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Managing Editor

Rob Lister

Layout and Design

Jared Hallal

Commentators

Russell D. Moore

Nancy Leigh De Moss

Todd L. Miles

CBMW

Executive Director

Randy Stinson

Editorial Correspondence JBMW

Attn: Bruce A. Ware

journal@cbmw.org

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Contact CBMW for Institutional Rates.

2825 Lexington Road · Box 926

Louisville, Kentucky 40280

502.897.4065 (voice)

502.897.4061 (fax)

office@cbmw.org (e-mail)

www.cbmw.org (web)

UK Address:

CBMW

9 Epsom Rd.

Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, CV32 7AR

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The purpose of The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood is to set forth the teachings of the Bible about the complementary differences between men and women, created equal in the image of God, because these teachings are essential for obedience to Scripture and for the health of the family and the Church.

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Editor's Column



Bruce A. Ware
Editor, Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood;
Senior Associate Dean,
School of Theology
Professor of Christian Theology
The Southern Baptist
Theological Seminary
Louisville, Kentucky

These are sobering days for evangelicalism. While there are many signs of God's favor and blessings, those endeavoring to be faithful to God and his word are faced with departures from sound biblical teaching on many fronts. Within the discussion of biblical manhood and womanhood alone, there are grave reasons for concern, prayer, and renewed fidelity.

David Jones opens our Fall 2003 issue with an eye-opening look at the undeniable historical connections that exist between groups denying biblical views of manhood and womanhood and those same groups being urged to move in the direction of the acceptance of homosexuality's legitimacy. Jones is careful to avoid making any claim of logical necessity here; i.e., an egalitarian is not logically bound to affirm homosexuality. But, the nature of the arguments for egalitarianism lend themselves particularly well elsewhere, and Jones provides much helpful information on this connection.

Randy Stinson, CBMW's executive director, suggests another departure the egalitarian movement is being urged to take. Masculine God language has been retained by conservative egalitarians, due to the fact that the God of the Bible has named himself this way. But, it is no surprise that many egalitarians are not happy about this. The pressure to remove masculine God language from our (formerly) Christian

vocabulary is strong and growing. Stinson has done a great service for Christian readers in helping us see more clearly just what is happening and what is at stake.

Behind many of these departures stands a method of biblical interpretation that gives rise to these deeply troubling views. Paul Felix offers a very insightful analysis of the hermeneutical methodology employed in egalitarian writings and exposes some of its most significant flaws. Only when we see how egalitarians think in their approach to the Scriptures are we able to assess their procedure and critique their positions.

In striking contrast to these areas of departure from biblical fidelity, we offer two very fine examples of how to understand, articulate, and apply true biblical principles of manhood and womanhood. Pastor David Prince's sermon, "Saved in Childbearing? God's High Calling for Mothers," is both insightful and inspiring. And, Patricia Ennis's essay, "Portraying Christian Femininity," offers an abundance of practical wisdom. These two resources are rich with biblical insight, wise counsel, and carefully conceived practical application.

The title of our cultural commentary from Russell Moore will turn a few heads, but more to the point, its content will inform all of ours in helpful ways. And, along with this cultural commentary, we introduce in this issue another column that we've entitled, "Celebrating Biblical Womanhood." Nancy Leigh DeMoss has agreed to write a brief column for this and several upcoming issues of *JBMW*, and we are thrilled to bring to our readers her passion and insight. Nancy is a dear friend of CBMW, and we rejoice in the ministry God has given her to encourage women in their spiritual growth and in their understandings of their God-given womanhood. Here are just a few gems from this godly woman, and we trust readers will profit much from her words.

Randy Stinson also offers here a brief review of a very popular book: John Eldredge's *Wild at Heart*. And again, I commend the hard work, diligence, and skill of Mr. Rob Lister, our Managing Editor, in offering to our readers an annotated bibliography of the most significant books on gender published in the previous year, 2002. No other resource, to my knowledge, offers such a helpful survey of this literature, and so we express our gratitude for this useful service.

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As a theologian, I am painfully aware that the evangelical church today risks massive doctrinal departures from “the faith once for all given to the saints” in a staggering array of areas. Among these, and at the center of Christianity’s interface with our culture, are the temptations to compromise on issues of sexuality and gender. We offer this issue of the Journal, then, with the prayer that God would be pleased to use this tool to keep more men and women of God faithful to him and, by his grace, to pull some back from paths of ruin. If so, we will give God all the praise for any and all good accomplished for his kingdom. May God be glorified! ■■

Executive Director's Column



Randy Stinson
Executive Director,
*The Council on Biblical Manhood
and Womanhood*
Louisville, Kentucky

One of the things I am often asked to address is the nature of the ongoing work of CBMW. While these inquirers are usually familiar with the complementarian position, they are often unaware of how we go about achieving our mission. With this in mind I believe it would be helpful to use this issue's column to communicate some of the key elements of our work.

1. Answering Current Challenges to Biblical Manhood and Womanhood.

With the broad confusion regarding such basic things as what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman, it should be no surprise that much of our work centers on answering the seemingly endless challenges to the biblical presentation. On a regular basis, we are not only dealing with egalitarian challenges to the home and church, but we also are combating multiple attempts to revise the doctrine of God, publish gender-neutral Bible translations, and push the acceptance of homosexuality as a legitimate lifestyle. In fact many of the articles in this issue of *JBMW* highlight our concerns in these areas.

2. Defining the Issue.

One of CBMW's primary contributions has been to define the complementarian position and encourage its acceptance and application. Without this centralized definition, it is likely that numerous variations would have been proposed by now that would have weakened our work.

3. Building Consensus Among Evangelicals.

CBMW regularly participates in evangelical forums and discussions and frequently serves as the evangelical voice for the biblical view of gender to the Christian community. CBMW Council members are involved at various levels in the evangelical community and have assisted representatives in such organizations and denominations as FamilyLife, the Southern Baptist Convention, and the Presbyterian Church in America.

4. Persuading Christian Leaders in the Church and Academy.

One of CBMW's goals is to be involved regularly in what we call, "engagement and debate." In order to influence and persuade leaders in the Christian community, we provide access to hundreds of complementarian resources on our website, publish the biannual *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, and coordinate the presentation of papers at scholarly meetings. Furthermore, each year, we participate in dozens of radio and print interviews.

5. Contributing to Knowledge and Practice.

One of the ways we believe we can best serve evangelicals is to engage continually in the academic and pastoral responsibilities of promoting the publication of complementarian resources and encouraging the application of the principles of the Danvers Statement. CBMW assists local churches and individuals by annually helping over 500,000 people from 34 different countries who visit our website, by sponsoring conferences, and by serving as a clearing house for complementarian resources.

6. Partnering with Like-minded Ministries.

At CBMW, we believe that like-minded ministries should cooperate and share resources and expertise as much as possible. Each year we partner with many different ministries that affirm the principles of the Danvers Statement.

In my estimate, the need for an organization like CBMW has never been greater primarily because the resistance to the biblical understanding of manhood and womanhood has never been stronger. I am grateful for many who see the significance of this issue and understand the severity of the repercussions resulting from a failure of the church to deal biblically with it. ■

Egalitarianism and Homosexuality: Connected or Autonomous Ideologies?

David W. Jones

Assistant Professor of Christian Ethics,
Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary
Wake Forest, North Carolina

Evangelical Christian organizations that hold to a complementarian view of gender roles, such as The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW), have expressed concern over a possible connection between an egalitarian view of male/female gender roles and homosexuality. For example, in the list of central concerns stated in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*—perhaps the most thorough defense of complementarianism—the authors declare, “We are concerned not merely with the behavior roles of men and women, but also with the underlying nature of manhood and womanhood themselves. Biblical truth and clarity in this matter are important because errors and confusion over sexual identity leads to . . . homosexual tendencies and increasing attempts to justify homosexual alliances.”¹ Furthermore, later in this same list of central concerns, the editors of this book note, “We believe that the feminist minimization of sexual role differentiation contributes to the confusion of sexual identity that, especially in the second and third generations, gives rise to more homosexuality in society. . . . It is increasingly and painfully clear that Biblical feminism is an unwitting partner in unraveling the fabric of complementary manhood and womanhood that provides the foundation not only for Biblical marriage and Biblical church order, but also for heterosexuality itself.”²

Evangelical feminists,³ however, have asserted that the notion of a possible connection between egalitarianism and homosexuality is both an unwarranted concern and an unfair allegation.⁴ For example, Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE), arguably the leading evangelical egalitarian advocacy organization, has repeatedly noted that they do not affirm

homosexuality, and the CBE Statement of Faith clearly states, “We believe in the family, celibate singleness, and faithful heterosexual marriage as the patterns God designed for us.”⁵ Additionally, several prominent evangelical egalitarians have written works that report their opposition to homosexuality.⁶ Indeed, the fact that egalitarian organizations such as CBE do not directly affirm homosexuality has been recognized by a number of complementarian authors;⁷ yet, a concern that evangelical feminism ultimately leads to the embrace of homosexuality still persists among those who champion a more traditional model of gender roles.

In view of the foregoing discussion regarding the possibility of a connection between egalitarianism and homosexuality, this work will address and attempt to answer a very important question in the gender roles debate—that is, “Is there sufficient historical evidence to support complementarians’ concern over a possible connection between egalitarianism and homosexuality?” If this concern is warranted, the final part of this essay will begin some introductory work with a view to a second important question—that is, “What is the nature of the link between these two ostensibly unrelated ideologies?”

Egalitarianism and Homosexuality: The Historical Record

While both complementarians and evangelical feminists recognize that an egalitarian view of gender roles does not constitute a *de facto* endorsement of homosexuality, a review of the historical record reveals that some Christian

organizations that have initially adopted the tenets of evangelical feminism have later moved on to embrace homosexuality.⁸ This shift can be documented by a study of the doctrines espoused (or at least tolerated) by a number of parachurch groups and Christian denominations.⁹

The Evangelical Women's Caucus

Perhaps the most striking example of a parachurch organization drifting from a focus upon women's rights to the endorsement of homosexuality is the group out of which CBE was formed—that is, the association currently known as the Evangelical and Ecumenical Women's Caucus (EEWC).¹⁰ As the EEWC website reports:

In 1973, a group of socially concerned Christians, later known as Evangelicals for Social Action (ESA), met in Chicago and drafted the *Chicago Declaration* as the basis for their organization. Among the participants were a few women who were concerned about the inferior status of women in Church and society and who called upon the group to consider issues related to sexism from a Christian perspective.

At ESA's second consultation in 1974 the women's caucus was one of six task forces formed by participants to study such concerns as racism, sexism, peace, and simpler lifestyles. Thus our group was born as the Evangelical Women's Caucus (EWC). The EWC presented proposals to Evangelicals for Social Action on a variety of topics including endorsement of the Equal Rights Amendment, support for inclusive language in Bible translation and Christian publications, affirmation of the ordination of women, and criticism of discriminatory hiring policies in Christian institutions.¹¹

The EWC, then, became an autonomous organization in 1975 (with loose ties to ESA) and continued in the late 1970s and early 1980s to promote women's rights both within the Church and in society at large.

At their annual conference in Fresno, California, in July of 1986, however, the EWC underwent a factious transformation as the majority of voting attendees determined to broaden the scope of the EWC's ministry. At this meeting a group within the EWC known as "Lesbians and Friends" brought the following resolution before the organization: "Whereas homosexual people are children of God, and because of the biblical mandate of Jesus Christ that we are all created equal in God's sight, and in recognition of the presence of the lesbian minority in the Evangelical Women's Caucus International, EWCI takes a firm stand in favor of civil rights

protection for homosexual persons."¹² Although the number of lesbians in the EWC was estimated to be fewer than thirty women (less than 5 percent of the total membership), this resolution passed by an overwhelming majority with a vote of 80 in favor, 16 opposed, and 23 abstaining.¹³ As a consequence of this vote, which was widely interpreted as an endorsement of homosexuality and was later described by one EWC leader as "a step of maturity within the organization,"¹⁴ a number of individuals withdrew their membership from the EWC and began discussions regarding the formation of a new evangelical organization to advocate an egalitarian view of male/female gender roles.

A new association, made up largely of the dissenting members of the Minnesota chapter of the EWC, was formed in 1987 that called themselves Men, Women and God: Christians for Biblical Equality. This group was loosely tied to Men, Women and God, International, an organization affiliated with John Stott's London Institute for Contemporary Christianity. The members of this new parachurch ministry abbreviated their name in 1988 to Christians for Biblical Equality, and the group continues as such to the present day. As has already been noted and must be reemphasized, CBE does not affirm homosexuality. The CBE Statement of Faith declares the organization's belief in faithful heterosexual marriage and, presumably in reference to homosexuality, "The History of CBE" section of the group's website reports that CBE was formed when the "EWC was moving in a direction these members [i.e., the founding members of CBE] perceived as unbiblical."¹⁵

If the EWC was the only Christian organization to begin with an emphasis on women's rights but to end up tolerating homosexuality, the preceding events could probably be viewed as inconsequential. A review of the shifting doctrinal beliefs of a number of the mainline Protestant denominations, however, reveals that more than one Christian group has followed the same path as that of the EWC—that is, to begin by adopting an egalitarian view of male/female gender roles, but to end up by endorsing homosexuality.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

While more than ten Presbyterian denominations are included in its ecclesiastical heritage, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) was officially formed when the two largest Presbyterian bodies—the Presbyterian Church in the U.S. (PCUS) and the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (UPCUSA)—reunited on June 10, 1983, after 122 years of separation. The denomination born out of this merger, the PC(USA), is currently the ninth largest Christian denomination in the world with just under 3.5 million members.¹⁶

Although an egalitarian view of male/female gender roles was manifest as early as the 1920s and 1930s in several of

the smaller predecessor denominations to the PC(USA)—evidenced by the ordination of women deacons and elders—it was not until the late 1950s and 1960s that feminism became firmly entrenched in the two main groups that came together to form the PC(USA).¹⁷ Women were first ordained into the ministry in one of the precursor denominations of the UPCUSA in 1956 and in the PCUS in 1965.¹⁸ As of 2001, nearly 19 percent of the PC(USA) clergy was female, with a trend showing women outpacing men in ordination.¹⁹ Additionally, an egalitarian view of male/female gender roles can be seen in the PC(USA) in the activities of the Woman's Ministries Program Area of the denomination, which is made up of several independent organizations that work in concert to promote women's rights both within the Presbyterian Church and within general society.²⁰

Historically speaking, the PC(USA) and its two main predecessor denominations have always been officially opposed to homosexuality. The Heidelberg Catechism, which clearly views homosexuality as sinful, is included in the *Book of Confessions*, which is part of the Constitution of the PC(USA).²¹ Additionally, over the years a number of Presbyterian General Assemblies have made rulings and issued policy statements reflecting general denominational opposition to homosexuality. For example, General Assembly rulings and statements include remarks such as, "Homosexuality is a sin;"²² "Homosexuality . . . seems to be contrary to the teaching of Scripture;"²³ "[Individual congregations] should not allow the use of the church facilities for a same-sex union ceremony;"²⁴ "It would not be proper for a minister of the Word and Sacrament to perform a same-sex union ceremony;"²⁵ "It would at the present time be injudicious, if not improper, for a presbytery to ordain to the professional ministry of the gospel a person who is an avowed practicing homosexual;"²⁶ and "Practicing homosexual persons may not be ordained as ministers of the Word and Sacrament, elders, or deacons [in the PC(USA)]."²⁷ In spite of this seemingly clear historical stance against homosexuality, there is currently a growing movement within the PC(USA) to accept homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle and to grant practicing homosexuals the rights of marriage and ordination in the denomination.

A softening of the traditional Presbyterian position on homosexuality can first be detected in the records of the 1978 General Assembly of the UPCUSA. At this Assembly, after stating their desire for continued dialog regarding the issue of homosexuality, this ecclesiastical body went on to declare, "The church must [begin] . . . to move toward the homosexual community in love and to welcome homosexual inquirers to its congregations."²⁸ Again, in 1987 a weakening of the denomination's historical stance is evident as the Presbyterian General Assembly called "for the elimination . . . of [civil] laws governing the private sexual behavior between consenting adults [and the passage] of laws forbidding discrimination based on sexual orientation."²⁹ In the late twentieth century

statements such as these, along with a growing tolerance of homosexuality among the PC(USA) hierarchy, clergy, and members,³⁰ sparked the formation of at least two homosexual advocacy organizations within the denomination that are currently working to remove what they perceive to be any constrictive or repressive references to homosexuality in the PC(USA) constitution.³¹

While the gradual embrace of homosexuality within the PC(USA) is an interesting subject in and of itself,³² the aspect of the PC(USA)'s slide toward homosexuality that is most significant for this present study is the methodology being employed by the progressive elements of the denomination. It is interesting to note that in order to achieve their objectives, the homosexual advocacy organizations within the PC(USA) are working, in large part, with and through the Women's Ministries Program Area of the denomination. It is apparent that just as with the EWC, a number of those affiliated with the women's ministry organizations of the PC(USA) are gradually moving from a specific egalitarian view of male/female gender roles to a general egalitarian view of human sexuality.

Several examples that illustrate this trend may be cited; first, in 1998 it was reported that the women's college ministry arm of the PC(USA)—the National Network of Presbyterian College Women—was producing resources that promote lesbianism as an acceptable Christian lifestyle;³³ second, in 1999 the Women's Ministries Program Area of the PC(USA) selected a lesbian minister who is employed as a full-time homosexual lobbyist to receive the denomination's prestigious annual Women of Faith award;³⁴ and third, over the past few years a number of individuals affiliated with the PC(USA) Women's Ministries Program Area have made arguments equating the women's-rights movement with the gay-rights movement—both within the denomination and within society at large.

For example, Joanne Sizoo, the current chair of the PC(USA) Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns (and formerly an officer with More Light Presbyterians, the most vocal of the denomination's homosexual advocacy groups) remarked, "I believe that part of [the] homophobia [within the PC(USA)] is based in our reluctance to talk about all things sexual and all things physical and that's been historically related to the church's fear of women."³⁵ Similarly, in an interview regarding the increasingly inclusivistic policies of the PC(USA), Marco Grimaldo, a female elder at the Westminster Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C., claimed, "Advocacy for gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people is a civil rights issue. . . . I was personally involved in the civil rights movement, in women's rights, all the people who were struggling. It seems to me just another part of that particular mind-set."³⁶ Likewise, theologian Jack Rogers, elected the Moderator of the PC(USA) in 2001, asserted, "I believe if we read the Bible in the same way we learned to read it in order to

accept the equality of . . . women, we will be forced to the conclusion that gay and lesbian people are also to be accepted as equal.”³⁷ Moreover, in a similar manner, in his book on the need for homosexual equality within the PC(USA), Bruce Hahne, a self-described social change consultant and member of the First Presbyterian Church of Palo Alto, California, wrote,

When we examine the history of the U.S. civil rights movement for parallels [to the gay rights movement], we find that the current status of the PC(USA)’s lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender movement strongly resembles the state of the civil rights movement. . . . The current status of the PC(USA)’s lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender equality movement matches not only the specific historical case of the U.S. civil rights movement . . . it also matches extremely well with the theoretical framework for [other] progressive social movements. . . . If we substitute “lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people” for “women” [in an argument related to women’s rights] . . . and recall the strong ideological links between sexism and heterosexism, then the parallels to the current dehumanizing climate in the PC(USA), and most other oldline Christian denominations, should become evident.³⁸

A final example of the connecting of women’s-rights with gay-rights within the PC(USA) comes from the pen of Sylvia Thorson-Smith, an active participant in several of the denomination’s women’s ministry groups and a former member of the Presbyterian Special Committee on Human Sexuality. In an article that Thorson-Smith wrote lamenting the conservative tone and content of a 1991 PC(USA) report on human sexuality, she equated her own efforts at getting the PC(USA) to embrace homosexuality with those of one of the pioneers of the women’s-rights movement, Susan B. Anthony. In her article Thorson-Smith wrote, “[Our] strategies to change the church’s position on even considering lesbians and gay men as eligible for ordination will proceed In all of this, I am sustained by the unshakable conviction of Susan B. Anthony, who gave her entire life in the struggle for women’s suffrage, never lived to see it, and still knew it would someday prevail because ‘Failure is Impossible.’”³⁹

Clearly, then, the above materials seem to indicate that the PC(USA) is slowly moving in a direction that is resulting in the gradual embrace of homosexuality within the denomination.⁴⁰ It appears that in a similar manner to that of the EWC, then, some of the members of the PC(USA)—especially those affiliated with the feminist-leaning Women’s Ministry Program Area—are drifting from an egalitarian view of male/female gender roles to the endorsement (or at least toleration) of homosexuality.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is the sixth largest Christian denomination in the world, with just under 5.1 million members.⁴¹ Although the Lutheran Church has been in North America since the early part of the seventeenth century, the ELCA was not officially formed until January 4, 1988, when three of the most prominent national Lutheran bodies—the American Lutheran Church (ALC), the Lutheran Church in America (LCA), and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC)—merged to form what is currently the largest of all of the Lutheran denominations in the United States.

In conjunction with the rise of secular feminism, all three of the predecessor denominations to the ELCA adopted an egalitarian view of male/female gender roles in the mid to late twentieth century. This is evidenced in that both the ALC and the LCA began ordaining female pastors in 1970, and a desire for women’s ordination was one of the key doctrinal issues that prompted a number of churches in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod to abandon the denomination in 1976 and form the AELC, which ordained its first woman pastor in 1977.⁴² Naturally, the ALC, LCA, and AELC brought their egalitarian views to the ELCA when they came together to form the denomination in 1988. This is manifest in the qualifications for ordination set forth in the ELCA constitution, which makes no stipulations regarding gender.⁴³ As of 2002, nearly 22 percent of the active clergy in the ELCA were women, with reports indicating that the percentage is growing on an annual basis.⁴⁴ Additionally, the ELCA’s feminist leanings can be documented in the activities of the church’s two main women’s ministry groups, the Commission for Women and the Women of the ELCA, both of whom are forthright about their endorsement of feminism and their efforts to preserve and promote an egalitarian view of gender relations within the denomination.⁴⁵

Concerning social issues such as homosexuality, the ELCA governs itself through official social statements that are approved at and supported by the biennial Churchwide Assembly. The ELCA currently does not have a social statement of its own on homosexuality; rather, the denomination relies upon the official policies and decisions of its two largest predecessor church bodies, the LCA and the ALC—both of whom were cautiously opposed to homosexual acts, but deliberately receptive to homosexual persons.⁴⁶ In spite of the ELCA’s lack of an official social statement on homosexuality, a number of divisions within the church hierarchy—such as the Church Council, the Conference of Bishops, and the Division for Ministry—have written documents, made rulings, and issued informal statements on homosexuality. While such actions are not regarded as official policy of the ELCA (since they are not voted on by the

Churchwide Assembly), they are nevertheless considered to be authoritative and routine polity for the denomination.

Nearly all of the proceedings of groups within the ELCA who have addressed issues related to homosexuality have reflected the tentative opposition first expressed in the policies of the predecessor denominations to the ELCA. Examples of actions taken by intra-denominational groups include statements such as, “Ordained ministers who are homosexual in their self-understanding are expected to abstain from homosexual sexual relationships;”⁴⁷ “Practicing homosexual persons are precluded from the ordained ministries of this church;”⁴⁸ “[We] recognize that there is basis neither in Scripture nor [in] tradition for the establishment of an official ceremony by this church for the blessing of a homosexual relationship. . . . Nevertheless, we express trust in and will continue dialogue with those pastors and congregations who are in ministry with gay and lesbian persons, and affirm their desire to explore the best ways to provide pastoral care for all to whom they minister;”⁴⁹ and “We invite gay and lesbian persons to join together with other members of this church in mutual prayer and study of the issues that still divide us, so that we may seek the truth together.”⁵⁰ Clearly, then, the above statements, as well as other church actions,⁵¹ demonstrate that the historical position of the ELCA has been cautious opposition to homosexual acts, but openness to homosexual persons.

Despite the seemingly clear (albeit somewhat tenuous) stance of the ELCA against homosexuality, since the mid-1970s a number of groups affiliated with the denomination have been lobbying the ELCA to change its historical position on homosexuality and to produce a social statement of its own that affirms homosexual unions and ordination.⁵² Efforts by such groups have had a measurable effect upon the denomination as is evidenced by the growing number of ELCA pastors and pastoral candidates who profess to be homosexuals,⁵³ by a handful of individual congregations who have ordained practicing homosexuals,⁵⁴ and by the proposal of a social statement in 1993 that openly endorsed homosexuality. This twenty-one page statement, which took a seventeen-member ELCA committee four years to produce in draft form, called for “open affirmation of gay and lesbian persons and their mutually loving, just, committed relationship[s] of fidelity.”⁵⁵ Due to internal disagreements regarding the content of this proposed social statement, however, the ELCA was forced to abandon it, and the church remains without an official social statement of its own on homosexuality to the present day.⁵⁶

As with the PC(USA), while the growing acceptance of homosexuality within the ELCA is an interesting study in itself,⁵⁷ the methodology being employed by those in the denomination who favor the endorsement of homosexuality is the aspect of the subject that is most significant for this present

project. Indeed, it is important to note, as did Lutheran Bishop R. L. DeJaynes, that within the ELCA it is the pro-feminist ministry areas “who most vocally support . . . the social/political agenda in the [Lutheran] Church. . . . They, as a whole, have been the greatest supporters of the homosexual agenda.”⁵⁸ Several examples of such support may be cited. First, in regard to the aforementioned proposed 1993 social statement endorsing homosexuality, it is interesting to note that even after it became apparent that the social statement was not going to be adopted by the church, the ELCA Commission for Women passed a resolution commending the statement, saying that it “addresses many [of the same] concerns of the Commission for Women with respect to the life of the Church and today’s society.”⁵⁹ Second, in 2001 the ELCA Commission for Women passed a resolution supporting the denomination’s Division for Outreach for its establishment of an official relationship with Lutherans Concerned/North America, the oldest and largest of the Lutheran homosexual advocacy organizations. Concerning this resolution, Janet M. Corpus, chairwoman of the ELCA Commission for Women steering committee, said, “We are committed to a thorough approach to address sexism in our church—sexism in the broadest sense, including sexism against women and girls, against people who are gay or lesbian, and including the ways in which sexism distorts boys’ and men’s lives.”⁶⁰ Third, in October of 2002 the ELCA Northeastern Ohio Synod sponsored a workshop at which Janelle Bussert, a professor of religion at Augsburg College, was the guest speaker. At this conference Bussert, a practicing lesbian, identified “some of the arguments in favor of the acceptance of same-gender [sexual] relationships,” as “a Lutheran hermeneutic, [and the] historical analogy . . . [of] women’s ordination.”⁶¹

Clearly, then, activities such as those described above reveal that some within the ELCA are arguing for the endorsement of homosexuality by equating certain aspects of the women’s rights movement with those of the homosexual rights movement.⁶² It seems evident that as with the EWC and the PC(USA), then, some members of the ELCA—particularly those involved in the denomination’s two feminist-leaning women’s ministry groups—are making a move from a specific egalitarian view of male/female gender roles to a general egalitarian view of human sexuality.

The United Methodist Church

While the Methodist movement proper began in the first half of the eighteenth century in England under the preaching of John Wesley, the founding date of the North American Methodist Church is usually regarded to be 1784—the year in which the first American Methodist bishop, Francis Asbury, was elected to lead the growing Methodist movement in the United States. The denomination known as the United Methodist Church (UMC), however, was not formed until April 23, 1968, when the two historical streams of American

Methodism, the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church, came together to form what is currently the largest Methodist denomination in the world and the third largest Christian church in North America with just over 8.3 million members.⁶³

As has been noted by a number of other authors,⁶⁴ feminism—or at least feminist-type ideas—have a long history within the broad scope of the Methodist movement. Indeed, egalitarian leanings can be detected in many of the predecessor denominations to the UMC as is evidenced by their inclination to license and ordain female leadership. For example, the United Brethren Church began licensing women to preach in 1849, the Methodist Protestant Church started ordaining deaconesses in 1866, the Methodist Episcopal Church began licensing female evangelists in 1869, and the United Brethren Church began the practice of ordaining women into the pastorate in 1889.⁶⁵ Given the history of this theological tradition, then, it is not surprising to note that when the UMC was formed in 1968, women were guaranteed ordination in the denomination's founding documents, and local churches were encouraged to treat women no differently than men "in all aspects of voluntary and compensatory participation in the Church and society."⁶⁶ As of 2002, nearly 8,600 of the UMC's 45,000 clergy members were female, which is roughly 19 percent of their ordained Church leadership.⁶⁷ More important for the future of the denomination, however, is the fact that as of the fall semester of 2001, more than half of all of the Master of Divinity degree students at the thirteen United Methodist seminaries were female.⁶⁸

The UMC records and expresses its opinion on social issues such as homosexuality in its *Book of Discipline*. This official policy manual, which is reviewed and revised every four years by Church delegates at the denomination's General Conference, reveals that the UMC has been historically opposed to homosexuality. Examples of statements on homosexuality found in the *Book of Discipline* include remarks such as, "We do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching;"⁶⁹ "While persons set apart by the Church for ordained ministry are subject to all the frailties of the human condition and pressures of society, they are required to maintain the highest standards of holy living in the world. Since the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be accepted as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in the United Methodist Church;"⁷⁰ "Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches;"⁷¹ and, the UMC Council on Finance and Administration "shall be responsible for ensuring that no board, agency, committee, commission, or council shall give United Methodist funds to any gay caucus or group, or otherwise use such funds to promote the acceptance of homosexuality."⁷²

As is evidenced by the above citations, the UMC has historically articulated clear opposition to homosexuality; yet, from the very earliest years of the denomination a number of groups affiliated with the Church have been petitioning the UMC to change its view on homosexuality. In fact, as of the year 2000, there were at least seven pro-homosexual groups working exclusively within the UMC to persuade the denomination to change its position on issues such as same-sex marriage and the ordination of homosexuals.⁷³ Indeed, these groups have influenced the UMC to such a degree that more than one denominational watcher has concluded that the UMC will soon be forced either to embrace homosexuality or to split.⁷⁴ For illustrative purposes, several events that demonstrate the impact of the homosexual lobby upon the UMC may be cited. For example, in 1988 the UMC established a committee to study the issue of homosexuality. After nearly four years of study, this twenty-one member committee voted to recommend to the UMC General Conference that the church remove the condemnatory statements on homosexuality from its social policy manual and include the following sentence in its *Book of Discipline* instead, "The present state of knowledge and insight in the biblical, theological, ethical, biological, psychological, and sociological fields does not provide a satisfactory basis upon which the church can responsibly maintain the condemnation of all homosexual practice."⁷⁵ This recommendation notwithstanding, the 1992 General Conference voted not to change the denomination's historical position on homosexuality, although more than a quarter of the voting delegates were in favor of adopting the changes proposed by the study committee. A second event that reveals a softening in the UMC's stance on homosexuality is the passage of a resolution at the 1996 General Conference calling for the United States military to remove its ban on homosexuals. This resolution reads, in part, "[The U. S. military] has denied the right of homosexuals to actively serve their country while being honest about who they are. Meanwhile, The United Methodist Church is moving toward accepting all people for who they are. . . . The U. S. military should not exclude persons from service solely on the basis of sexual orientation."⁷⁶ Finally, it may be noted that despite the growing number of local UMC churches and regional bishops who are breaking with official denominational policies on issues related to homosexuality,⁷⁷ at their most recent General Conference in May of 2000, the majority of voting church delegates refused to endorse proposals that would have reinforced the church's historical position on homosexuality as well as fund ministries designed to help individuals who wish to leave the homosexual lifestyle.⁷⁸

While more could be said about the gradual embrace of homosexuality by the UMC,⁷⁹ as with the other groups studied thus far in this project, it is not the acceptance of homosexuality itself that is germane to this work, but rather the methodology being employed by the advocates of homosexuality within the UMC. As with the PC(USA) and

ELCA, a brief review of denominational literature reveals that there are many ties between the feminist-leaning women's ministry areas of the UMC and the homosexual lobby. For example, many of the leaders of the pro-homosexual organizations working within the UMC are former leaders in the feminist-leaning women's ministry areas of the denomination.⁸⁰ Additionally, the groups advocating homosexuality within the UMC have made it clear that they fully support the women's ministry arm of the church,⁸¹ and even encourage those who wish to implement homosexual-friendly policies in local churches to work through the women's ministry circles in the denomination.⁸² Furthermore, as with the PC(USA) and ELCA, arguments in favor of embracing homosexuality based upon parallels between women's and homosexual rights abound in the UMC. For example, Methodist minister James M. Wall wrote, "Until recently, women were excluded from receiving ordination in most denominations . . . And some church people argue that the exclusion of homosexuals is just as discriminatory as the exclusion of women. . . . The case could be made that discrimination against the homosexual seeking ordination [in the UMC] is as immoral or illegal as discrimination for reasons of gender."⁸³ Likewise, at the 2000 UMC General Conference, Methodist pastor James Lawson described "the movement for the inclusion of gays and lesbians is a continuation of the civil rights struggles of other groups . . . [including] women."⁸⁴ Finally, in a similar manner, former Methodist seminary student David Wesley Perkins observed, "There is a great diversity of hermeneutic regarding the brief passages in the Bible where same biological gender sexual interaction is mentioned. . . . The same can be said regarding passages . . . [containing] directives that imply women should be subjugated to men. Since the [1988 UMC] Committee to Study Sexuality acknowledged that some biblical passages 'are not applicable today,' why did some members of the committee conclude that . . . passages [that seem to prohibit homosexuality] deserve our assent?"⁸⁵

Clearly, then, the above citations indicate that the UMC is slowly moving in a direction that is resulting in the gradual embrace of homosexuality by the denomination. It appears that in a similar manner to that of the EWC, PC(USA), and ELCA, some of those within the UMC are beginning to move from a specific egalitarian view of male/female gender roles to a more general egalitarian view of human sexuality.

Historical Conclusions

After surveying the pilgrimage of some members of the EWC, PC(USA), ELCA, and UMC from the endorsement of biblical feminism to the embrace (or at least toleration) of homosexuality, it is evident that the concern expressed by complementarians over a possible connection between egalitarianism and homosexuality is indeed warranted. This conclusion becomes even more salient when it is noted that,

historically speaking, parachurch groups and denominations who have openly and consistently promoted a complementarian view of gender roles have not had to struggle on a corporate level with issues related to homosexuality. Indeed, a review of modern denominations reveals that it is only when Christian organizations have abandoned the traditional model of male/female gender roles that homosexuality has even become a topic for moral discussion on a church-wide scale.⁸⁶

Egalitarianism and Homosexuality: Exploring the Connection

While the historical record seems to provide enough information for one to make an *a posteriori* conclusion that egalitarianism and homosexuality must somehow be intertwined, this supposition is complicated by the fact that not all (perhaps not even most) of the advocates of egalitarianism have endorsed (or will endorse) homosexuality.⁸⁷ It seems, therefore, that whatever connection exists between these two ostensibly unrelated ideologies, it is neither immediate in manifestation nor requisite in nature. This being true, however, in view of the proceeding historical survey, it seems a reasonable conclusion that the likelihood of an egalitarian view of male/female gender roles leading to the endorsement of homosexuality increases with the passage of time.

The above observations notwithstanding, the question still remains, What is the nature of the connection between egalitarianism and homosexuality? Or, put another way, Why have some who have initially adopted the tenets of biblical feminism later come to endorse homosexuality in the church? Other authors have suggested that there are spiritual,⁸⁸ philosophical,⁸⁹ hermeneutical,⁹⁰ and even political connections between these two ideologies.⁹¹ While these connections are likely valid, in the remaining portion of this essay a single characteristic of egalitarianism will be explored that, it is suggested, is the primary reason why some proponents of biblical feminism have been led to endorse homosexuality. This feature, which constitutes a logical connection between these two ideologies, is *egalitarianism's minimization of gender distinctions*.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines egalitarianism as "the doctrine or condition that asserts the equality of mankind."⁹² A reading of *Men, Women, and Biblical Equality*, the cardinal statement of evangelical egalitarian beliefs, reveals that this broad definition of egalitarianism is an accurate summation of biblical feminists' beliefs as they generally hold to the full equality of men and women in essence (or being) as well as in role (or function). Indeed, a foundational tenet of biblical feminism is that differing gender roles were established as a result of, and not prior to, the fall of mankind; or, in the words of *Men, Women, and Biblical Equality*, "The Bible teaches that woman and man were created for full and equal partnership. . . .

The rulership of Adam over Eve resulted from the Fall and was therefore not a part of the original created order.”⁹³

While evangelical egalitarians do champion the full equality of the sexes, most proponents of this ideology have been careful to note that they are not advocating an androgynous view of humanity, for as egalitarian Rebecca Groothuis noted, “The inevitable result of . . . androgyny . . . [will] be the complete obliteration of any meaningful distinction between male and female, which will lead inexorably to homosexuality and the breakdown of the family and society.”⁹⁴ Many biblical feminists, then, have wisely asserted that while men and women are fully equal in regard to essence and role, there are physiological, emotional, psychological, and perhaps even intellectual differences between the sexes. For example, biblical feminist Ruth Tucker wrote, “How men and women complement each other intellectually or emotionally is often a contentious issue Yet, it is difficult to argue that there are no differences between men and women—be it innate or socially acquired. . . . Women are typically more outwardly emotional than men.”⁹⁵ Similarly, egalitarian Nicholas Wolterstorff asserted, “[Men and women] have been created and re-created differently. We must not try to obliterate that . . . we must prize our particularities.”⁹⁶ Likewise, Elaine Storkey observed, “God created people as male and female, and this difference will always be there.”⁹⁷ Ostensibly, therefore, it seems that egalitarians have articulated a position that will allow them to defend the equality of the sexes with regard to essence and gender roles, and yet enable them to resist homosexual arguments built upon an androgynous view of humanity.

A critical weakness of egalitarianism, however, is the fact that it fails to recognize that within the fixed scheme of human sexuality, gender roles both stem from and help to define and inform gender identity. This is precisely the point that Karl Barth was getting at when he wrote that “a man . . . can only be genuinely human with woman, or . . . a woman with man.”⁹⁸ In other words, because men and women have distinct gender identities, they have distinct gender roles, which, in turn, help to define and inform their distinct gender identities. In short, the relationship between gender identity and gender roles is reflexive. Although egalitarians claim to recognize differences in gender identity (i.e., they repudiate androgyny), their denial of distinct gender roles—which, ironically, the physiological, emotional, psychological, and intellectual differences that they admit seem to be tailored to support—amounts to a practical denial of differences in gender identity. As Daniel R. Heimbach noted, since biblical feminists deny differences in gender roles, “sexual differences [in gender identity] distinguishing men from women are marginalized to the point of becoming unnecessary or meaningless.”⁹⁹

This practical denial of gender identity becomes problematic for egalitarianism in regard to any morality that

rests upon distinctions in gender, such as homosexuality. Heimbach observes:

If gender differences in human sexual identity really do not matter—if in fact what we think are differences [in gender roles] are actually just transitory, cultural, or perhaps even unreal—then the idea of difference based on separate sexual gender identities can sustain no real moral value either. Then the idea that gender-based sexual differences sustain or define any sort of normative standard must be rejected. Thus, it turns out, a way of thinking used by egalitarians to justify opposition to gender roles is shared by advocates of plastic sexuality [e.g., proponents of homosexuality] who use it to deny that heterosexual marriage should be treated as a standard.¹⁰⁰

As Heimbach points out, then, although egalitarians do not intend to support homosexuality, their denial of distinct gender roles creates an essentially androgynous view of gender identity that caters to advocates of homosexuality. Indeed, biblical feminist Rebecca Groothuis is technically correct in stating, “It does not promote homosexuality to acknowledge that both men and women have basically the same human needs, desires, and range of abilities and vocational callings Such a view of men and women will not change heterosexuals to homosexuals.”¹⁰¹ However, when such a view of gender roles leads to a practical denial of differences in gender identity, the end result is a view of human sexuality that is unable to resist arguments waged by advocates of the progressive homosexual movement.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this essay addressed two main questions; first, “Is there sufficient historical evidence to support complementarians’ concern over a possible connection between egalitarianism and homosexuality?” And second, “What is the nature of the link between these two ostensibly unrelated ideologies?” Regarding the first question, which was the focus of this essay, this work surveyed historical evidence from four different groups—the Evangelical Women’s Caucus, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the United Methodist Church—and concluded that, indeed, there is sufficient evidence to support complementarians’ concern regarding a connection between egalitarianism and homosexuality. In fact, the slide from the acceptance of feminist-type arguments to the endorsement of homosexuality currently occurring in some Christian denominations follows a paradigm that is demonstrable in secular culture, as well. In light of the historical record, then, it seems that to deny the presence of this progression would be both irresponsible and irrational.

Regarding the second question that this work briefly considered, it was noted that pinpointing the exact nature of the connection between egalitarianism and homosexuality is not an easy task. Indeed, defining the link between these two ideologies is a difficult endeavor because not all who endorse biblical feminism have or will embrace homosexuality. In light of this fact, then, it was suggested that the primary connection between egalitarianism and homosexuality is a non-requisite logical connection. While many other links between these two ideologies likely exist (there is great need for further work in these areas), as was explained above, the main reason why some advocates of egalitarianism have been led to endorse homosexuality is that feminist-type arguments so minimize gender identity that once biblical feminism is embraced, it is but a small logical step to accept homosexuality. ■

¹ John Piper and Wayne Grudem, "An Overview of Central Concerns: Questions and Answers," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991) 60.

² Ibid., 82, 84. This concern over a possible connection between egalitarianism and homosexuality is frequently noted by complementarian authors. For example, in reference to egalitarian doctrine in his overview of the gender roles debate, D. Massimiliano Lorenzini noted, "Without identifying role distinctions between men and women, there is no real reason to oppose homosexuality." D. Massimiliano Lorenzini, "The Role of Women in the Church" (Napa, CA: Frontline Ministries, accessed 25 Aug. 2003); available from <http://frontlinemin.org/women.asp>; Internet. Similarly, when commenting on the complementarian "fear [of] a slippery slope within egalitarianism," Ronald C. Ehlke posed the question, "If, for instance, the prohibitions of Paul regarding female leadership were merely cultural, might not the same be said of his prohibitions regarding homosexuality?" Ehlke, 20. Likewise, Mary Kassian observed, "The Biblical feminist's belief in the evolving, developing nature of revelation with regards to male and female roles poses some difficulty for the interpretation of other Scripture. For if this particular teaching is meant to evolve, it logically follows that other teachings that are now socially unacceptable are likewise changing. Evangelicals could therefore justifiably update Christian doctrine to approve of homosexuality." Mary A. Kassian, *The Feminist Gospel: The Movement to Unite Feminism with the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1992) 210. Additionally, Thomas R. Schreiner wrote that when gender roles are denied, "one of the next steps is to accept lesbianism." Thomas R. Schreiner, "Head Coverings, Prophecies, and the Trinity: 1 Corinthians 11:2-16" in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991) 139.

³ In this work the terms "evangelical feminist," "egalitarian," and "biblical feminist" (and their related cognates) will be used interchangeably. The use of these terms is meant to denote an individual or organization who affirms feminist-type arguments and claims an authoritative view of Christian Scripture.

⁴ For example, in an online discussion on the "Apologetics Index" list server, egalitarian Rebecca M. Groothuis noted that "the oft-heard claim that to move toward biblical equality (biblical feminism) is to

take the first step toward an inevitable slide down the slippery slope to radical feminism, goddess worship, abortion and homosexual rights, and so on . . . is another false but highly effective rhetorical effort that trades on the ignorance of the evangelical public."

Rebecca M. Groothuis, "Re: Debate on Inclusive Language Translations" (Apologetics Index, accessed 25 Aug. 2003); available from <http://www.gospelcom.net/apologeticsindex/cpoint1-3.html>; Internet. Similarly, Agnieszka Tennant, assistant editor of *Christianity Today*, wrote that the notion of a connection between egalitarianism and homosexuality is a "cheap shot fired by the complementarian[s]," and is "unfair rhetoric." Agnieszka Tennant, "Seahorses, Egalitarians, and Traditional Sex-Role Reversal" (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, accessed 25 Aug. 2003); available from <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2001/128/33.0.html>; Internet. Note that Tennant's comments were the result of her misreading of a CBMW news release. See Randy Stinson, "Response to Christianity Today's Dispatch from the CBE Conference" (Louisville, KY: The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, accessed 25 Aug. 2003); available from <http://cbmw.org/news/ctresponse.html>; Internet. Likewise, biblical feminist Elaine Storkey classified the notion that egalitarianism leads to homosexuality as "utterly ridiculous." Elaine Storkey, *What's Right with Feminism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985) 240.

⁵ Christians for Biblical Equality, "Statement of Faith" (Minneapolis, MN: Christian for Biblical Equality, accessed 25 Aug. 2003); available from (http://www.cbeinternational.org/new/about/who_we_are.html); Internet.

⁶ Robert A. Gagnon, "Are There Universally Valid Sex Precepts? A Critique of Walter Wink's Views on the Bible and Homosexuality," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 24 (2002) 72-125; Stanley J. Grenz, *Welcoming But Not Affirming: An Evangelical Response to Homosexuality* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1988); Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, "To Ask a Better Question: The Heterosexuality-Homosexuality Debate Revisited," *Interpretation* 51, no. 2 (April 1997) 143-58; William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001).

⁷ For example, Wayne Grudem, one of the editors of *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, noted that "our egalitarian friends within the evangelical world agree that homosexual conduct is prohibited by Scripture." Wayne Grudem, "The Key Issues in the Manhood-Womanhood Controversy, and the Way Forward," in *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002) 44. Likewise, when writing about egalitarianism in a news release dated July 7, 2001, Randy Stinson, the executive director of CBMW, noted that "many who advocate women in the pastorate do not affirm homosexuality." Randy Stinson, "'Mother God' Worship Shocks CBF Attendee" (Louisville, KY: The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, accessed 25 Aug. 2003); available from <http://cbmw.org/news/cbf2001.html>; Internet. Similarly, in an article that he wrote on ties between women's ordination and homosexual ordination, Southern Seminary president R. Albert Mohler emphatically declared, "I am not [emphasis in the original] accusing all proponents of women's ordination of supporting the ordination of homosexuals." R. Albert Mohler, "Women Preachers, Divorce, and a Gay Bishop—What's the Link?" (Salem Communications Corporation, accessed 25 Aug. 2003); available from <http://www.crosswalk.com/news/weblogs/mohler/?adate=8/5/2003#1213166>; Internet.

⁸ The movement of some from the endorsement of evangelical

feminism to the embrace of homosexuality is recognized by both complementarians and egalitarians. For example, egalitarian Rebecca M. Groothuis notes that while “‘homosexual rights’ were not linked to the cause of women’s rights in early feminism; . . . efforts have been made by some Christian feminists to argue for homosexuality as part and parcel of evangelical feminism.” Rebecca M. Groothuis, *Women Caught in the Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994) 46, 118. Likewise, in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, complementarians Piper and Grudem write, “Some evangelicals who once disapproved of homosexuality have been carried by their feminist arguments into approving of faithful homosexual alliances.” Piper and Grudem, “An Overview of Central Concerns,” 82.

⁹ Note that the shift from embracing evangelical feminism to the endorsement of homosexuality can also be seen in the writings of a number of individual authors. Examples of those who have made such a move have been reported in a number of other works, and include individuals such as Mary Daly, Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, Paul Jewitt, Gerald Sheppard, and Karen J. Torjesen. Cf. Piper and Grudem, 82-85 and Kassian, 230, 232, 237-39. Additionally, William E. Mouser, founder of the International Council for Gender Studies, lists several individuals who claim to be evangelical egalitarians and yet are supporters of homosexuality, including Loren L. Johns, Walter Wink, William Herzog, and Rembert S. Truluck. William E. Mouser, “Gays and Egals: A Common Hermeneutical Playbook” (Waxahachie, TX: International Council for Gender Studies, accessed 25 Aug. 2003); available from <http://cacsi.com/BCMWGaysAndEgals.htm>; Internet.

¹⁰ Prior to 1990, the Evangelical and Ecumenical Women’s Caucus was known as the Evangelical Women’s Caucus. The organization underwent a name change, adding the word “ecumenical” to their name, “in order to reflect the increasingly inclusive nature and the many traditions” of their membership. “How Did EEWOC Originate?” (Wichita, KS: EEWOC, accessed 25 Aug. 2003); available from <http://www.eewc.com/About.htm>; Internet.

¹¹ Ibid. It is interesting to note that while the *Chicago Declaration* does make a brief reference to general societal irresponsibility in the acting out of male/female gender roles, and it does contain a call for mutual submission, there is no reference to the “inferior status of women” in the document. See Ronald J. Sider, ed., *The Chicago Declaration* (Carol Stream, IL: Creation House, 1974).

¹² Kathleen E. Corley and Karen J. Torjesen, “Sexuality, Hierarchy and Evangelicalism,” *TSF Bulletin* (Mar.-Apr. 1987) 23.

¹³ Beth Spring, “Gay Rights Resolution Divides Membership of Evangelical Women’s Caucus,” *Christianity Today* 30, 3 October 1986, 40-41. Note that Corley and Torjesen report the vote as 80-16-25. Corley and Torjesen, 23. Efforts by this author to get the exact vote tally from the EEWOC were unsuccessful.

¹⁴ Spring, 43.

¹⁵ “The History of CBE,” (Minneapolis, MN: Christians for Biblical Equality, accessed 25 Aug. 2003); available from http://www.cbeinternational.org/new/about/who_we_are.html; Internet. Concerning CBE’s Statement of Faith, William D. Aleshire made the following observation: “It is interesting to note that while this statement affirms a traditional biblical understanding on family and marriage, it does not clearly define the group’s views on homosexuality. Since the CBE split off from the EWC because of that organization’s growing support for lesbians, it seems logical that you could find some document or statement that explains why they distanced themselves.” William D. Aleshire, “The Slope of Relativistic Theology,” unpublished paper (Wake Forest, NC:

Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003) 6-7. Piper and Grudem make a similar observation regarding the seeming ambiguity in CBE’s declaration, *Men, Women, and Biblical Equality*. In regard to CBE’s teaching of the “full equality of men and women in Creation and in Redemption,” Piper and Grudem note, “In this day of increasing homosexual demands for marital rights, we need to say loudly and clearly that men are not equal with women personally or physically as candidates for the spouses of men. Men and women are not equal when they stand before a man as a possible marriage partner.” Piper and Grudem, “Charity, Clarity, and Hope: The Controversy and the Cause of Christ” 407.

¹⁶ National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches 2003* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003) 11.

¹⁷ “Presbyterian 101: A General Guide to the Facts About the PCUSA” (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Church [USA], accessed 25 Aug. 2003); available from <http://www.pcusa.org/101/101-women/htm>; Internet.

¹⁸ “Women’s Ministries” (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Church [USA], accessed 25 Aug. 2003); available from <http://www.pcusa.org/women/history.htm>; Internet.

¹⁹ “Churchwide Personnel Services: Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)” (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Church [USA], accessed 25 Aug. 2003); available from <http://www.pcusa.org/cps/statistics.htm>; Internet. According to statistics available from the aforementioned denominational webpage, in 2001, the PC(USA) had 21,150 ordained ministers of Word and Sacrament, 4,015 of whom were women. In 1990, there were 20,338 ordained ministers of Word and Sacrament, 2,257 of whom were women.

²⁰ These organizations include: the National Network of Presbyterian College Women, the Office of Womens Advocacy, the Advocacy Committee for Women’s Concerns, as well as numerous synod and presbytery level organizations. More information about these groups and their activities is available from the Women’s Ministries Program Area of the denominational website. Cf. <http://www.pcusa.org/women/index.htm>.

²¹ Question 87 of the Heidelberg Catechism asks, “Can those who do not turn to God from their ungrateful, impenitent life be saved?” The answer given is, “Certainly not! Scripture says, ‘Surely you know that the unjust will never come into possession of the kingdom of God. Make no mistake: no fornicator or idolater, none who are guilty either of adultery or of homosexual perversion, no thieves or grabbers of money or drunkards or slanderers or swindlers, will possess the kingdom of God’ (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9).” *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.): Part I, Book of Confessions* (Louisville, KY: The Office of the General Assembly, 2003) 4.087.

²² Minutes of the 190th General Assembly (1978), United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. 261.

²³ Minutes of the 120th General Assembly (1980), Presbyterian Church in the United States 213.

²⁴ Minutes of the 203rd General Assembly (1991), Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) 395.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Minutes of the 188th General Assembly (1976), United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. 111-12.

²⁷ Minutes of the 205th General Assembly (1993), Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) 322.

²⁸ Minutes of the 190th General Assembly (1978), United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. 264.

²⁹ Minutes of the 199th General Assembly (1987), United Presbyterian

Church in the U.S.A. 776.

³⁰ The growing tolerance of homosexuality among PC(USA) members is evident as in 1999-2000 the denomination voted to join the Churches Uniting in Christ movement. This confederation of churches holds nine "marks of churches," the seventh of which is an "intentional commitment to promote unity with wholeness and to oppose all marginalization and exclusion in church and society based upon such things as race, age, gender, forms of disability, sexual orientation, and class." *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)* D-7. Additionally, in 2001 the majority of presbyteries (100 out of 173) did not affirm an amendment to the denominational constitution that would have banned PC(USA) ministers from performing same-sex unions. Cf., "PCUSA Vote Allows Same-Sex Unions," *Christian Century* 118, no. 10 (Mar. 2001) 11-12. The amendment (known as "Amendment O") read: "Scripture and our confessions teach that God's intention for all people is to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or in chastity in singleness. Church property shall not be used for, and church officers shall not take part in conducting, any ceremony or event that pronounces blessing of God upon any relationship that is inconsistent with God's intention as expressed in the preceding sentence." "Daily Presbyterian News" (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Church [USA], accessed 25 Aug. 2003); available from http://presbyweb.com/VotesOnA-B_O.html; Internet. Additionally, an August 2000 survey by the Presbyterian Panel, the research arm of the PC(USA), found that within the denomination a majority of specialized clergy (61%), four in ten pastors (41%), and around three in ten members (28%) agree with the statement that "homosexuality should be considered an acceptable alternative lifestyle." Furthermore, the same survey reported that a majority of PC(USA) pastors (51%) and specialized clergy (67%) agree with the statement that "gay partners who make a legal commitment to each other should be entitled to the same rights and benefits as couples in traditional marriages." "Ministries to Families and Same-Sex Issues in the PC(USA)" (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Church [USA], accessed 25 Aug. 2003); available from <http://www.pcusa.org/research/panel/family.htm>; Internet.

³¹ These two groups are the Covenant Network of Presbyterians (formed in 1997) and the More Light Presbyterians (formed in 1998 by the merger of Presbyterians for Lesbian and Gay Concerns and More Light Churches Network).

³² For additional information regarding the homosexuality debate in the PC(USA), see Richard G. Huteson and Peggy L. Shriver, *The Divided Church: Moving Liberals and Conservatives from Diatribe to Dialogue* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999) 93-99; Clifton Kirpatrick and William Hopper, Jr., *What Unites Presbyterians: Common Ground for Troubled Times* (Louisville, KY: Geneva, 1997) 1-164; Jack Rogers, *Claiming the Center: Churches and Conflicting Worldviews* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995) 127-35; Jeffrey S. Siker, *Homosexuality and the Church: Both Sides of the Debate* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1994) 3-194; and James K. Wellman, ed., "Religious Organizational Identity and Homosexual Ordination: A Case Study of the Presbyterian Church, USA," *Review of Religious Research* 41 (Dec 1999) 184-274.

³³ Minutes of the 210th General Assembly (1998), Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Commissioner's Resolution 98-10.

³⁴ Jim Tiefenthal, "Women Criticized for Existing: ACWC Chair Looks Ahead to 213th GA Issues" (Rochester, NY: That All May Freely Serve, accessed 25 Aug. 2003); available from <http://www.tamfs.org/new/ga213/acwcSizoo.asp>; Internet.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Waveney Ann Moore, "A Church That Doesn't Just Preach Tolerance," (Tampa Bay, FL: St. Petersburg Times, accessed 25 Aug. 2003); available from http://www.sptimes.com/2002/06/22/NorthPinellas/A_church_that_doesn_t.shtml; Internet.

³⁷ Deb Price, "Presbyterians Push Church to Embrace Gays," (Detroit, MI: The Detroit News, accessed 22 Sept. 2003); available from <http://detnews.com/2001/editorial/0106/25/a09-240016.htm>.

³⁸ Bruce Hahne, *Turning Point: The Need to Escalate the Struggle for LGBT Equality within the PCUSA* (Palo Alto, CA: New Visions Project, 2002) 2, 4, 6.

³⁹ Sylvia Thorson-Smith, "Enlarging Human Freedom: A Feminist View," in *The Sexuality Debate in North American Churches, 1988-1995: Controversies, Unresolved Issues, Future Prospects* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1995) 190.

⁴⁰ This gradual embrace of homosexuality by the PC(USA) can also be documented by the growing number of local synods, presbyteries, and local churches that have taken actions—contrary to current denominational doctrine—to affirm homosexuality. For example, see "More Light" Synod OK, rules PCUSA Court" *Christian Century* 110, no. 20 (June 30-July 7, 1993) 667; "Presbyterian Body OK's Same-Sex Unions" *Christian Century* 116, no. 6 (Feb. 24, 1999) 210; and Dan Klepal, "Rebuke Doesn't Stop Pastor: 2 Women Wed at His Church," *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 21 May 2003, n.p.

⁴¹ National Council 11.

⁴² John E. Lynch, "Ordination of Women: Protestant Experience in Ecumenical Perspective" *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 12, no. 2 (Spring 1975) 186.

⁴³ The qualifications for ordination into the ministry in the ELCA constitution read, "An ordained minister of this church shall be a person whose commitment to Christ, soundness in the faith, aptness to preach, teach, and witness, and educational qualifications have been examined and approved in the manner prescribed in the documents of this church; who has been properly called and ordained; who accepts and adheres to the Confession of Faith of this church; who is diligent and faithful in the exercise of the ministry; and whose life and conduct are above reproach. An ordained minister shall comply with the constitution of this church." *Constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, 7.22. The ELCA constitution may be found in *Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001).

⁴⁴ *Fact Sheet about Ordained Women*, ELCA Office of the Secretary, August 2002. As of August 1, 2002, 2,707 of the 17,693 total (active and retired) ELCA clergy were women (15.3%). In 1991, only 8% of the total ELCA were women.

⁴⁵ For more information on the Commission for Women and the Women of the ELCA and their ministries, see the brochure entitled, *Commission for Women—Women of the ELCA* (Chicago, IL: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, n.d.). See, also, the women's ministry areas of the denominational website (www.elca.org/wo).

⁴⁶ The LCA adopted a social statement entitled "Sex, Marriage, and Family" at its fifth biennial convention held between June 25-July 2, 1970. This statement noted, "Scientific research has not been able to provide conclusive evidence regarding the causes of homosexuality. Nevertheless, homosexuality is viewed biblically as a departure from the heterosexual structure of God's creation. . . . However, they [i.e., homosexuals] are often the special and undeserving victims of prejudice and discrimination in law, law enforcement, cultural mores,

and congregational life. In relation to this area of concern, the sexual behavior of freely consenting adults in private is not an appropriate subject for legislation or police action. It is essential to see such persons as entitled to understanding and justice in the church and community." Siker, 197. The ALC approved a similar policy entitled "Human Sexuality and Sexual Behavior" at its tenth general convention in October of 1980. This statement reads, "We believe it appropriate to distinguish between homosexual orientation and homosexual behavior. Persons who do not practice their homosexual erotic preference do not violate our understanding of Christian sexual behavior. . . . While we see no scriptural rationale for revising the church's traditional teaching that homosexual erotic behavior violates God's intent, we nonetheless remain open to the possibility of new biblical and theological insights. . . . Members of congregations of The American Lutheran Church [ought] to review their attitudes, words, and actions regarding homosexuality. Christians need to be more understanding and more sensitive to life as experienced by those who are homosexual. They need to take leadership roles in changing public opinion, civil laws, and prevailing practices that deny justice and opportunity to any persons." Ibid., 198-99.

⁴⁷ *Vision and Expectations: Ordained Ministers in the ELCA*, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Division for Ministry (1990) 8. The ELCA has a companion statement for commissioned ministers in which it similarly states, "Commissioned ministers who are homosexual in their self-understanding are expected to abstain from homosexual sexual relationships." *Vision and Expectations: Commissioned Associates in Ministry*, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Division for Ministry (1993) 5.

⁴⁸ *Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline of Ordained Ministers*, Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (1989) 1. Similarly, in regard to other ministers within the ELCA, the church has declared, "Practicing homosexual persons are precluded from the rostered ministries of this church." *Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline of Associates in Ministry, Members of the Deaconess Community, and Diaconal Ministers*, Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (1993) 1.

⁴⁹ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Conference of Bishops, CB93.10.25 (1993).

⁵⁰ H. George Anderson and Charles S. Maahs, "An Open Letter from the Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America: A Word of Welcome to Gays and Lesbians," 22 March 1996.

⁵¹ Other actions taken by divisions of the ELCA that communicate the church's position on homosexuality include Church Council Actions CC93.3.37 (1993), CC00.11.67 (2000), CC00.11.68 (2000), Assembly Actions CA91.7.51 (1991), CA93.6.12 (1993), CA95.6.27 (1995), CA95.6.59 (1995), CA95.7.72 (1995), CA95.7.73 (1995), CA97.6.28 (1997), CA97.6.29 (1997), CA99.06.27 (1999), CA99.06.57 (1999), and the ELCA Department of Studies, Division for Church in Society, "A Message on Sexuality: Some Common Convictions" (Nov. 9, 1996).

⁵² Five pro-homosexual groups have come together in the Lutheran Alliance for Full Participation. These groups include The Network for Inclusive Vision, Lutherans Concerned/North America (founded in 1974), Wingspan (founded in 1982), Lutheran Lesbian and Gay Ministries (founded in 1989), and the Extraordinary Candidacy Project (founded in 1993).

⁵³ Cf. "Gay Candidate Rejected," *Christian Century* 105, no. 22 (July 20-27, 1988) 666.

⁵⁴ Cf. "Ban on Gay Clergy Defied," *Christian Century* 106, no. 34

(Nov. 15, 1989) 1041; "Church Defies Ruling on Gay Pastor," *Christian Century* 111, no. 9 (Mar. 16, 1994) 274; "Lutherans Defrock Homosexual Cleric," *Christian Century* 115, no. 7 (Mar. 4, 1998) 226; and "Ordained Against the Rules," *Christian Century* 118, no. 16 (May 16, 2001) 7-8.

⁵⁵ "Draft Affirms Homosexual Unions," *Christianity Today* 37, no. 22, 22 November 1993, 43. For more on the content of this proposed social statement, as well as the internal controversies surrounding it, see David Neff, "How Lutherans Justify Sex: An ELCA Commission Looked Immorality in the Eye and Called it Sin. So Why Did They Blink When They Came to Homosexuality?" *Christianity Today* 37, 13 December 1993, 16-17; "Chilstrom: Read the Sexuality Report," *Christian Century* 110, no. 33 (Nov. 17-24, 1993) 1154; "More Reaction to ELCA Sexuality Report," *Christian Century* 110, no. 37 (Dec. 22-29, 1993) 1295; and "Lutherans Abandon Sexuality Study," *Christian Century* 111, no. 31 (Nov. 2, 1994) 1007-8.

⁵⁶ At their 2001 Churchwide Assembly, the voting attendees of ELCA took steps to establish a committee to produce an official social statement on homosexuality to be presented at the 2005 Churchwide Assembly for denominational approval or disapproval (cf. Assembly Actions CA01.06.28, CA01.06.36, and CA01.06.45). This 1.2 million dollar five-year study is being directed by James M. Childs, theology and ethics professor at Trinity Lutheran Seminary. For more information on the study and its progress as of 2003, see "ELCA Names Director of Sexuality Study," *Christian Century* 119, no. 3 (Jan. 30-Feb. 6, 2003) 15; and James M. Childs, "Progress Report ELCA Studies on Sexuality" (Chicago, IL: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, accessed 25 Aug. 2003); available from <http://www.elca.org/faithfuljourney/pdf/spring2003churchcouncilreport.pdf>; Internet.

⁵⁷ For more information on homosexuality and the ELCA, see Nancy K. Grush, *The Position of the ELCA on the Ordination of Homosexual Persons* (Gettysburg, PA: Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, 2002); Karen L. Bloomquist, "The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America: The Politics of Sex and Power in the Churches," in *The Sexuality Debate in North American Churches, 1988-1995: Controversies, Unresolved Issues, and Future Prospects*, ed. John J. Carey (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1995), 147-67; and Christian Batalden Scharen, *Married in the Sight of God: Theology, Ethics, and Church Debates Over Homosexuality* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000) 103-25.

⁵⁸ R. L. DeJaynes, *Come Out From Among Them: A Journey Out of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* (Decatur, IL: Johann Gerhard Institute, 1996) 27.

⁵⁹ "Lutherans Hail, Dismiss, Sexuality Task Force," *Christian Century* 111, no. 12 (Apr. 13, 1994) 377.

⁶⁰ "ELCA Women Offer RIC Workshop," *ADVENT* (Spring 2001) 2. For more information on the establishment of an official relationship between the ELCA and LC/NA, see "ELCA Establishes Formal Relationship with LC/NA" (Chicago, IL: Lutherans Concerned/North America, accessed 25 Aug. 2003); available from http://lcna.org/lcna_news/elca_relationship.shtm; Internet; and "ELCA Establishes Formal Relationship with LC/NA," *CONCORD* (Dec. 2002) 12.

⁶¹ "Shared Conversations: A Study Day and Workshop using Shared Congregational Conversation around Homosexuality Study Resource," conference brochure, Cleveland Heights, OH: Northeastern Ohio Synod, ELCA Task Force on Ministry with People who are Gay or Lesbian, 2002. Information about this conference was also posted at http://lcna.org/lcna_news/

oct26_study_day.shtm. Note that the ELCA has frequently sponsored workshops that have included pro-homosexual speakers. For example, Wilma Mankiller, a self-described radical feminist, was a keynote speaker at the 1996 annual meeting of the Women of the ELCA. DeJaynes, 28.

⁶² For another example of the connecting of the homosexual rights movement with other liberation movements, see the article by lesbian Wartburg Theological Seminary professor Gwen Saylor entitled "My Journey Isn't Over," *Lutheran Woman Today* (May 2001), n.p. Additionally, this connection can be documented in a special report prepared by the Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America, a group of which the Canadian branch of the Evangelical Lutheran Church is a part. This report notes, "After many years of struggle by women's organizations to raise awareness about violations against women, there is now a widespread consensus in the international community that women's rights are human rights. In the same way, the courageous efforts of lesbian and gay rights groups in many parts of the world have brought about a growing recognition that violations against lesbians and gay men are a fundamental human rights issue." Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America, *Violence Unveiled: Repression Against Lesbians and Gay Men in Latin America* (Toronto, Canada: ICCHRLA, 1996) 32.

⁶³ National Council, 11. Note that the Methodist Church was formed in 1939 by the merger of the three historical North American branches of Methodism—the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the Methodist Protestant Church. The Evangelical United Brethren Church was formed in 1946 by the joining of the Evangelical Church and the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, both of whom trace their beginnings to the eighteenth century Methodist revivals in Pennsylvania.

⁶⁴ Cf. Mary A. Dougherty, "The Methodist Deaconess: A Case of Religious Feminism," *Methodist History* 21, (Jan 1983) 90-98; Nancy A. Hardesty, "Women in the Holiness Movement: Feminism in the Evangelical Tradition," in *Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Rosemary Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979) 225-54; and Norma T. Mitchell, "From Social to Radical Feminism: A Survey of Emerging Diversity in Methodist Women's Organizations, 1869-1974," *Methodist History* 13 (April 1975) 21-44. Additionally, it is interesting to note that in 1998, one of the largest churches in the UMC—First United Methodist Church, Marietta, Georgia—began withholding funds from Churchwide causes due to "the pervasive influence that radical feminist theology has had on United Methodism." Alice Smith, "Large United Methodist Church in Georgia 'Redirects' Funds from Churchwide Causes" (Nashville, TN: United Methodist News Service, accessed 25 Aug. 2003); available from <http://umns.umc.org/98/mar/183t.htm>; Internet.

⁶⁵ Barbara B. Troxell, "Ordination of Women in the United Methodist Tradition," *Methodist History* 37 (Jan. 1999) 122-23. For additional historical information about women's ministries and ordination in the Methodist tradition, see Rosemary S. Keller, "Women and the Nature of Ministry in the United Methodist Tradition," *Methodist History* 22 (Jan. 1984) 99-114; and Jonathan Cooney, "Maintaining the Tradition: Women Elders and the Ordination of Women in the Evangelical United Brethren Church," *Methodist History* 27 (Oct 1988) 25-35.

⁶⁶ The full "Rights of Women" section of the UMC constitution reads, "We affirm women and men to be equal in every aspect of their common life. We therefore urge that every effort be made to

eliminate sex-role stereotypes in activity and portrayal of family life and in all aspects of voluntary and compensatory participation in the Church and society. We affirm the right of women to equal treatment in employment, responsibility, promotion, and compensation. We affirm the importance of women in decision-making positions at all levels of Church life and urge such bodies to guarantee their presence through policies of employment and recruitment. We support affirmative action as one method of addressing the inequalities and discriminatory practices within our Church and society. We urge employers of persons in dual career families, both in the Church and society, to apply proper consideration of both parties when relocation is considered." United Methodist Church, *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville, TN: United Methodist Publishing House, 1968-) par. 162F.

⁶⁷ UMC General Council on Finance and Administration, "Clergy Membership, 2002 Gender" (Evanston, IL: UMC, 2002). Note that the UMC classifies six categories of ordained Church workers as official clergy: Elders in Full Connection, Deacons in Full Connection, Probationary Members [of the clergy], Associate Members [of the clergy], Full-time Local Pastors Appointed to Local Churches, and Part-time Local Pastors Appointed to Local Churches.

⁶⁸ The General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, The United Methodist Church, "Moving Toward General Conference 2000 . . . Women in the UMC: How Far Have We Come?" (Evanston, IL: The General Commission on the Status and Role of Women: United Methodist Church, accessed 25 Aug. 2003); available from <http://gcsrw.org/news/spring2000/movingtowardgc2000.html>; Internet. Figures that support this conclusion may be obtained from Association of Theological Schools (<http://www.ats.edu>).

⁶⁹ *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, Social Principles*, par. 161G.

⁷⁰ *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, par. 304.3. Note that in a footnote the *Book of Discipline* defines a self-avowed practicing homosexual as "a person [who] openly acknowledges to a bishop, district superintendent, district committee of ordained ministry, board of ordained ministry, or clergy session that the person is a practicing homosexual." Ibid.

⁷¹ *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, Social Principles*, par. 65C.

⁷² *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, par. 806.9.

⁷³ These groups include Affirmation (founded in 1975 and formerly called the United Methodist Gay Caucus and Gay United Methodists) Shalom Ministries (founded 1993) the Reconciling Ministries Network (founded in 1994 and formerly called the Reconciling Congregations Program) MoSAIC—Methodist Students for an All-Inclusive Church (founded 1996) CORNET—The Covenant Relationships Network (founded 1997) Parents Reconciling Network (founded 1999) and United Methodists of Color for a Fully Inclusive Church (founded 2000).

⁷⁴ Cf. "Homosexuals Consider Splitting from the UMC," *Christian Century* 110, no. 5 (Feb. 17, 1993) 167; and B. A. Robinson, "The United Methodist Church and Homosexuality: An Overview" (Watertown, NY: Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance, accessed 25 Aug. 2003); available from http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_umc4.htm; Internet.

⁷⁵ Jane Hull Harvey, "Struggle for Recognition of Personal Worth: General Conference Commends Materials on Homosexuality for Church Study but Maintains Discipline Statements," *Christian Social Action* (June 1992) 10. For additional information on the United

Methodist Committee to Study Homosexuality and their report, see, "UMC on Homosexuality," *Christian Century* 108, no. 9 (Mar. 13, 1991) 289-90; and "Wavering on Homosexuality," *Christian Century* 108, no. 25 (Sept. 4-11, 1991) 800.

⁷⁶ J. Richard Peck and Erik Alsgaard, eds., *The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church, 2000*. (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 2000) 160.

⁷⁷ Examples of UMC clergy disobeying official church policy abound. For example, see "'Good News' Backs Efforts to Change Gays" *Christian Century* 116, no. 7 (Mar. 3, 1999) 241-42; "Bishop Asked to Resign," *Christian Century* 100, no. 6 (Mar. 2, 1983) 176; "Powers Won't Speak on Gay Issues," *Christian Century* 113, no. 3 (Jan. 24, 1996) 70-71; "UMC Bishop Will Abide by Church's Decision," *Christian Century* 115, no. 24 (Sept. 9-16, 1998) 815; "UMC Bishop Rejects Gay Union Liturgies," *Christian Century* 109, no. 30 (Oct. 21, 1992) 928-29; "UMC Pastors Launch Gay Rights Campaign," *Christian Century* 114, no. 4 (Jan. 29, 1997) 93-94; and Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, "Human Rights and the Golden Rule," *Christianity and Crisis* (Nov. 9, 1987) 383-85.

⁷⁸ Cf. Jody Veenker, "Holding the Middle Groud" *Christianity Today* 44, no. 7, 12 June 12 2000, 17; Jean Caffey Lyles, "At the UMC General Conference: Watershed in Cleveland," *Christian Century* 117, no. 17 (May 24-31, 2000) 590-91.

⁷⁹ For additional general information about the acceptance of homosexuality within the UMC, see Tex Sample and Amy E. DeLong, eds., *The Loyal Opposition: Struggling with the Church on Homosexuality* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000) 15-194; James R. Wood, *Where the Spirit Leads: The Evolving Views of United Methodists on Homosexuality* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000) 9-135; and James R. Wood and Jon P. Bloch, "The Role of Church Assemblies in Building a Civil Society: The Case of the United Methodist General Conference's Debate on Homosexuality," *Sociology and Religion* 56 (Summer 1995) 121-36.

⁸⁰ For example, a survey of the board of directors of the Reconciling Ministries Network—the largest of the UMC related homosexual advocacy groups—reveals that its members include Inelle Cox Bagwell, former director of the Women's Ministry Division of the UMC, and Judith Craig, a former leader in the UMC General Council on the Status and Role of Women and the first woman ever to deliver the opening episcopal address at a UMC General Conference. Cf. "New Board Members 2003," *Katalyst* (Winter 2003) 9; and Steve Rabey, "United Methodists Retain Ban on Homosexual Ordinations," *Christianity Today* 40, 17 June 1996, 58-59.

⁸¹ Concerning their plans for the UMC General Conference in 2004, the Parents Reconciling Network noted, "We will be there to support the Women's Division . . . as they are targeted by the same people who have marginalized our [homosexual] children at past General Conferences." "It's My Church Too!" *Katalyst* (Spring 2003) 4.

⁸² In a handout produced by the Reconciling Congregation Program entitled "How to Become a Reconciling Congregation," this homosexual advocacy group notes, "If your congregation has a large membership or a complex [ministry] program, be sure to pursue dialogue with all the identifiable groups within the church who are willing to talk [about homosexuality]. Especially try to reach the UMC Women's circles . . . Identify those persons who can address the biblical and theological questions involved [about homosexuality], and have them reach out to those groups with whom they have credibility." "How to Become a Reconciling Congregation" (Chicago, IL: Reconciling Ministries Network,

accessed 25 Aug. 2003); available from <http://www.rmnetwork.org/papers/resource2.pdf>; Internet.

⁸³ James M. Wall "Methodists Face the Homosexual Issue," *Christian Century* 92, no. 9 (Mar. 12, 1975) 243.

⁸⁴ Tim Tanton, "Bishop, 180 Others Arrested in Protest Over Church's Gay Policies" (Nashville, TN: United Methodist News Service, accessed 25 Aug. 2003); available from <http://umns.umc.org/gc2000news/stories/gc050.htm>; Internet. Although not in favor of homosexuality himself, after the 1996 UMC General Conference Methodist pastor James V. Heidinger similarly observed that "many United Methodist leaders speak as if change in our United Methodist standards on homosexuality is inevitable, likening this issue to the civil and women's rights struggles." Thomas S. McAnally, "'Good News' Says Push to Accept Homosexual Practice Threatens to Split United Methodist Church" (Nashville, TN: United Methodist News Service, accessed 25 Aug. 2003); available from <http://umns.umc.org/news97/may/tsplit.htm>; Internet.

⁸⁵ David Wesley Perkins, "Taking the 'Plank' Out of Our Eyes," *Christian Social Action* (May 1988) 15.

⁸⁶ In addition to the denominations previously mentioned in this essay—the Presbyterian Church (USA) the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the United Methodist Church—the following Christian groups have, likewise, departed from traditional views of male/female gender roles and are currently struggling with issues related to the acceptance of homosexuality: the Anglican Church of Canada, the Christian Reformed Church, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, the Disciples of Christ (the Christian Church) the Episcopal Church, the Unitarian Universalist Association, the United Church of Christ, and the Unity Church.

⁸⁷ In her study of homosexuality and evangelical feminism, feminist Sheila Hassell Hughes offers three reasons why many egalitarians have been hesitant to endorse homosexuality. These are (1) a fear of rejection by conservative denominations and organizations, (2) a confusion of real lesbianism with "political lesbianism," and (3) viewing lesbianism as the new "contamination"—the issue associated with too much radicalness and compromise. Sheila Hassell Hughes, "Homosexuality and Group Boundaries in Contemporary Evangelical Perspective," *Quarterly Review* 14 (Summer 1994) 155-56.

⁸⁸ Peter Jones has done extensive work into the spiritual connection between egalitarianism and homosexuality. For example, in his book *Spirit Wars* Jones writes, "The [current spiritual] revolution is about the personal power to be autonomous. . . . [This] leads some liberal Christians to denounce the 'sin of heterosexism.' . . . Egalitarianism is the first step to autonomous individualism just as the relativization of sexual differences is the first step to gender-confusion." Peter Jones, *Spirit Wars: Pagan Revival in Christian America* (Mukilteo, WA: WinePress Publishing, 1997) 179. See, also, Peter Jones, "Androgyny: The Pagan Sexual Ideal," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43, no. 3 (Sept. 2000) 443-69. Daniel R. Heimbach, too, has written about the spiritual connection between feminism and homosexuality. For example, in his article, "The Unchangeable Difference: Eternally Fixed Sexual Identity for an Age of Plastic Sexuality," Heimbach notes, "Any ethic [such as egalitarianism or homosexuality] based upon the idea of plastic sexuality must naturally dispense the notion of complementary difference in sexual union; and it must ridicule evidence that good might result from cooperation between fixed differences in sexual identity. . . . Ultimately the sort of moral thinking that arises from a plastic notion of human sexual identity must be characterized by

intentional, self-conscious rebellion against God.” Daniel R. Heimbach, “The Unchangeable Difference: Eternally Fixed Sexual Identity for an Age of Plastic Sexuality” in *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. Wayne Grudem (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002) 278.

⁸⁹ In several of his works, well-known apologist Francis Schaeffer identified a philosophical tie between feminism and homosexuality. For example, in his inaugural text *The God Who is There*, Schaeffer noted, “Some forms of homosexuality today are of a similar nature, in that they are not just homosexuality but a philosophic expression. One must have understanding for the real homophile’s problem. But much modern homosexuality is an expression of the current denial of antithesis. It has led in this case to an obliteration of the distinction between man and woman. So the male and female as complementary partners are finished. This is a form of homosexuality which is part of the movement below the line of despair. In much of modern thinking, all antithesis and all the order of God’s creation is to be fought against—including male-female distinctions.” Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who is There* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1968) 39. Likewise, in his final book *The Great Evangelical Disaster*, Schaeffer wrote, “The [philosophic] idea of absolute, autonomous freedom from God’s boundaries flows into the idea of equality without distinction, which flows into the denial of what it truly means to be male and female, which flows into abortion and homosexuality, and the destruction of the home and the family, and ultimately the destruction of our culture.” Francis Schaeffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1984) 136.

⁹⁰ Perhaps the most oft-mentioned connection between egalitarianism and homosexuality is their hermeneutical similarities. For example, Albert Mohler wrote, “I am insisting that the basic hermeneutical approach (method of interpreting the Scriptures) behind these [feminist and homosexual] arguments [for ordination] has a common core—a relativizing of prohibitive biblical texts in the name of ‘liberation,’ whether of women . . . or of homosexuals.” Mohler, Internet. See, also, Mouser, Internet and Jefferis Kent Peterson, “Feminism, Homosexuality, and Hermeneutics” (Butler, PA: Scholar’s Corner, accessed 25 Aug. 2003); available from <http://www.scholarscorner.com/Critical/Feminist.html>; Internet. For an excellent analysis of egalitarian hermeneutics, see Paul W. Felix, “The Hermeneutics of Evangelical Feminism,” in *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, ed. Robert L. Thomas (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002) 389-423, which also appears in this issue of *JBMW*. For an example of a self-described “evangelical homosexual” using egalitarian hermeneutics to support homosexuality, see Ralph Blair, “One Foolishness or Another: The Gospel and Foolish Galatians, Gays and Lesbians” (New York: Evangelicals Concerned, accessed 25 Aug. 2003); available from <http://www.ecinc.org/foolishnes.htm>; Internet; and William Richard Kremer, “Homosexuality and Hermeneutic: Romans 1:24-32” (Charlotte, NC: St. John’s Baptist Church, accessed 25 Aug. 2003); available from <http://www.stjohnsbaptistchurch.org>; Internet.

⁹¹ In her book *What’s Right with Feminism* Elaine Storkey notes that there are political aspects to both feminism and homosexuality (although most evangelical egalitarians would deny a *de facto* connection with political feminism). Indeed, Storkey notes that “to be a lesbian is thus the most personal and political stand a radical feminist can make.” Storkey, *What’s Right with Feminism* 106. Additionally, Shelia Hassell Hughes has noted that the overt political nature of lesbianism may be one of the reasons why some (but not all) evangelical egalitarians have been hesitant to endorse

homosexuality. Hughes, 155-56. Note, also, the connection that many of those in the EWC, PC(USA) ELCA and UMC, previously cited in this work, made between women’s rights, homosexual rights, and civil rights—all of which are seen to be political issues and are currently manifest in the political arena.

⁹² *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2d ed. (1989) s.v. “Egalitarian.”

⁹³ Christians for Biblical Equality, *Men, Women and Biblical Equality* (Minneapolis: Christians for Biblical Equality, 1989) par. 1, par. 5.

⁹⁴ Groothius, *Women Caught in the Conflict* 140.

⁹⁵ Ruth A. Tucker, *Women in the Maze: Questions and Answers on Biblical Equality* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992) 220-21.

⁹⁶ Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Between the Times,” *Reformed Journal* 40 (Dec. 1990) 20.

⁹⁷ Storkey, *What’s Right with Feminism* 178.

⁹⁸ CD III/4, 166. Corley and Torjesen similarly note, “The relationship between man and woman is not an interchangeable one; they have different natures. One is created to stimulate, lead and inspire, and the other to follow. Thus they cannot be who they are except in relationship to each other—male and female.” Corley and Torjesen, 25. Cf. CD III/4, 170-71.

⁹⁹ Heimbach 288.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 288-89.

¹⁰¹ Groothius 143.

Our Mother Who Art in Heaven: A Brief Overview and Critique of Evangelical Feminists and the Use of Feminine God-Language

Randy Stinson

Executive Director,

The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood

Louisville, Kentucky

For several decades, the feminist movement has had a clear impact on the church. Most mainline denominations have eschewed biblical authority and fidelity in favor of cultural accommodation, as they now are not only ordaining women to the ministry and embracing them as pastors of their churches, but they also are debating the legitimacy of homosexual ordination and even homosexual marital union.¹ Even among evangelicals the issue of the roles between men and women in the home and the church are hotly contested. But as some have been saying for years, the debates over the roles of men and women have never been solely about who is authorized to preach on Sunday morning. The debate has extended into areas such as the relationship between the members of the Godhead and the use of that relationship as a paradigm for how men and women might relate to one another. The discussion has extended into philosophies of Bible translation and how one might render the gender-related texts of the Bible in the “language of the people” without compromising the meaning of the original text. There is also debate regarding the language one should use when addressing God and whether or not God can be referred to as “mother.” It is no surprise, then, to find that the use of feminine God-language has become popular in various circles.

Liberal/Moderate Southern Baptists

At a 2001 meeting/worship service of the Baptist Women in Ministry organization (an auxiliary group associated with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship²), participants were encouraged to sing hymns and songs to mother God. Not only this, but at the end of the service, worshippers were asked to

participate in a responsive reading that expressed the inability to refer to God as father:

**To you who laid the foundations of the earth, I
dare to speak.**

We have called you by many names,
in many languages,
through many centuries.

**Living in this transition time,
none of those names seems sufficient,
expressive, easy to speak
when I try to bring myself before you.**

“Jesus,” I can say, yes, and “Jesus Christ” —
Son of the Most High, Redeemer of the world,
incarnation of the divine in human form —
crucified and risen to show us the way home.

“Holy Spirit,” I can say, no problem —
wind and fire anointing the Apostles,
your still voice at the center of the whirlwind,
caretaker of this strange thing we call the Church.

But what of you, O first person of the Trinity?

If I don't pay attention during church
I can roll through all those names without a hitch:
Father, Lord, King.

But when I hear myself, or focus on the words
upon the page,
I falter, resisting the baggage of human fathers,
lords, kings.

But human baggage cannot weigh you down.

You were enigmatic when directly asked your
name; just "I AM, tell them I AM sent you."
What kind of name is that? I AM what?
Is this an elaborate game
in which the goal is to discover what is hidden?

Or do we know instinctively
that to name something is to control it
as Adam named the animals?

**Is that why your name is a mystery,
must remain a mystery,
lest we imagine even for a moment
we can control your beauty and your power?**

God forbid.
Speak my name, lover of souls,
that I may be wholly yours.
Then none of the rest will matter at all.³

As will be seen in the rest of this article, the disdain for
father language and its accompanying belief that it promotes a
patriarchal system that is damaging to women is at the heart of
many of the efforts to rename God.

The United Methodist Church

The most recent United Methodist Hymnal supplement
(2000), entitled *The Faith We Sing*, includes songs that address
God as "Strong Mother" and "Mothering God." In this same
hymnal, not only are there songs referring to God as mother,
but there is one song referring to the earth as mother. The song
entitled "I am Your Mother" (subtitled "The Earth Prayer") is
written from the perspective of the earth:

I am your mother:
Do not neglect me!
Children, protect me
I need your trust
My breath is your breath,
My death is your death,
Ashes to ashes,
Dust into dust.⁴

The willingness to sing of both God and the earth
interchangeably as mother should be more than troubling. Here
it can be seen that there is at least an intimation of the

connection between giving a feminine name to God and the
necessary change in the entire way that He relates to the
world.⁵

Country Music Industry

Recently, even the country music industry has weighed
in on the discussion of God-language. In an apparent tribute
from a son to his mother, well-known musician, Travis Tritt,
sings that God must be a woman:

It's the way that you sneak a Kleenex to me
When a sad song gets in my eye
You say it's alright, you got no appetite
When it's down to the last piece of pie
It's the way that you never remember
The things I would rather forget
How you grin and shrug your shoulders
When it's time to start over again.

Chorus:
God must be a woman
You're probably a lot like her
Your grace is so amazing
An angel here on earth
You're so much like your maker
She sent you down to lay a crown on me
God must be a woman
Only mamas have a love that runs so deep
Watching out for drunks and babies and fools
And castaways like me.

Some heavenly rain must soak in your brain
And come out as the sweet things you say
You stitch me back up when life plays too rough
Give my hand a little squeeze when we pray
And the 'I love you's' that you told me
They would probably stretch to the moon
You multiply what matters
And divide the pain by two.⁶

This revision of God-language is to be expected from
mainline religious feminists⁷ who have disregarded the Bible or
from denominations or affiliations of churches who have a low
view of the Bible, or even a country music star who has no
respect for biblical language. But the real concern is the
inclination of several self-proclaimed evangelicals who are
advocating the practice of referring to God as mother,
signifying their willingness to succumb to the leftward pull of
culture. This article documents some recent efforts by
professing evangelicals to propose feminine God-language and
then offers a brief critique and response.

Evangelicals and Mother God?

Several evangelicals advocate a revision of how we speak about God and claim to do so on grounds that the Bible itself warrants some kind of feminine language. All three of the individuals mentioned in this article are affiliated in some way with an organization called Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE), a self-professing evangelical organization.⁸

Tony Campolo

While some may have reservations about referring to Campolo as an evangelical, the key issue for this paper is his formal affiliation with CBE as a Board of Reference member. In Campolo's book, *Carpe Diem*, he includes a puzzling chapter entitled, "Embracing the Feminine Side of God."⁹ Here he declares that there is a feminine aspect of God that can be seen in Jesus. In what amounts to a false dichotomy, Campolo states that "If the male side of God's character was expressed by Jesus' strong declarations of truth and pronouncements on morality, the female side of God was clear in His gentle sense of wonder while enjoying what the less perceptive would call the simple things of life."¹⁰ He goes on to note, "the masculine side of God is something to be admired. But it is the feminine side that draws love out of me. It is this feminine side of God I find in Jesus that makes me want to sing duets with him. When I think about the feminine in Him, I want to throw out my arms and be loved."¹¹ This "discovery" of the feminine side of God has led Campolo to also affirm his own feminine side. As a result of this acknowledgement, he wants Jesus to find in him the feminine characteristics of "a gentle heart and an awareness of the goodness that lies in people around me especially my enemies."¹²

Granted, he has not issued a clarion call for a revision of God-language, but this kind of description about the femininity of Jesus, based on the feminine side of God, is confusing at best. And this is certainly not biblical language. Campolo himself even notes that he is appealing to characteristics that the "world" calls feminine. Further, claiming that the idea of goodness and gentleness are a reflection of the "feminine side of God" is a false categorization of the fruit of the Spirit as masculine and feminine. The Bible lists the fruit of the Spirit as desirable for all members of the body of Christ and never even hints that some are particular to, or more common in, one gender or the other. This is in fact one of the themes of the book of Galatians. In Christ, all are justified by faith and all can expect the same inheritance regardless of ethnicity, gender, or social status (Gal 3:28). Likewise, all are expected to manifest the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5). Moreover, some serious Christological problems arise with identifying Christ as the embodiment of God's feminine side.¹³

Catherine Kroeger

Catherine Kroeger is significant to this discussion

because, as a founding member of CBE and current president emerita, she presumably embodies the principles and ideals of the direction of CBE. She and her husband have co-authored many publications on the issue of women in ministry. On the website of the First Presbyterian Church of Pitman, New Jersey, the Kroegers have a lengthy defense of women as elders in the church. Within this work they have a brief section that deals with images of God and gender:

So far we have referred to God as "He" and "Him" because most of us are used to employing these terms when we think of the Holy One. Indeed, it is sometimes asserted that those in holy office should be male to represent the Deity who is male. This is to ignore what the Bible has to say, for God is pictured as both male and female. Let us be clear that God does not possess sexuality—neither distinctive maleness nor femaleness; but to explain the love and work of God, both male and female imagery is used. Consider these scriptures carefully: Psalm 131:2-3; Deut. 32:18; Isa. 49:15, 66:9-13, 42:13-14; and Matthew 23:37. Among other passages is James 1:17-18, which first speaks of God as Father and then says God brought us forth as Mother. Job 38:28-29, Isa. 63:15 and Jer. 31:20 speak of the womb of God, surely a valuable image when we think of new birth. God's likeness to a mother is an important aspect of the divine nature. *Can Christians neglect any aspect of God's being as it is revealed in Scripture? There is good biblical reason, then, to speak of God as both Father and Mother, both "she" and "he".* This is particularly important for evangelicals to remember when they seek to witness to people turning to goddess worship in their desire for a deity with feminine attributes. It is also essential to remember when ministering to those with bad father images, who may have positive feelings about their mothers. Women as well as men are made in God's image! (Gen. 1:26-27, 5:1-2).¹⁴

Here language revision is explicitly stated. For the Kroegers, referring to God as mother is not only biblical but is also helpful for evangelism. Mother God language can, in their estimation, help overcome poor relationships with fathers and help divert those attracted to goddess worship.

Mimi Haddad

As the current president of CBE, Mimi Haddad recently posted a brief article on their website entitled, "What Language Shall We Use: A Look at Inclusive Language for People, Feminine Images for God, and Gender-Accurate Bible Translations."¹⁵ Here Haddad has presented a brief compilation of data that in her estimation bolsters the argument that it is proper, even biblical, to refer to God with feminine imagery, even to the extent of calling God mother. She claims that

the church today often overlooks biblical, yet feminine language for God. We rely almost exclusively on male metaphors and images for

God, a departure not only from scripture but also from the historical church. Though we rarely hear references to these in churches today, they are a part of the biblical record. Given the patriarchal culture of Scripture, it is interesting that we have so many feminine metaphors for God.¹⁶

She goes on to say, “It is idolatry to make God male or female. God is no more female or goddess (as some feminists would argue) than God is male. *God is beyond gender*. Yet, though we may speak of God as father or as mother, God is not limited by fatherhood or motherhood.”¹⁷ So here it appears that she is comfortable referring to God as mother, but wants to distance herself from feminists who are advocating goddess worship. This distancing is commendable but it is difficult to see what is governing her avoidance of the goddess connection when she has already left the pattern, and consequently the authority, of the biblical witness by using mother language in the first place.¹⁸

CBE Webstore Books

Of further concern is the presence of two particular books featured in the webstore of the CBE website. Certainly one can grant that, even in a specialized webstore, some authors are going to say some things with which not all who endorse the store would agree.¹⁹ There are always nuances of positions and explanations that require careful thought and expression. However, two books sold in the CBE webstore, *God, A Word for Girls and Boys*, by Jann Aldredge-Clanton²⁰ and *Is it Okay to Call God Mother? Considering the Feminine Face of God*, by Paul R. Smith,²¹ thoroughly endorse and encourage referring to God as Mother.

Let the Children Come to Me. Aldredge-Clanton explains in her book that her purpose is to provide songs, pictures, stories, prayers and other resources that will “apply a theology of inclusiveness to concrete experiences of children.”²² She argues that children “cannot grasp a theology of God as transcendent spirit if they hear trusted authority figures in the church constantly calling God, ‘he,’ ‘father,’ ‘king.’”²³ In her estimation, using feminine language for God will help boys rid themselves of arrogance (God is not a boy) and will help girls quit devaluing themselves (the supreme power of the universe is not a “he”).²⁴ She goes on to say,

Exclusively masculine images of God present problems for boys and girls. Boys have trouble developing personal, intimate relationships with a masculine God, whom they view as aloof. Girls lack a powerful role model if God is masculine. Gender-inclusive language for God will give children a more balanced view of God and of themselves. They can conceive of God as intimate as well as active; artistic as well as pragmatic;

emotional, as well as rational; powerful, as well as gentle. Developing an androgynous concept of God will help children to claim their own androgyny.²⁵

Aldredge-Clanton starts the book with a section on defining God, who in the end is the greatest lover and mother.²⁶ The section closes with a prayer to “God, our Mother.”²⁷ Later in the book, she teaches that God is both our father and our mother. She says, “We are all daughters and sons of our Mother and Father God. At times we all waste the gifts that God gives us. And we do other wrong things and fail to do the good things that God wants us to do. But our Father and Mother God will forgive us and help us to do better.”²⁸ This section concludes with a prayer to “Mother and Father God.”²⁹ The book also includes an appendix of songs for children with inclusive language. One is entitled “Our God is a He and a She” which teaches children that God is a father, mother, sister and brother.³⁰ Also included in this section is a song entitled, “God’s Beautiful World,” which refers to God, the creator, with the feminine pronoun, “she.”³¹

A Cautionary and Revealing Word About Jann

Aldredge-Clanton. In her 2002 autobiography, *Breaking Free: The Story of a Feminist Baptist Minister*,³² Aldredge-Clanton documents her journey from daughter of a Baptist minister to her own ordination as minister to her embrace of Christ-Sophia worship. In the fall of 1994, her book, *In Search of the Christ-Sophia: An Inclusive Christology for Liberating Christians*,³³ was published. Her *Praying With Christ-Sophia: Services for Healing and Renewal*³⁴ came out in 1996 and much of her autobiography deals with her efforts in assimilating the principles in these two books and how others were either repulsed by them or, in many cases, impressed by them. In one instance Aldredge-Clanton tells of introducing new hymns to her family at a Christmas event. One hymn, sung to the tune of “O Come All Ye Faithful,” substitutes Christ-Sophia:

O Come, Christ-Sophia, full of grace and wisdom;
Come bless us, challenge us to make life anew.
Come bring us power, beauty, hope, and harmony.
O come, thou Christ-Sophia,
O come, thou Christ-Sophia
O come, thou Christ-Sophia, wisdom and peace.³⁵

In another instance, Aldredge-Clanton details the creation of an icon, by her friend Elizabeth, used in the worship services she and some of her friends had instituted at Royal Lane Baptist Church. Her recollection is as follows:

Elizabeth took home the Mary statue and began by painting Mary’s robe a rich purple dotted with shiny gold stars. Where one hand had been, Elizabeth glued a silver styrofoam moon and in

the place of the other hand, a larger golden sun. Elizabeth saved the face for last. When she rubbed off the crusted paint, Elizabeth watched, in amazement, as Mary's face shone with dark and light tones in perfect balance. At once, Elizabeth recognized Christ-Sophia, holding sun and moon, black and white, in equal balance. Elizabeth also tells of a deeper discovery of herself as she recreated this sacred image. As she restored this wounded and rejected image, Elizabeth was at the same time reclaiming her own feminine power. Slowly working for months, in the midst of chaos and questions, she touched the divinity within herself. For the first time she saw herself as fully created in the divine image *It became harder and harder for me to conceive of any Royal Lane members' objecting to such profound spiritual discovery*³⁶

Later in the life of this small group of worshippers, after they were forced to change their location, Aldredge-Clanton relays part of her role in how they began their first service in their new location:

I draped a purple silk cloth over the table. On this altar I placed five votive candles, a black ceramic Madonna, and a porcelain Madonna. The room was so filled with people and pulsated with expectancy. Elizabeth entered, placing on the altar the purple-robed Christ-Sophia figure and a gloxinia plant with purple velvety blooms . . . Our ritual began with a litany in celebration of new beginnings. Then we stood and sang: 'Celebrate a new day dawning, sunrise of a golden morn; Christ-Sophia dwells among us; glorious visions now are born.'³⁷

One other occasion noted by Aldredge-Clanton was an opportunity to speak "for Sophia" at a particular conference. At the encouragement of one of her friends, Aldredge-Clanton took the opportunity and part of her account follows:

My voice started to swell as I quoted lines from one of my hymns: 'Long we've needed Her embrace, glory and power of Her grace.' My bright flowing arms stretched wider in a circular gesture toward all the women around me on stage as I continued, 'Now we gather up her blessings as we celebrate her many names: Ruah, Creative Spirit, Sophia, Hokmah, Wisdom, Sister, Shekinah, Mother Eagle, Friend, Black Madonna, Divine Midwife, Mother Hen, Birth-Giver, Comforting Mother, Divine Healer, Holy Mother, and so many more.' Then with even larger arms I reached up toward the eighteen-foot Lady of

Guadalupe and then out toward the Women of the Cloth and all of the people in the congregation as I exclaimed: 'Look, look, for She is here! Her wisdom words have long been near. Now, now, behold her grace, divinity in Her image.' I continued with a supplication to the 'Great Creator of the universe, She and He, all in all' to pour out blessings of hope and healing for the new millennium. And with both arms lifted high above my head I called out in a loud voice: 'Come, Spirit who makes all things new. Show us your wider, fuller view. Teach us your wholeness now to see. Stir us to be all we can be.'³⁸

For CBE to present material on their website by an author who has departed so thoroughly from the biblical witness is more than problematic. There is at least the possibility that others will think that the author's other writings are to be embraced and in this case, that would be tragic.³⁹

Is it Okay to Call God Mother? The second book of concern on the CBE website, written by Paul R. Smith, is a full argument for referring to God as mother. Since a complete review of this book is not possible here, only a few of Smith's presuppositions and conclusions will be provided. Throughout the book, Smith argues that referring to God as mother is necessary because of the enormous amount of sexism in the culture and the church today and claims that, "Many of us are so accustomed to our religious habits we do not perceive the male domination often present in our church leadership and religious language."⁴⁰ He claims that the language used in doctrinal formulations such as the Council of Nicea are not helping the church today:

Languages lag and symbols slip. That is, they eventually fail to represent faithfully the reality behind them as they once did. Since all languages lag and all symbols slip, including important ones like 'Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,' Christians who base their faith on the authority of biblical revelation have a true dilemma. The ever-changing and evolving meanings and nuances in language mean that the common, undefined, and unqualified use of this traditional trinitarian formula by almost all evangelicals and charismatics communicates something which was never intended by the New Testament writers. It communicates something which was also not intended by those who formulated the rather precise definition of the Trinity at the Council of Nicea in AD 325. This trusted naming of God as it is commonly used, no longer defends our faith. It seriously distorts our faith in two ways:

(1) It increasingly implies today that God's image is

male in some way that it is not also female, or that God is more 'masculine' than 'feminine' as we commonly understand those terms.

- (2) Speaking of God in exclusively male terms implies that men are more like God than women are, a belief which buttresses the idea that only men should be in charge.⁴¹

Smith claims that as he has "experienced women coming into greater partnership with men in the church," that he "read[s] the Bible in a different way."⁴² After providing a few biblical examples of what he considers "texts of terror"⁴³ he remarks that the New Testament is remarkably free of "texts of terror" but the system of patriarchy in which God's truth was communicated continues.⁴⁴ He goes on to say

Paul could say in Galatians 3:26 (NIV), 'You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus,' because in a patriarchal society everyone knew sons had the greater value, and calling us daughters of god made little sense because it would mean we had no power, authority, inheritance, or rights. Because of my church experience with women as partners, I see that the Bible in these situations is giving a true record of a false idea—patriarchy.⁴⁵

Smith agrees it is self-evident that the Bible uses predominately male metaphors for God, but claims that this is not the question. The question for him is, "Was it God's intent that we should continue to do so today?"⁴⁶ For him the task is being able to separate the cultural issues from the eternal truths.

If we can recognize cultural influence in the early church practice of addressing one another with a holy kiss, why should we not also recognize cultural influence in the New Testament practice of addressing God with almost exclusively masculine imagery? One may be more important than the other, but is not the principle exactly the same? The challenge is to separate the message of God from the culturally determined linguistic systems and practices that have come to us in the Bible. Divine revelation comes to us in human packaging. We must separate the gift from the wrapping in order to understand what the Bible teaches as God's Word for us.⁴⁷

A Cautionary and Revealing Word About Paul Smith.⁴⁸ The most disturbing factor about the inclusion of Paul Smith's book in the CBE webstore is that he is an openly professing homosexual pastor. In a February 2003 editorial, Don Hinkle laments the invitation of Smith to come and speak at William Jewell College in Missouri.⁴⁹ Hinkle notes that according to the *Hilltop Monitor*, "The two pro-gay-and-

lesbian speakers, Rev. Paul Smith and Rev. Marsha Fleischman, were provided by the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation; both are on the ministerial team at Broadway Baptist Church."⁵⁰ Hinkle reports that Smith "admitted to being a homosexual" and that Smith commented "he is the only openly gay Southern Baptist pastor that he knows of, and that God created him that way."⁵¹ In addition to this, Broadway Baptist Church, in Kansas City, where Paul Smith is the senior pastor, has a statement on membership found on the front page of their website. It reads, "In the spirit of Jesus Christ who welcomes all, and to celebrate the richness diversity brings, Broadway Baptist Church **affirms and welcomes all persons of any sexual orientation, gender, gender identity**, race, ethnicity, differing abilities, religious affiliation, socioeconomic status, or any persons who have been spiritually disenfranchised. **All are welcome into the life of our church, including its membership, leadership, sacraments, and ceremonies.**"⁵²

Smith has also written on the subject of homosexuality. In articulating what he considers to be the "four theological positions about homosexuality," he calls his position "full acceptance," and describes it in this way:

This . . . position calls both heterosexual and homosexual persons to the same gifts and responsibilities. Full acceptance does not mean anything goes. It means that homosexual behavior is accepted in the same way heterosexual behavior is accepted—neither is always good or always bad. Promiscuous, exploitative, and immoral sexual expression is always rejected, whatever one's sexual orientation. This attitude holds that it is not reasonable to place homosexuality in the same class as prostitution, pedophilia, or alcoholism because there is no evidence biblically, socially, or psychologically that homosexual orientation or same-sex partnerships are in any way more immoral, harmful, or unnatural than different same-sex partnerships . . . In this non-traditional position, sexual orientation, is seen as a gift from God, with homosexuality considered a naturally occurring variation. Same-sex partnerships can be a vehicle for God's caring intentions for humankind and gay and lesbian Christians are considered one of God's gifts to the church.⁵³

In another article entitled, "The Bible and Homosexuality: Affirming All Sexual Orientations as Gifts From God,"⁵⁴ he argues "The Bible has been used to defend racism, the claim that people of color are inferior to whites, therefore whites should be in charge. It has been used to defend sexism, the claim that women are inferior to men and therefore, men should be in charge. And now the Bible is being used to defend heterosexism,

the claim that homosexuals are inferior to heterosexuals and therefore, heterosexuals should be in charge.”⁵⁵ Smith even argues that since the real “sin of Sodom” was not homosexual acts but “mistreatment of the oppressed,” the real sodomites of our culture are those who “discriminate against gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered persons”⁵⁶

Some of Smith’s other conclusions follow:⁵⁷

An increasing number of us see God’s spirit filling and blessing same sex individuals and relationships today Gays are okay as they are and do not need to be changed, ‘cured,’ or act like heterosexuals!⁵⁸

Paul’s advice [in 1 Cor. 7:8-9] is also an answer for gay men and lesbian women and realistically points to the support and blessing of gay unions in the church The church must stop forbidding gay unions if we are to take Paul seriously.⁵⁹

I believe that if one draws a straight line from the Bible to now, the inevitable conclusion is that all sexual orientations are a gift from God. Homosexuality, the natural ability to fall in love with a person of the same sex is a gift from God. God blesses same-sex relationships in the same way that God blesses different-sex relationships We must change both the internal and external messages of hate which attempt to use the Bible against homosexual persons. One friend of mine has been redeemed by God’s love from self-hate about his sexual orientation and his capacity to fall in love with another man. He and his same-sex partner have been together for over twenty years now and have developed such care for one another that the love these two share is a model for covenant love for all. I like what he said when asked if he was a ‘practicing homosexual.’ He responded, ‘I’m way past the practicing stage, I’m getting pretty good at it!’⁶⁰

Response

There are several areas of critique and concern that will be addressed here. In some cases, a special note will be made to the similarities between evangelical argumentation and the arguments of religious feminists.⁶¹

Faulty Presupposition

First, most of the evangelical attempts to rename God presented in this article rest on a faulty presupposition.⁶² The individuals surveyed associate the exercise of male power and

authority with the use of predominate father language for God. The idea of God as exclusively father, in their understanding, is a source of the problems women have faced over the years at the hands of men. For the Kroegers, a female deity will help women overcome any abusive relationship they may have had with their father. For Paul Smith, a feminine deity will bring healing to what he considers to be rampant sexism in the church. For Aldredge-Clanton, boys will not feel superior any longer and girls will feel valued. Even Mimi Haddad mentions in her article, “Though Jesus referred to God as Father and Abba, these terms do not teach or imply the preeminence of males.”⁶³ These arguments are based on a faulty presupposition which is most clearly seen in their religious feminist counterparts.

Most religious feminists also presuppose that use of predominately male imagery and language for God leads to, or is at least connected to, oppression and hierarchy under the rule of males. For instance, as far back as 1973 Mary Daly explains that,

The biblical and popular image of God as a great Patriarch in heaven, rewarding and punishing according to his mysterious and seemingly arbitrary will, has dominated the imagination of millions over thousands of years. The symbol of the father God, spawned in the human imagination and sustained as plausible by patriarchy, has in turn rendered service to this type of society by making its mechanisms for the oppression of women appear right and fitting. If God in ‘his’ heaven is a father ruling ‘his’ people, then it is in the ‘nature’ of things and according to divine plan and the order of the universe that society be male-dominated. . . within this context a mystification of roles takes place: the husband dominating his wife represents God ‘himself.’⁶⁴

It is this type of thinking that characterizes much of religious feminism today. The use of masculine language conjures up certain cultural understandings which are then attributed to God. This view of God in turn reinforces a hierarchical view of men and women. Daly goes on to say that the “widespread conception of the ‘Supreme Being’ as an entity distinct from this world but controlling it according to plan and keeping human beings in an infantile state of subjection has been a not too subtle mask of the divine patriarch.”⁶⁵ Fellow feminist Carol Christ remarks that, “a serious response to Daly’s criticism of the core symbolism of Christianity either will have to show that the core symbolism of Father and Son does not have the effect of reinforcing and legitimizing male power and female submission, or will have to transform Christian imagery at its very core.”⁶⁶

In a similar vein, Rosemary Ruether comments that, “traditional theological images of God as father have been the sanctification of sexism and hierarchalism precisely by

defining this relationship of God as father to humanity in a domination-subordination model and by allowing ruling-class males to identify themselves with this divine fatherhood in such a way as to establish themselves in the same kind of hierarchical relationship to women and lower classes.”⁶⁷ In addition, Anna Case-Winters argues that the traditional conceptions of God have focused on a particular type of power that is on one hand a stereotypical male preoccupation, and on the other a result of a male bias. Both of these conditions have had a negative affect on human affairs.⁶⁸ She goes on to say,

The ramifications of ascribing power to God and especially power in this mode are an admission that we prize power highly and that this is the kind of power that we prize. Moreover, as this notion becomes divinized the exercise of this kind of power in the realm of human affairs is legitimated and promoted—with obvious disastrous results in the form of oppression, exploitation, and violence.⁶⁹

Sally McFague, contends that not only does the patriarchal metaphor promote oppression, it could end life on the whole planet. She explains,

I have come to see patriarchal as well as imperialistic, triumphalistic metaphors for God in an increasingly grim light: this language is not only idolatrous and irrelevant—besides being oppressive to many who do not identify with it—but also may work against the continuation of life on our planet.⁷⁰

Finally, Daphne Hampson laments that God is always conceived in patriarchal terms. Her problem is that, “the dominant God, whose behavior seems so male and is conceived in imagery which is male, corresponds to nothing in which feminist women believe.”⁷¹

Both religious feminists and evangelical feminists are united in the sense that they see patriarchy as oppressive to women. For them, part of the problem is centered on the fact that religious language has been predominately masculine. The understanding of kingly and monarchical images of a God who keeps human beings in subjection serves as a cover for the perpetration of patriarchy. This presupposition, however, is unfounded. To say that God is an omnipotent Father says nothing about how He chooses to exercise that power. The mere statement that God has power does not state His intentions.

Peter Byrne has pointed out that there are no easy comparisons between human power and God’s power.⁷² His exercise of power is coupled with His mercy, love, goodness, as well as all of His other attributes and characteristics. The faulty

exercise of power by men should never be extrapolated and projected onto God. In fact far from exposing anything about God, this kind of reasoning really only says something about the men who are abusing their position. Byrne rightly states,

All too often the powerful people that run this world are driven by and exemplify [abusive power]. But the divine power cannot be at all similar to it. The bad, degenerate dependence on others such power hides cannot characterize a perfect being. It is the merest superficial caricature to display an omnipotent God in such terms. If men have been moved to hold the doctrine of omnipotence out of a subconscious desire to project this kind of power, then they are doubly confused. Their double confusion tells us nothing about the notion of an omnipotent God per se, but remains just a fact about them.⁷³

It is not tenable that father-language for God should be jettisoned or revised, or even supplemented with terms like “mother,” simply because human beings have falsely perverted their own power. Further, the men who have perpetrated harmful actions against women, have no warrant to do so based on the manner in which God exercises His power.

The hostility toward the masculine language and imagery in the Bible, and the belief that masculine metaphors reflect a hierarchical and oppressive God, are the result of a prior commitment to what Garrett Green calls role model theology.⁷⁴ He contends that this reveals a major flaw in the whole program of metaphorical theology. His argument follows:

If religion functions by constructing divine models to be emulated by humans, a tradition that imagines God as heavenly Father must surely serve to legitimate patriarchy . . . but at this point a Christian metaphorical theology finds itself caught up in contradiction. If metaphors are uniquely informative – if they enable insights that are unobtainable from any other source – then changing religious metaphors means changing religions. Furthermore, any religion that projects images of God that are as destructive as metaphorical theology contends surely deserves to be replaced. Now the only way that the metaphorical theologian can escape the implication that the religion itself—Christianity in this case—is at fault is to claim that Christians have some other, non-metaphorical information about God against which to measure the adequacy of the metaphors. But that is precisely the move precluded by modern metaphor theory, for it returns to a view of metaphor as mere vehicle, a rhetorical ornament, an optional means of expression that may in

principle be replaced by another . . . at the heart of the theology that calls itself metaphorical, is a failure to take metaphor seriously: the metaphorical theologian already knows what God is like from other—presumably non-metaphorical—experience and merely makes use of metaphors as vehicles to express that experience. If one vehicle seems to convey the wrong message, it is changed for a more suitable one.⁷⁵

The presupposition that faulty metaphors reflect an oppressive God, betrays the fundamentals of metaphorical theology itself. The ease with which they are changed reveals that they are not to be taken seriously in the first place.⁷⁶

The Confusion of Name and Metaphor

In their effort to rename God, the evangelical feminists mentioned in this article have confused the concepts of name and metaphor. There are approximately twenty-seven biblical references to God that utilize feminine imagery in some sense.⁷⁷ Further, it is clear that when these images are used, they are most certainly figures of speech: similes, metaphors, analogies, or personification.⁷⁸ There are no cases in which feminine terms are used as names, titles, or invocations of God. There are no instances where God is directly identified by a feminine term.⁷⁹ In other words, “God is never directly said to be a mother, mistress, or female bird in the way he is said to be a father, king, judge, or shepherd.”⁸⁰

With only twenty-seven possibilities, it appears a little sensational for Haddad to be puzzled that feminine imagery is not used more in churches today since there are “so many feminine metaphors for God.” She overstates her case when she argues that it is a departure from scripture and the historical church to use predominately male language for God, when in fact, this is exactly how the Bible and the historical church handle the issue. The Bible rarely uses any female imagery, and the historical church minimally uses the same types of references.⁸¹ It is more faithful, then, for the church today to use the biblically given, predominate masculine language.

Many of the individuals represented in this article are mistaken when they assume that all references to God are metaphors.⁸² This confuses the whole concept of a name.⁸³ Early in her article, Haddad notes that the Bible “uses a rich variety of images, names, and metaphors for God. The many images enhance the usual names for God—such as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”⁸⁴ The rest of Haddad’s article focuses on metaphors that utilize birthing imagery (especially with the Holy Spirit), and maternal activities, and she is not careful to note the very crucial distinctions between names, similes and metaphors. Haddad, Paul Smith, and other feminist revisionists, by transforming figures of speech into titles and names, have attributed feminine characteristics to God, and by

reducing titles and names to metaphors, have denied masculine characteristics to God. Neither of these revisions is warranted by biblical language. When comparing metaphors and appellative predicate nouns,⁸⁵ Cooper argues:

My students might complain that ‘Professor Cooper is a real bear.’ I might lament that ‘I brought forth a stillborn child’ if I ‘labor hard’ on this book but no one reads it. But these figures of speech are not and do not generate appellatives. They do not name me by classifying me as a hairy mammal who hibernates or by identifying me as mother. In the same way, birth images and other feminine figures of speech simply are not and do not generate appellatives for God as a mother or any female person.⁸⁶

In other words, the Bible never extends metaphors into titles or appellatives. For instance, the fact that God gives birth to the waters in Job 38 certainly does not make “Rain Mother” a divine name.⁸⁷ The attempt to rename God violates the basic understanding of a metaphor. Haddad’s confusion on this point can be seen in her explanation of the meaning of a metaphor. “A metaphor says something that can be said in no other way. Metaphors retain the tension of the ‘is and is not.’ God is our rock; yet God is not a physical rock. God is our father; yet is not our biological father.”⁸⁸ Earlier in her article Haddad claimed that metaphors are used to enhance the “usual names” for God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), but here she collapses everything into a metaphor.

Just as it is improper to take a metaphor and make it a proper name, it is also inappropriate to take a proper name and make it a metaphor. The revisionists, by accepting the concept of turning metaphors into titles, have, by virtue of their understanding of metaphor treated all language for God as equivalent to figures of speech. They confuse the fact that in some sense all language about God is figurative because of the limitations of human language. In other words, human language does not have the exact meaning when referring to God as when referring to humans. In this sense it is always figurative. Cooper notes:

Inclusivism holds that all terms for God are equally figures of speech or metaphors for God: God is Light and God is our Father are both metaphors. Thus inclusivism implicitly means two things when it asserts that all language for God is figurative or metaphorical. It means both that all terms for God are figures of speech or metaphors and that all language for God is figurative or metaphorical due to divine transcendence. Because they fail to appreciate the difference between these two meanings of figurative/metaphorical language, inclusivists

overlook the fact that masculine divine names and titles, though figurative in the sense that all language for God is figurative, are not figures of speech.⁸⁹

A Warning About Religious Feminism and its Departure From Biblical Authority

For religious feminists, the use of feminine language for God is necessary if the understanding of God is to be commensurate with their agenda. Because of their agenda, which involves, among other things, eliminating patriarchy and its attendant oppression of women in the church, these feminists have tried to find creative ways to let the Bible have some place in their revision of God. This leads to multiple views of how the Bible should be interpreted and how much authority, if any, it should have.⁹⁰ For many, the Bible becomes an obstacle to be overcome or revised since it was written by men, interpreted by men, and, they claim, used by the church to subordinate women to men.

One of the more common feminist approaches to interpreting scripture is advocated by Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza. She argues for seeing the Bible through the lens of women's experience.⁹¹ This is also the case for Rosemary Ruether. She contends, "Whatever diminishes or denies the full humanity of women must be presumed not to reflect the divine or authentic relation to the divine, or to reflect the authentic nature of things, or to be the message or work of an authentic redeemer."⁹² Any texts that promote patriarchy or supposed sexism, under this system, should be thrown out and not used in Christian worship or teaching.⁹³ This has led one author to conclude that, "feminists have handed us, without even a trace of a blush, not only a new 'canon' but also specific directions regarding how it should be read. And this new canon is not a new authoritative guide for Christian faith and action but a tool for use in promoting the feminist agenda."⁹⁴

While most of the evangelicals mentioned in this article have not embraced this method of achieving their purposes, the presence of Jann Adredge-Clanton's book on the CBE website and the revelations in her biography of her full embrace of Christ-Sophia worship, should give pause to all evangelicals concerned about the authority of scripture. Adredge-Clanton's detailed stories about worshipping around a revised statue of Mary demonstrate a connection between a desire to make God appealing to women and the next step of a complete revision of biblical Christianity. Further, the willingness of evangelical feminists to refer to God as mother without any biblical precedent is another large step in the direction away from biblical authority. Once this occurs, the structure is removed that prohibits further biblical revisions. This is clearly what has happened in the lives of many religious feminists.

The Danger in Changing Biblical Language and Symbols

As mentioned earlier, the disdain for masculine imagery for God and the belief that it has caused the subordination of women to men has driven religious feminists to use new, feminine imagery to describe God. This is a fundamental strategy for religious feminists. At the heart of this strategy is the assertion that all symbols for God should continually be replaced. As Anne Carr has noted, "each symbol is partial, embedded in a cluster of symbols and a network of myths out of which its meaning arises . . . thus symbols for God, whether mother or father, king or servant, warrior God or God of slaves, intrinsically demand their own negation."⁹⁵ She continues by noting about feminist theology that "its further task is to search out a doctrine of God which is related to the intellectual, practical and ethical concerns of the present situation of women and which suggests transformative or emancipative possibilities for the future."⁹⁶ Indeed, Carr is emphatic that "the most important symbols to reinvent, because of their centrality to Christianity and the issue of maleness, are the doctrines of God."⁹⁷

This is also true for Daphne Hampson. She contends that, "We need to conceive of God in such a way that we shall be girded into action . . . Father-language at least has too often served to make Christians think that all was right with the world because big Daddy God was in his heaven. This is not the religion we need in our world at the present time. We need rather one which empowers us."⁹⁸

The efforts to rename God are numerous.⁹⁹ Virginia Mollenkott, in her proposal to affirm feminine language for God, argues that the Bible depicts God as a woman giving birth, a mother nursing, a mother bear, a midwife, a mother hen, and a bakerwoman.¹⁰⁰ She claims, "it is important to reclaim the biblical images of God as female to protect us from the idiocy that God is literally masculine."¹⁰¹ Sally McFague contends that one should use the language of "mother, lover, and friend."¹⁰² Hampson prefers "God-self"¹⁰³ and Winters has settled on "mother."¹⁰⁴ These efforts to neuter God or to reassign God's gender in order to make him accessible to all people, as will be seen in the next section, have consequences that will ultimately change the nature of the relationship between God and the world.¹⁰⁵ Nothing less than the Christian view of God is at stake.

The Identification of God with the World

There is a danger in using mother-language for God because there is a strong possibility that it could lead wrongly to an identification of God with the world. Many religious feminists have already embraced this idea. Anna Case-Winters has adopted a process-feminist model that utilizes the principles of process theology. Winters' revision culminates in the presentation of a female image of God which is the image

of God as mother.¹⁰⁶ Her reason for doing this centers on the concept of mother and child—the life giving and world generating aspects of this key realm of motherhood.¹⁰⁷ She has a particular understanding in mind and goes on to explain that,

a panentheism (the world in God) is being proposed with this image rather than a pantheism (which completely identifies the world and God) . . . While there is clear implication of dependence of the world upon the divine, it is not to be assumed that the divine is independent, in the traditional sense of separate from and unaffected by the world . . . In a very real sense, God's well-being depends upon the well-being of the world.¹⁰⁸

Sallie McFague has developed a model based on the relational and personal characteristics of God as mother, lover, and friend. Since monarchical language, depicting God as king, ruler and patriarch, is oppressive and hierarchical, she advocates the cessation of referring to the world as a king's realm and proposes that the world be referred to as God's body.¹⁰⁹ When she claims that God is mother and the world is part of the womb of God, she, by virtue of the birthing imagery, has set up a model that has construed the world as part of the divine nature.

Achtemeier has noted that, "if God is identified with his creation, we finally make ourselves gods and goddesses—the ultimate and primeval sin."¹¹⁰ She asserts that until human beings are clear on their place in the universe, they can never fully understand themselves and the Bible will never allow for any language that blurs the distinction between God and his creatures.¹¹¹ Anything that identifies the creation with the creator must be rejected.

While the evangelicals mentioned in this article have not indicated this leap, it seems that there is a connection with the language used for God and the way in which he relates to his creation. The two religious feminists mentioned above are counting on it. It would appear from their examples that female language for God brings about a change in the relationship of God with the world. He is no longer Lord over the world, but a mother birthing it. He is no longer king over his realm, but the world is actually part of his (her?) body. It seems that the evangelicals who wish to simply add mother to the list of names for God in the Scriptures, have no way of preventing this kind of revision of the way in which God relates to the world. Once the authority of scripture is given up with regard to the name (mother), there is no authority to which they may appeal to argue against the natural revisions of the God-world relationship associated with feminine language. This potential identification of God with the world poses at least two significant problems.¹¹²

First, the Bible is clear about the otherness of God and

demonstrates that before there was a creation God existed (John 1:1). It further points out that the world will pass away but God will not since the world and God are not one (Ps. 46:1-2, Is. 51:6, Mark 13:31). Of course, there is no better place to see this than Genesis 1 where it is certain that God is above, prior to, and separate from, His creation. Achtemeier asserts:

God, the biblical writers are saying, is in no way contained in or bound up with or dependent on or revealed through His creation. God creates the world outside of himself, by the instrument of his Word. Between God and his world stands the Word of God (cf. John 1:2), which always addresses the creation as an object of the divine speech (cf. Isa. 1:2; 40:22, 26; Mic 6:2 et al.) The world does not emanate out of the being of God or contain some part of him within it. He has not implanted divinity within any part of the creation, not even in human beings, and therefore no created thing or person can be claimed to be divine.¹¹³

Second, the language of father should not be understood apart from the act of creation and is an indicator of God's separateness from His creation. This can be seen in Deut. 32 as Moses extols the greatness of God when he asks about God, "Is he not your father, who created you, who made you and established you?" This is why Mankowski argues that, "YHWH's fatherhood is seen by the Old Testament as a pure and sovereign act of divine will, divorced from any external limitation or constraint."¹¹⁴ Mankowski goes on to say "YHWH' activity . . . is masculine because it is fatherly; it is fatherly because the initiative, the prerogative, and the motive power of creation are his and his alone."¹¹⁵ Therefore, the separateness of God from creation, contra the revisionists, is directly connected with the masculine understanding of God as father. Their departure from the biblical, masculine references to God has led to an understanding of God that is far from the God who is revealed in the Scriptures.¹¹⁶

Not only does the biblical record preclude an identification of God with the world, but the very identification of God as father is connected to his role as Creator who is other than his creation. Evangelical feminists should see this as a caution. Revising language used for God results in drastic changes in the doctrine of God. While the motives of evangelical feminists may not be to purposefully revise biblical Christianity (as in the case of the religious feminists) the results, tragically, are likely to be the same.

Conclusion

In 1979, Naomi Goldenberg argued that if women succeeded in changing the Christian tradition with regard to the roles of men and women, this major departure would radically alter Christianity by virtue of a complete revision of God.¹¹⁷

Her contention is that if and when feminists change the understanding of the roles women, Christianity will “be shaken at its roots.”¹¹⁸ She says that in time, “sizable numbers of women ministers will graduate from Protestant seminaries and will take charge of parishes throughout the Western world. Liberal Catholics will eventually win their fight to have women ordained as priests” and that “there will be the recognition of large numbers of women as spiritual leaders.”¹¹⁹ “Yet” she says, “very few of the women and men now working for sexual equality within Christianity and Judaism realize the extent of their heresy.”¹²⁰ But in her estimation, the truth remains that “The feminist movement in Western culture is engaged in the slow execution of Christ and Yahweh.”¹²¹

Because evangelical feminists have not yet written extensively on the subject of calling God mother, much of this article has been a warning based on the path that has been followed by religious feminists. This may very well be a path that is unavoidable when the first step of language revision is taken.

It would appear that evangelical feminists have not thought through all of the inconsistencies and consequences of making what they would possibly consider minor changes. Most of the evangelicals in this article most likely have the best of motives and intentions. However, when they attempt to revise God-language, they involve themselves in a system that does not allow for indiscriminate picking and choosing. This system does not have minor revisions in mind, nor is it content to merely have equity in pulpits on Sunday mornings. The changes being proposed are significant, and as the evidence has hopefully shown, there is an entire theological system that follows the embrace of feminine God-language. This has the potential to revise the doctrine of God to the extent that it is unrecognizable to biblical Christianity, and as Goldenberg eerily predicted in 1979, “New gods are coming.”¹²² ■

Enough, written by Vernon Rust.

⁷ I use the phrase “mainline religious feminist” to refer to those feminists in mainline denominations who reject the verbal, plenary inspiration of scripture while opting to retain at least some minimal use of the Bible in their religious expression.

⁸ Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE) is the counterpoint organization of CBMW. CBMW affirms that there is equality between men and women in the home and church but there is also a God-created and God-designed difference in role and function. CBE espouses the view that the equality of men and women dictates that there be no functional differences. They argue that role relationships between men and women that involve authority and submission based on gender are a result of the Fall in Genesis 3.

⁹ Anthony Campolo, *Carpe Diem* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1994) 85.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid. 86.

¹² Ibid. 87.

¹³ See Bruce A. Ware, “Could Our Savior have Been a Woman: The Relevance of Jesus’ Gender for His Incarnational Mission,” *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 8:1 (Spring 2003) 31-38.

¹⁴ Richard and Katherine Kroeger, “Women Elders . . . Sinners or Servants?” (First Presbyterian Church, Pittman, NJ Accessed 20 September 2003); available from <http://firstpresby.org/womenelders.htm#Unit1>; Internet. Emphasis mine. Interaction with their argumentation will appear later in this article.

¹⁵ Mimi Haddad, “What Language Shall We Use: A Look at Inclusive Language for People, Feminine Images for God, and Gender-Accurate Bible Translations,” (Christians For Biblical Equality Accessed 29 September 2003); available from http://www.cbeinternational.org/new/free_articles/what_language_shall_we_use.htm; Internet.

¹⁶ Ibid. 2.

¹⁷ Ibid. 4. Emphasis in original.

¹⁸ I hope to show in other places in this article that this is a very real danger.

¹⁹ CBE has a disclaimer on their site regarding the contents of the store. It says, “This bookstore is a branch of Christians for Biblical Equality’s ministry. For this reason, its purpose can be found in CBE’s Core Purpose: ‘To broadly communicate the biblical truth that men and women are equally responsible to use their God-given gifts to further Christ’s kingdom.’” It goes on to give a summary of the evaluation process: “Resource Criteria: Each resource we carry has first been evaluated by our team of reviewers to ensure that it furthers CBE’s mission and vision. Each resource is chosen on its own merit. (CBE does not necessarily endorse an author’s entire body of work.) If you would like to see the criteria our reviewers use, please read our evaluation criteria for CBE resources.” See, <http://www.cbeinternational.org/new/bookstore.htm> (Christians for Biblical Equality Accessed 2 October 2003); Internet. Issue-oriented organizations like CBMW or CBE of course do not endorse the entire body of work of any author, even those formally associated with their organizations. However, this disclaimer does not seem to distance CBE enough from the individuals that will be mentioned in this section of the article.

²⁰ Jann Aldredge-Clanton, *God, A Word for Girls and Boys* (Louisville, KY: Glad River Productions, 1993).

²¹ Paul R. Smith, *Is It Okay to Call God “Mother” Considering the Feminine Face of God* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993).

²² Aldredge-Clanton, *God, A Word for Girls and Boys* 14.

¹ I am more convinced than ever that there is a natural (although not requisite) connection between all of these issues. For an excellent presentation on the connection between egalitarianism and homosexuality, see the article by David Jones in this issue of *JBW*.

² The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) is an affiliation of churches that formed in opposition to the conservative resurgence of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). Along with their rejection of the general direction of the SBC, this group has made their egalitarian view of men and women in the church and home a key doctrinal commitment. Baptist Women in Ministry is not a formal ministry of the CBF but does receive annual funding from the CBF.

³ The print in bold was read by the leader.

⁴ Shirley Erenna Murray, “I am Your Mother,” in *The Faith We Sing* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000) hymn number 2059. Although the final stanza references God as “our maker,” the willingness to refer to God and the earth interchangeably as “our mother” is really what is at issue.

⁵ I will develop this further later in the article.

⁶ Travis Tritt, “God Must Be a Woman,” from the Album, *Strong*

- ²³ Ibid. 9.
- ²⁴ Ibid. 11.
- ²⁵ Ibid. 13.
- ²⁶ Ibid. 19-20.
- ²⁷ Ibid. 23.
- ²⁸ Ibid. 55.
- ²⁹ Ibid. 55. For other places where prayers to mother God or mother and father God are listed, see pages 98, 121, 129.
- ³⁰ Ibid. 141.
- ³¹ Ibid. 153.
- ³² Jann Aldredge-Clanton, *Breaking Free: The Story of a Feminist Baptist Minister* (Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 2002).
- ³³ Jann Aldredge-Clanton, *In Search of the Christ-Sophia: An Inclusive Christology for Liberating Christians* (Mystic, CT: Twenty Third Publications, 1995).
- ³⁴ Jann Aldredge-Clanton, *Praying With Christ-Sophia: Services for Healing and Renewal* (Mystic, CT: Twenty Third Publications, 1996). Neither of these two books is included in the CBE webstore. The point I am trying to make here is that there is a danger that those reading the book that is in the webstore will look for other works by Aldredge-Clanton. Also of concern is Aldredge-Clanton's general direction and the implicit endorsement of CBE by carrying her products. CBMW would never carry the product of an author, no matter how eloquently he may present the complementarian position, if in their personal life, he was a polygamist, homosexual, or had some other lifestyle that was antithetical to the mission and vision of CBMW.
- ³⁵ Jann Aldredge-Clanton, *Breaking Free* 224.
- ³⁶ Ibid. 231. Emphasis mine
- ³⁷ Ibid. 243.
- ³⁸ Ibid. 278.
- ³⁹ There are many problems presented by Aldredge-Clanton's Christ-Sophia worship but they will not be dealt with in this article.
- ⁴⁰ Paul R. Smith 13. The key here is that he is connecting equity of women in ministry with equity in God-language.
- ⁴¹ Ibid. 24.
- ⁴² Ibid. 44.
- ⁴³ He gets this term from Phyllis Trible. By this term he means the types of texts (all in the OT) that portray a woman being gang-raped as less significant than a man being sexually abused, the fact that Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines, and his understanding of Exodus 20:17 that teaches that women were considered property along with a man's house, slaves, and donkeys.
- ⁴⁴ Paul R. Smith 44.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid. 49.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid.
- ⁴⁸ I want to be clear that I am not claiming that CBE is endorsing homosexuality or that they are endorsing the homosexual writings of Paul Smith. None of the homosexual publications of Paul Smith appear on the CBE website. However, the willingness of CBE to promote the works of an openly homosexual pastor is very troubling to me.
- ⁴⁹ Don Hinkle, "Jewell's Apparent Flirtation with Homosexuality," (The Pathway, Missouri Baptist Convention Accessed 20 September 2003); available from <http://www.mbcpathway.com/text%20Files/Jewell'sApparentFlirtationWithHomosexuality.doc>; Internet.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid.
- ⁵¹ Ibid.
- ⁵² Broadway Baptist Church, (Accessed 30 September 2003); available at <http://www.broadwaychurch-kc.org>; Internet. Emphasis mine.
- ⁵³ Paul Smith, "Four Theological Positions About Homosexuality," in *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth* (Charlotte: Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, 2000) 77.
- ⁵⁴ Paul Smith, "The Bible and Homosexuality: Affirming all Sexual Orientations as Gifts from God," in *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth* (Charlotte: Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, 2000) 37-53.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid. 37. I again refer you to the article in this issue of *JBW* by Dave Jones, to see how others also make the connection between egalitarianism and homosexuality.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid. 39.
- ⁵⁷ Smith's attempts at biblical argumentation are not the immediate concern of this article. One particularly troubling example, however is his understanding of the healing of the centurion's servant: "The story of Jesus healing the centurion's 'slave' is one of the many stories that shows Jesus' mercy and justice at work. The slave is referred to as the centurion's 'boy' (Luke 7:7) and one who was 'dear to him' (7:2). 'Boy' was the common term for the homosexual lover that Roman soldiers often lived with. Jesus would have certainly been quite aware of this as he praised this soldier and exclaimed, 'Not even in Israel have I found such faith,' and then healed the soldier's gay lover!" (Exclamation his)
- ⁵⁸ Ibid. 50. Exclamation his.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid. 51.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid. 52. Exclamation his.
- ⁶¹ In my estimation, this is a very real and crucial connection. Religious feminism and its expression in the mainline denominations should be seen as a warning that when one gives up the biblical position on the basic roles between men and women in the home and the church, there is usually an entire (though gradual) theological shift that in many cases ends up with a religious system that bears almost no resemblance to biblical Christianity. This is dealt with minimally in the critique section of this article.
- ⁶² Some of the available material was not extensive enough to ascertain the presuppositions of every author. It is my hope that evangelicals associated with CBE, or otherwise, will go ahead and write more on this subject so that we all can see clearly just exactly what they intend to do with their plan to rename God.
- ⁶³ Haddad 4.
- ⁶⁴ Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973) 13.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid., 18. Note Daly's connection between the use of father language for God and a particular way that he relates to His creation. Many religious feminists have already realized that changing the name of God will necessitate a change in the way we understand his relationship to his creation.
- ⁶⁶ Carol Christ, "New Feminist Theology," *Religious Studies Review* 3 (October 1977) 211.
- ⁶⁷ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *New Woman New Earth* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995) 65.
- ⁶⁸ Anna Case-Winters, *God's Power: Traditional Understandings and Contemporary Challenges* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990) 19.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid.
- ⁷⁰ Sally McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987) ix.
- ⁷¹ Daphne Hampson, "The Challenge of Feminism to Christianity," *Theology* 90 (May 1987) 47.
- ⁷² Peter Byrne, "Omnipotence, Feminism, and God," *International*

Journal for the Philosophy of Religion 37 (1995) 149.

⁷³ Ibid. 150.

⁷⁴ Garrett Green, "The Gender of God and Metaphorical Theology," in *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism*, ed. Alvin Kimel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) 52.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ The evangelicals in this article have not adopted anything formal with regard to metaphorical theology, but this is partially my point. I do not believe that they have thought through their position with any clear structure in mind.

⁷⁷ John Cooper, *Our Father in Heaven: Christian Faith and Inclusive Language for God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998) 89. See Num. 11:12; Deut. 32:18; Job 38:8, 29; Ps. 90:2; 123:2; 131:2; Prov. 8:1, 22-25; Is. 31:5; 42:14; 45:10; 49:15; 66:13; Hos. 13:8; Matt. 23:37; Luke 13:34; 15:8-10; John 3:3-8; 1 Pet. 2:2-3; Ruth 2:12; Ps. 17:8; 91:14; 22:9-10; Is. 46:3; 66:9-7. Some of these are clear and for others only a semi-reasonable argument can be posited. This list is meant to display the most generosity and to show that even when generous this list is very small.

⁷⁸ For an explanation of these see Cooper, *Our Father in Heaven* 65-91. See also Roland Frye, "Language for God and Feminist Language: Problems and Principles," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 41 (1988) 36-43.

⁷⁹ Cooper, *Our Father in Heaven* 89.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Haddad depends on Carol Walker Bynum to present some in the historical church who discuss Christ using various kinds of maternal imagery. A more thorough critique of these references will have to be given in another place. However, even Bynum notes, "In general the Greek fathers, particularly those influenced by Gnosticism, seem to have been more at home with maternal metaphors." See Carol Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982) 126. The appeal to these early church teachers also raises the question of theological method in this whole discussion. How much authority is Haddad willing to give to tradition? The fact that there are only a handful of references in the first place demonstrates very shaky ground.

⁸² For others who do this see, Aida Besancon Spencer, "Father-Ruler: The Meaning of the Metaphor 'Father' for God in the Bible," *The Journal for the Evangelical Theological Society* 39 (1996) 433-42; and Ruth C. Duck, "Praising the Triune God: Beyond Gender?" *Christian Century* 110 (1993) 553-56.

⁸³ Cooper has identified that the name of God could only mean: 1) a proper name in distinction from all other references, including titles, 2) a proper designation whether name, title, or epithet; 3) a general noun, appellative, or description designating who or what God is; and 4) any verbal reference to God. See p. 122.

⁸⁴ Haddad 1.

⁸⁵ An appellative is a general noun designating who or what God is. Words like shepherd or warrior are common nouns for human position or vocation that are predicated of God.

⁸⁶ Cooper 123.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 124.

⁸⁸ Haddad 4. I would of course agree that God is not a "biological father" in the sense that He has a body or created man in some sexual manner. This does not eliminate the idea that father is a name for God, not a metaphor.

⁸⁹ Cooper. 178.

⁹⁰ See, Letty M. Russell, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985); Letty M. Russell,

Household of Freedom: Authority in Feminist Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987); Mary Ann Tolbert, ed., *The Bible and Feminist Hermeneutics* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983); Adel Yarbrough Collins, ed., *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship* (Chico, CA: Scholar's Press, 1983); Katherine Doob Sakenfeld, "Feminist Perspectives on Bible and Theology: An Introduction to Selected Issues and Literature," *Interpretation* 42 (1988) 5-18.

⁹¹ Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984) vii.

⁹² Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Interpretation: A Method of Correlation," in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* 115.

⁹³ Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone* 18.

⁹⁴ Leslie Zeigler, "Christianity or Feminism?" in *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism*, ed. Alvin Kimel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) 322. Several Evangelical authors have critiqued various types of feminist hermeneutics. See Jack Cottrell, *Gender Roles and the Bible*; Paul W. Felix, Sr., "The Hermeneutics of Evangelical Feminism," in *The Master's Perspective on Contemporary Issues*, Robert Thomas, ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1998) 129-55; Andreas Kostenberger, "Gender Passages in the NT: Hermeneutical Fallacies Critiqued," *Westminster Theological Journal* 56 (1994) 259-83; David S. Dockery, "The Role of Women in Worship and Ministry: Some Hermeneutical Questions," *Criswell Theological Review* 1:2 (1987) 363-86.

⁹⁵ Anne Carr, "Is Christian Feminist Theology Possible?" *Theological Studies* 43 (June 1982) 293.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid. 291.

⁹⁸ Hampson, "The Challenge of Feminism to Christianity," 347. Her concept of empowerment will be addressed in a later section.

⁹⁹ Aside from the efforts of feminists in their specific works, see *An Inclusive Language Lectionary*, prepared by a committee appointed by the National Council of Churches (Atlanta: John Knox, 1983); *The Inclusive New Testament* (Hyattsville, MD: Priests for Equality, 1994); *The New Testament of the Inclusive Language Bible* (Notre Dame: Cross Cultural, 1994); and *The New Century Hymnal* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1995). Each of these publications either neuters the language for God or specifically uses feminine language.

¹⁰⁰ Virginia Mollenkott, *The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Imagery of God as Female* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing, 1983). She lists several other images as well.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 13. Neither would I assert that God is literally masculine in the sense that He is male or is somehow a sexual being. However, there is something about the consistent way in which God is referred to with masculine names and pronouns that reflects something ontologically about Him.

¹⁰² McFague, *Models of God* 87.

¹⁰³ Daphne Hampson, *Theology and Feminism* (Basil: Blackwell, 1990) 172.

¹⁰⁴ Winters, *God's Power* 220. See also, Rita Gross, "Female God Language in a Jewish Context" in *Womanspring Rising*, Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, eds. (New York: Harper & Row, 1979) 173, who advocates using "God-she," and Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983) 211, who proposes "God/ess," and Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: Readings for a Year* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1986) 88 who uses "Sophia-God."

¹⁰⁵ Some have suggested that this is similar to the work of the

reformers in the sixteenth century. See Marjorie Suchoki, "The Unmale God: Reconsidering the Trinity," *Quarterly Review* 3 (1983) 48.

¹⁰⁶ Anna Case-Winters, "What Do We Mean When We Affirm That God is All-Powerful?" *Encounter* 57:3 (Summer 1996) 220. The motivation for Winters' proposal centers on her contention that the classic doctrine of the omnipotence of God is deficient especially when trying to address issues of theodicy. She is reacting to the inability of the classic model to deal with the often-asked question, "If God is all powerful, why is there evil?" See *God's Power* 17-35.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. Winters credits Sally McFague with this idea of God as mother. McFague was one of Winters' committee members for her Ph. D. supervision at Vanderbilt University. McFague develops her concept of God as mother from an ecological standpoint. To be fair, Winters notes some problems with the image of God as mother. First this image may produce an excessive sense of sentimentality or romanticism. Second, it may falsely communicate that God unconsciously provides for the world in the same way a woman unconsciously provides for the child in her womb. Third, it may miscommunicate an excessive emphasis on the reproductive role of women. See pp. 222-23.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 221, 225.

¹⁰⁹ Sallie McFague, "The World as God's Body," *The Christian Century* 671.

¹¹⁰ Elizabeth Achtemeier, "Exchanging God for 'No Gods:' A Discussion of Female Language for God," in *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism*, ed. Alvin Kimel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) 9. She interacts with the biblical text and also shows how this will not work internally because it ultimately leads to meaninglessness. She is sympathetic with the feminist movement in general and believes that the prohibition against ordaining women in ministry is oppressive and constitutes an abuse of the biblical text.

¹¹¹ Ibid. Others have noted the problems with the identification of God with the world as seen in the process model of God. They deal with this by critiquing the pantheism of process thought. Many of the same problems are present in the feminist models presented here in this paper in as much as they are appealing to some sort of pantheism. See, F. Duane Lindsey, "An Evangelical Overview of Process Theology," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 134 (January-March 1977) 28-31; Carl F. H. Henry, "The Reality and Identity of God," *Christianity Today* (March 28, 1969) 12-16; and Ronald Nash, ed., *Process Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987).

¹¹² In spite of my strong belief that there seems to be a requisite connection between referring to God as mother and advocating some sort of pantheistic view of the God-world relationship, I am willing to say "potential identification" with the hope that evangelical feminists will clarify their view and its perceived implications in print so that these issues can be debated.

¹¹³ Ibid. 10.

¹¹⁴ Paul Mankowski, "The Gender of Israel's God," in *This is My Name Forever: The Trinity & Gender Language for God*, ed. Alvin Kimel (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001) 40.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 41. Stephen T. Franklin also agrees that the transcendence of God is centered on the doctrine of God the creator. He is critiquing the process view of the identification of God with the world in, "Process Thought From an Evangelical Perspective: An Appreciation and Critique," *Christian Scholar's Review* 28 (1998) 85-87.

¹¹⁶ See Ronald Nash, "Process Theology and Classical Theism," in *Process Theology*, ed. Ronald Nash, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book

House, 1987) 27. He says, "A being who is not essentially omnipotent or omniscient, who is not the sovereign and independent Creator, is neither worthy to receive our worship nor to bear the title, 'God.'"

¹¹⁷ Naomi R. Goldenberg, *Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979) 7.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 5.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. 7.

¹²⁰ Ibid. 4.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid. 8.

The Hermeneutics of Evangelical Feminism¹

Paul W. Felix, Sr.

*Assistant Professor of New Testament Language and Literature,
The Master's Seminary
Sun Valley, California*

An evangelical feminist is one who has a high view of Scripture and believes the Bible teaches the full equality of men and women without role distinctions between the two. Their principles for interpreting Scripture, however, differ markedly from those of the advocates of role distinctions for men and women. A comparison of evangelical feminists' principles with the grammatical-historical method of interpretation clarifies what and how great they deviate from traditional views of a woman's role in church and at home. The disputed principles include the issues of ad hoc documents, interpretive centers, the analogy of faith, slavery as a model for the role of women, culturally biased interpretation, cultural relativity, and patriarchal and sexist texts. An examination of these issues shows how far evangelical feminist hermeneutics falls short of grammatical historical interpretation.

Definitions and Differences

The significant changes for women in society that began about thirty years ago have not bypassed the church. The changes have challenged the Christian community to consider afresh the role of women in their relationship to men in the church and in the home. The instigators of this challenge call themselves "feminists."

Feminism is a broad term that includes several groups. "Secular feminists" are those who do not accept the Bible as authoritative.² "Religious feminists" are "individuals who do not identify with Christianity, but whose beliefs nevertheless include a religious worldview."³ "Christian feminists" work from the standpoint of a commitment to the Christian faith but

accept the authority of Scripture in only a limited way.⁴ A final classification of feminists includes those identified as "evangelical feminists." An evangelical feminist has a high view of Scripture and is "one who believes that the Bible teaches the full equality of men and women without role distinctions based on gender."⁵ The focus of this essay is on this last group.

A group that best represents the position of evangelical feminism is Christians for Biblical Equality (C.B.E.), organized in late 1987. A position paper—"Men, Women, and Biblical Equality"—published in 1989 stated the beliefs of this organization. The paper contained twelve "Biblical Truths" and five points of "Application."⁶ Rebecca Merrill Groothuis expresses the goal of this organization and of evangelical feminism well: "The goal of evangelical feminism is that men and women be allowed to serve God as individuals, according to their own unique gifts rather than according to a culturally predetermined personality slot called 'Christian manhood' or 'Christian womanhood.'"⁷

The individuals primarily responsible for laying the foundation of evangelical feminism are Nancy Hardesty, Letha Scanzoni, Paul Jewett, Virginia Mollenkott, and Dorothy Pape. Prominent names currently associated with the movement are Linda L. Belleville, Gilbert Bilezikian, Mary Evans, Gordon D. Fee, W. Ward Gasque, Kevin Giles, Patricia Gundry, E. Margaret Howe, Gretchen Gaebelein Hull, Craig Keener, Catherine Clark Kroeger, Walter Liefeld, Alvera Mickelsen, David Scholer, Aida Besancon Spencer, and Ruth Tucker.

The purpose of this article is to examine certain hermeneutical principles being implemented among those who are evangelical feminists.⁸ As much as possible, the evaluation of these principles will use the standard of the grammatico-historical method of exegesis. The scope of this study necessitates focusing only on principles that differ from the hermeneutics of those called “hierarchicalists,”⁹ the ones frequently used in the Pauline “hard passages.”¹⁰

There are two primary reasons why the role of women and their relationship to men in the church and the family is one of the “great divides” among Christians today. The first reason is a difference of opinion with regards to the exegesis of the relevant biblical texts. The second reason is the role of hermeneutics in the debate. Robert K. Johnston believes that the second reason lies behind the first reason: “For behind the apparent differences in approach and opinion regarding the women’s issue are opposing principles for interpreting Scripture—i.e., different hermeneutics. Here is the real issue facing evangelical theology as it seeks to answer the women’s question.”¹¹

This essay will examine and evaluate seven relevant principles of hermeneutics of evangelical feminists and, thereby, provide a heightened mutual understanding of the basic difference between the two sides.¹² Understanding these will hopefully lessen the “great divide” that exists in Christendom concerning a woman’s role in the church and the home.

The Principle of *Ad Hoc* Documents

A prominent characteristic of evangelical feminism is its insistence that understanding the literary form of a passage plays a major role in adequate interpretation.¹³ Sometimes the phrase describing this axiom is the “hermeneutics of *ad hoc* documents.”¹⁴ The principle is prominent in the interpretive scheme of 1 Timothy 2:8-15 by evangelical feminists.

The literary form of 1 Timothy closely relates to the purpose of the epistle. According to Scholer, Paul writes the letter to help Timothy handle the problem of false teachers in Ephesus: “The purpose of 1 Timothy is to combat the Ephesian heresy that Timothy faced.”¹⁵

To some, a necessary corollary to this view of 1 Timothy’s purpose is to perceive the epistle as an *ad hoc* letter.¹⁶ The implication of this *ad hoc* perspective is to restrict the teaching of 2:9-15 to an individual situation experienced by the original audience. Concerning the instructions in 2:9-10 and 15, Gordon D. Fee writes,

All of these instructions, including 2:11-12, were *ad hoc* responses to the waywardness of the young widows in Ephesus who had already gone astray after Satan and were disrupting the church.

It simply cannot be demonstrated that Paul intended 1 Tim 3:11-12 [*sic*, 1 Tim 2:11-12] as a rule in all churches at all times. In fact the occasion and purpose of 1 Timothy as a whole, and these verses in particular, suggest otherwise.¹⁷

It is impossible to deny the *ad hoc* nature of 1 Timothy. The inroads of false teachers into the church under Timothy’s leadership are the evident occasion of the epistle. More questionable, however, is the *ad hoc* interpretation that limits the teaching of 2:11-15 based on an *ad hoc* literary style. Paul’s epistle to the churches of Galatia is *ad hoc* in nature. Yet no one limits the teaching of Gal 2:16 to the original recipients.¹⁸ Also, Douglas J. Moo’s observation is valid: “The isolation of local circumstances as the occasion for a particular teaching does not, by itself, indicate anything about the normative nature of that teaching.”¹⁹

A further problem with the *ad hoc* interpretive principle is that it rests upon the assumption that Paul’s sole reason for writing 1 Timothy’s was to combat false doctrine. This purpose does find some support in Paul’s words in 1:3: “As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus, in order that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines.” Yet it ignores the other purpose statement in 1 Tim 3:14-15: “I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.”

These two verses support the view that Paul writes to his spiritual son to instruct him on how to order and direct the life of a Christian congregation. Hurley expresses this perspective:

It is universally accepted that 1 Timothy was intended to provide a clear statement concerning certain issues which its author, whom I take to be Paul, felt needed attention. The letter forms a “spiritual will” from Paul to Timothy. In the letter Paul indicates that he hopes to be able to come soon to Timothy, but fears that he will be delayed (3:14-15a). He writes, “I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God.”²⁰

A “church manual” approach to 1 Timothy views the teaching of the epistle as normative.²¹ Even if one agrees with this analysis of 1 Timothy, it does not follow that everything within the epistle is normative. Most agree that Paul’s emphasis in 2:8—“I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension”—is upon the manner of life of the one praying, not upon his posture.²²

But neither of the above proposed purposes of 1 Timothy is preferable. It is best to understand 3:15 as the overarching purpose that embraces the purpose stated in 1:3.²³

The Principle of an Interpretive Center

One of the hermeneutical questions related to the ecclesiastical and domestic roles of women is whether or not a single text determines the interpretation of all the other passages. Stated another way, is there a clear text,²⁴ an interpretive center,²⁵ a theological and hermeneutical key,²⁶ a “*locus classicus*,”²⁷ a defining passage, a starting point that serves as a filter in analyzing the New Testament view regarding these female roles?²⁸

Most evangelical feminists affirm the existence of such a starting point when seeking God’s will on the role of women. Yet they do not agree on what that starting point is. They agree that the interpreter should not start with the Pauline “hard passages.” The comment of W. Ward Gasque is informative:

The Egalitarian View also takes these texts [1 Cor 11:2-16; 14:33-35; 1 Tim 2:11-15; Eph 5:22-33; 1 Pet 3:1-7] seriously, but it does not begin with these. It points out that if you leave these texts to the side until the end of the discussion, you will come out with a different conclusion. If you look at these texts first, you have basically programmed yourself to come to the Traditional View; but if you put these texts aside for the time being and first study all else that the Bible has to teach theologically about the role of men and women—in society and in the created order, in the Old Testament people of God and the New Testament people of God, in the church and the home—then you come to a different position.²⁹

One recommended starting place has been Galatians 3:28, where Paul declares to the Galatians that there is “neither male nor female.” Some see this as an interpretive filter that determines the meaning of the other passages. F. F. Bruce represents this view: “Paul states the basic principle here; if restrictions on it are found elsewhere in the Pauline corpus, as in 1 Cor 14:34f. or 1 Tim 2:11f., they are to be understood in relation to Gal 3:28, and not vice versa.”³⁰

Scanzoni and Hardesty concur with Bruce in stating,

The biblical theologian does not build on isolated proof texts but first seeks the *locus classicus*, the major biblical statement, on a given matter. (The doctrine of creation and fall, for example, is to be found most clearly spelled out in Gen. 1–3 and Rom 5:12-21, not in 1 Cor 11:2-16 or 1 Tim 2:13-14.) Passages which deal with an issue

systematically are used to help understand incidental references elsewhere. Passages which are theological and doctrinal in content are used to interpret those where the writer is dealing with practical local cultural problems. (Except for Gal 3:28, all of the references to women in the New Testament are contained in passages dealing with practical concerns about personal relationships or behavior in worship services.)³¹

Creation-Redemption is another recommended interpretive center. Timothy P. Weber explained, “Egalitarians, then, organize their understanding of the sweep of redemption history in terms of creation and redemption and believe that the women’s issue should be seen in that context.”³²

To illustrate the lack of agreement among feminist writers further, a third suggested theological key identifies the highest norms or standards taught in the Bible as the starting point and begins there. The source of these norms is usually the lofty standards emphasized by Jesus, as well as the statements about the purpose of Christ’s ministry and the purpose of the gospel.³³

Evangelical feminists have not listened to one of their own, David Scholer, on this subject. Scholer says it is wrong to identify a controlling text regarding women’s role and status in the church. His words are, “What I want to stress is that from a hermeneutical point of view the question of where one enters the discussion is really an open question to which no canonical text speaks with clarity.”³⁴

In essence, Scholer says that, instead of attempting to identify an interpretive center, each text should have equal weight in developing a biblical theology of the role of women. Biblical theology should build upon all relevant texts. For several reasons, Scholer’s proposal is the preferred solution to this hermeneutical issue. First, as already stated by Scholer, the New Testament does not specify a starting point for this or many other doctrines.³⁵ To choose a theological and hermeneutical key often reflects one’s personal presuppositions.

A second reason why an interpretive center is a bad idea, as Craig L. Blomberg points out, is the evangelical doctrine of the plenary inspiration of Scripture: “I think that if we as evangelicals take seriously our doctrine of the plenary inspiration of Scripture, then it is hermeneutically impossible to set up one text as the interpretive grid through which everything else must be filtered.”³⁶

A third reason for favoring Scholer’s proposal is that it allows for the hermeneutical principle universally agreed upon among those with a high view of Scripture: it is necessary for all relevant texts to harmonize with each other.³⁷ This allows

for input from each text that touches on the subject, without excluding the unique contribution of each to the doctrine.

Finally, to use Galatians 3:28 or any other starting point as an interpretive grid through which all other passages are understood automatically colors the meaning emerging from other passages. As Robert L. Thomas argues, “It is impossible to deal with literature accurately if one’s mind is already preconditioned to discover something that the literature does not relate to.”³⁸

The Principle of the Analogy of Faith

Closely related to the issue of a controlling text is the principle of “the analogy of faith.” The principle of the analogy of faith says that Scripture cannot contradict Scripture.³⁹ In light of this internal agreement, no verse or passage can have a meaning isolated from the rest of Scripture.⁴⁰ Yet the role of the analogy of faith in the context of “clear” and “obscure” passages is debatable. The issue is how to handle “unclear” texts in light of the agreed upon truth that Scripture does not contradict Scripture. A resolving of this issue is key in the interpretation of women’s place in the church and home.⁴¹

Evangelical feminists advocate that the analogy of faith principle means the clearer passages should determine the interpretation of the less clear ones.⁴² They hold that the “clear” text on women’s roles is Galatians 3:28⁴³ or one of other starting points; 1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:34-35; and 1 Timothy 2:11-12 are identified as obscure passages.

Another way of applying the analogy of faith principle is to refrain from preferring one passage over another. The basic approach of this variation is to give equal attention to “obscure” or “disputed” texts.⁴⁴ This technique does not disregard the analogy of faith principle, but instead employs it after completion of the exegetical procedure, as a “double check” on the results of one’s exegetical investigation.⁴⁵

Two strong considerations make this second approach to the analogy-of-faith principle preferable. First, it keeps the influence of the interpreter’s personal biases to a minimum. John Piper and Wayne Grudem are correct: “We are all biased and would very likely use this principle of interpretation to justify neglecting the texts that do not suit our bias while insisting that the ones that suit our bias are crystal clear.”⁴⁶

Second, interpreting a passage in this way forces the interpreter to consider seriously all relevant passages. This prevents exegetical laziness by requiring an exegetical accounting for all passages germane to the issue. The following recommendation is fitting: “Our procedure should be rather to continue to read Scripture carefully and prayerfully, seeking a position that dismisses no texts but interprets all the relevant texts of Scripture in a coherent way.”⁴⁷

The Principle of Slavery as a Model

A predominant concept in the literature of evangelical feminism is that the relationship between slaves and masters parallels that between wives and husbands and speaks to the issue of women in church leadership.⁴⁸ Proponents have offered two other justifications of the same principle. First, “scriptural interpretation must allow for continuing actualization as necessary implications are drawn out.”⁴⁹ Second, “one is informed by the history of biblical interpretation, which may shed light on a passage at hand.”⁵⁰

Keener states the rationale of the principle clearly:

Those who today will admit that slavery is wrong but still maintain that husbands must have authority over their wives are inconsistent. If they were consistent with their method of interpretation, which does not take enough account of cultural differences, it is likely that, had they lived one hundred fifty years ago, they would have had to have opposed the abolitionists as subverters of the moral order—as many Bible-quoting white slave owners and their allies did. Many of the traditions which today use Scripture to subordinate women once did the same for slavery before that idea was anathema in our culture. In contrast, the method of interpretation we favor in this book is closer to the methods favored by the abolitionists.⁵¹

The basis for treating the male/female relationship like the master/slave relationship is the scriptural similarity between the two. Boomsma points this out when he says,

There are several comparable elements that suggest such a parallel. As we have seen, in Galatians 3:28 the distinctions between slave and free and male and female, although they continue to exist, are superseded by equality in Christ in the church. The instructions in Paul’s letters prominently modify the relations between slaves and masters, and between husbands and wives, as in Ephesians 5:22-33. Similarly Paul places restrictions on both slaves and women by instructing slaves to obey their masters and women to be subservient to their husbands and to refrain exercising equality in the authoritative offices of the congregation.

What is of great significance is the parallelism between the grounds on which the apostle supports his instructions to both slaves and women. In 1 Timothy 6:1 he urges slaves to respect their masters “so that God’s name and our teaching may not be slandered.” In Titus 2:5 he requires women to be subject

to their husbands “so that no one will malign the word of God.”⁵²

Despite these impressive parallels, one major setback confronts this principle: “The existence of slavery is not rooted in any creation ordinance, but the existence of marriage is.”⁵³ Additionally, Paul laid down principles in the book of Philemon that would ultimately destroy the institution of slavery. This is not true of the male/female relationship. Vern S. Poythress is correct:

In the New Testament, there are too many passages that never “drop the second shoe.” The passages say that women must submit to their husbands. But they never say explicitly that husbands must submit to their wives. They explicitly instruct Timothy and Titus about appointing men as elders, but they never explicitly mention the possibility of women elders.⁵⁴

Mary A. Kassian states a final stumbling-block for the slavery analogy when she writes,

Biblical feminists view the Bible as open to alteration. One of the basic presuppositions of Biblical feminist theology is that the Bible is not absolute and that its meaning can “evolve” and “transform.” Since the Bible presents no *absolute* standard of right and wrong, feminists maintain that they must decide this for themselves. This basic premise allows them to interpret the Bible in *any manner* appropriate to their immediate circumstances.⁵⁵

The Principle of Culturally Biased Interpretation

A recurring question in a quest to understand the biblical teaching on the role of women is, “Can there be an objective understanding of Scripture?” Is it possible to set aside biases and prejudices for the purpose of ascertaining the meaning of the text? The response of several in the evangelical feminist camp is “No.” Scholer illustrates the negative answer: “Now, however, I feel that I have come to understand for myself, along with many others, that in fact objective interpretation and objective hermeneutic is a myth.”⁵⁶ One of the “many others” is Johnston. His conviction is that the reason for the continuing spate of evangelical literature on women’s role in the church and family is the role of the reader/interpreter in determining the meaning of the text: It is the reader who uses incomplete knowledge as the basis of judgment. It is the reader who chooses between equally valid possibilities based on personal preference. It is the reader who develops criteria for what is universal and what is culturally specific, what is translatable

and what is transcultural. It is the reader who brings to a text a specific understanding of Scripture’s overarching unity. It is the reader who finds it difficult to remain vulnerable to the text as it confronts Christian and pagan alike.⁵⁷

In light of this he concludes that evangelicals hide themselves behind “the veneer of objectivity.”⁵⁸

The position that objectivity in interpretation is a false notion does not demand the abandonment of all attempts to determine the meaning of a text. What it does dictate is that, first, the exegete must recognize personal biases,⁵⁹ and, second, the interpreter must carefully use proper hermeneutical procedure.⁶⁰

The view of the mythological nature of objective interpretation is contrary to the traditional grammatical-historical method of interpretation. It is a standard corollary of the long-honored approach that one can investigate a passage in an unbiased manner. Walter C. Kaiser Jr.’s definition of interpretation declares this: “To interpret we must in every case reproduce the sense the Scriptural writer intended for his own words. The first step in the interpretive process is to link only those ideas with the author’s language that he connected with them. The second step is to express these ideas understandably.”⁶¹

Dockery concurs: “The goal of biblical interpretation is to approach the text in terms of the objective ideal. This goal does not mean approaching the Bible without any presuppositions at all, for the Bible itself provides the interpreter with certain presuppositions. Yet, the interpreter is expected to strive as diligently as possible for objective understanding.”⁶²

Is it possible for the interpreter to exclude bias in the hermeneutical process, or is this simply a delusion of grandeur or a veneer of objectivity? However one may answer these questions, all agree that the interpreter has prejudices in approaching the Word of God. Yet the grammatical-historical method advocates the possibility and necessity of excluding these prejudices. The Reformers were well aware of this and consequently geared their approach to exegesis along lines of the *tabula rasa* idea. Sproul says,

The interpreter was expected to strive as hard as possible for an objective reading of the text through the grammatico-historical approach. Though subjective influences always present a clear and present danger of distortion, the student of the Bible was expected to utilize every possible safeguard in the pursuit of the ideal, listening to the message of Scripture without mixing in his own prejudices.⁶³

What response can a person offer to the claim that objective interpretation is a myth?⁶⁴ What procedures will exclude personal background and culture from hindering an understanding of the intent of the authors of Scripture? Piper and Grudem offer five suggestions to provide interpreters with confidence to interpreters that they have excluded their biases and prejudices from the hermeneutical process:

1. Search your motives and seek to empty yourself of all that would tarnish a true perception of reality.
2. Pray that God would give you humility, teachability, wisdom, insight, fairness, and honesty.
3. Make every effort to submit your mind to the unbending and unchanging grammatical and historical reality of the biblical texts in Greek and Hebrew, using the best methods of study available to get as close as possible to the intentions of the biblical writers.
4. Test your conclusions by the history of exegesis to reveal any chronological snobbery or cultural myopia.
5. Test your conclusions in the real world of contemporary ministry and look for resonance from mature and godly people.⁶⁵

To speak of objective interpretation is not to diminish the reality of the exegete's background and culture. As Thomas states,

It must be granted that twentieth century exegetes are outsiders to the cultures in which the Bible was written and for this reason can never achieve a complete understanding of the original meaning of the Bible in its historical setting. An undue emphasis upon this limitation, however, loses sight of the fact that all historical study is a weighing of probabilities. The more evidence we have, the higher degree of probability we can attain. The practice of exegesis, therefore, is a continued search for greater probability and a more refined understanding.⁶⁶

The Principle of Cultural Relativity

The major hermeneutical issue in interpreting the Pauline "hard passages"—1 Timothy 2:11-15 in particular—is whether the teaching is culturally specific or normative. Quarrels about the meaning of the 1 Timothy passage are one issue, but even those who agree on its meaning disagree about how to apply it. Fee, who argues that the passage does not apply to women in ministry today, agrees with the

interpretation of those who see it as restricting what women can do when the church meets for public worship. He writes, "My point is a simple one. It is hard to deny that this text prohibits women teaching men in the Ephesian church; but it is the unique text in the New Testament, and as we have seen, its reason for being is not to correct the rest of the New Testament, but to correct a very *ad hoc* problem in Ephesus."⁶⁷

The comment of Fee illustrates that the debate involving 1 Timothy 2:11-15 consists not only of how to interpret this passage but also of how to apply it. The primary hindrance to discerning the application is how to ascertain whether the text is culture limited or transcultural. To state it another way, the concern is "discerning between the permanent, universal, normative teaching of Scripture on the one hand and, on the other hand, that which is transient, not applicable to every people in every culture, not intended to function as a mandate for normative behavior."⁶⁸ This important topic in contemporary studies of hermeneutics particularly relates to determining women's roles in the home and church.⁶⁹

Evangelical feminist hermeneutics advocate widespread distinctions between universal principles and localized applications. In fact, Weber identifies this as one of the three distinguishing marks in the egalitarian reading of the Bible.⁷⁰ The problem is not with the principle but with how extensive its implementation should be. How to determine what is "cultural" or "normative" requires further discussion.

Resolving this matter requires answers to two important questions: First, does Scripture convey universal principles or culture-limited application? Second, what method can distinguish the normative from the cultural in Scripture?

Three alternatives of how to answer the former question are conceivable.

The first recommendation is to view Scripture as conveying what is normative for all believers at all times unless the text explicitly expresses the limitation. J. Robertson McQuilkin represents this view when he writes, "My thesis is that a fully authoritative Bible means that every teaching in Scripture is universal unless Scripture itself treats it as limited."⁷¹ Identifying hermeneutical criteria for nonnormativeness is the focus of this approach to distinguishing what is normative from what is cultural.⁷²

The second recommendation is to see Scripture as conveying what is limited in application to its original context. Instead of Scripture relaying what is normative, it relays that which is culture bound. The crucial question to be asked in discerning between the time-bound and the eternal is, "How can we locate and identify this permanent element or essence?"⁷³ This view assumes that Scripture is time bound, not that which conveys what is basically normative.

The third recommendation mediates between the first two. Instead of assuming that Scripture conveys either what is normative or what is culture bound, it assumes neither. This view allows the criteria to make this decision. Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard write,

We detect problems, however, with both of these views. The former [Scripture conveys what is normative] makes it difficult to establish the timelessness even of fundamental moral principles such as prohibitions against theft or murder; the latter [Scripture conveys what is cultural] would seem to require us to greet one another with a holy kiss (1 Thes 5:26) or drink wine for upset stomachs (1 Tim 5:23).⁷⁴

All three recommendations take seriously the need to distinguish between what is permanent and what is transient. Yet the assumption that Scripture conveys what is culture bound does not harmonize with Paul's significant statement in 2 Tim 3:16. Recommendations one and three take into account the importance of this verse in their view. George W. Knight III, who agrees that Scripture relays what is normative, says of McQuilkin's thesis, "In such a thesis, he is articulating the same absolute and universal language that the apostle Paul has used in asserting the Scripture's comprehensive didactic significance (2 Tim. 3:16). Since Christ's apostle indicates that this is true of all Scripture, then only it itself can teach us what it regards as limited and not universally normative."⁷⁵

Likewise, the third recommendation that each passage must be judged on its own merits to determine what is normative or cultural, regards 2 Tim 3:16 as crucial to its formulation. Representatives of this position declare,

With 2 Tim 3:16 and related texts, we affirm that every passage (a meaningful unit of discourse that makes one or more points that can be restated, if necessary, in a proposition) has some normative value for believers in all times and places. But we presuppose nothing about whether the application for us today will come by preserving unchanged the specific elements of the passage or whether we will have to identify broader principles that suggest unique applications for new contexts. Instead we ask a series of questions of the text.⁷⁶

The caveat offered in the last portion of the above quotation is what distinguishes this view from the position that Scripture presents what is normative. The distinction is that those who take Scripture as normative suggest "both the form and meaning of Scripture are permanent revelation and normative,"⁷⁷ but those who let the criteria determine what is normative accept the meaning as normative, but not the form. Elaborating on this difference, William J. Larkin, Jr. explains why taking both the form and meaning of Scripture as normative is the best position: "The obvious reason for adopting the more comprehensive position affirming both form

and meaning is that it best upholds the full authority of Scripture and to the same extent that Scripture itself does."⁷⁸

The question of "what method should be followed to distinguish what is normative from what is cultural"⁷⁹ finds its answer in two primary methodologies that are foundational but work from different perspectives, the ones proposed by McQuilkin⁸⁰ and Alan F. Johnson.⁸¹ Since the answer to the first question has ruled out Johnson's initial assumption that Scripture is culture bound, it is unnecessary to review his proposal. Since Scripture conveys what is normative, McQuilkin's list is best in reflecting how to determine what is normative as opposed to cultural.⁸² To discern this, the interpreter must ask:

1. Does the context limit the recipient or application?
2. Does subsequent revelation limit the recipient or the application?
3. Is this specific teaching in conflict with other biblical teaching?⁸³
4. Is the reason for a norm given in Scripture, and is that reason treated as normative?
5. Is the specific teaching normative as well as the principle?
6. Does the Bible treat the historic context as normative?
7. Does the Bible treat the cultural context as limited?⁸⁴

Patriarchal and Sexist Texts

Another hermeneutical mark of evangelical feminism is its detection of patriarchal and sexist texts in the Bible. The loudest advocate of this principle is Scholer, who writes, "Evangelical feminist hermeneutics must face patriarchal and sexist texts and assumptions within biblical passages and understand them precisely as limited texts and assumptions."⁸⁵

The sample texts that Scholer sees as reflecting patriarchy, androcentrism, and possibly misogyny are: Rev 14:1-5; 1 Tim 5:3-16; 1 Cor 11:2-16; Eph 5:24. Concerning Revelation 14:1-5, he states:

I submit that most of us have never really noticed how dramatically androcentric the text is: the redeemed are men, explicitly men. Nor do I think that most of us have noticed the sexual or sexuality assumptions behind the text: men who have not defiled themselves with women. This is a view of sexuality that most of us would like to explain away or ignore. It is a view rooted in the

reality of the ancient world that women were always understood to be the one primarily to blame for sexual sin. This view has haunted the question of rape even to this day.⁸⁶

His comments on 1 Timothy 5:3-16 are along the same lines: "I submit again that the assumption behind this view is a view of sexuality that probably none of us really share or would admit to sharing. Again, it is rooted in the assumption that women are sexually irresponsible. If a 59-year-old or younger widow does not remarry, the odds are very great that she will follow Satan."⁸⁷

The nature of these passages leads Scholer to the conclusion that they are limited texts reflecting historical-cultural assumptions and realities.⁸⁸ In essence, this hermeneutical principle allows him to affirm evangelical feminism by limiting the passages that speak against it. Such a perspective toward the identified texts has several problems. First, it implies that the Bible cannot be interpreted in a regular fashion because of its male authorship.⁸⁹ Second, it adds a further dimension to the historical aspect of the grammatical-historical method of interpretation, that the interpreter concern himself or herself and know about the biases of the author. This requires much guesswork on the part of the exegete. Third, this principle is unacceptable because it presents a writer of Scripture, such as Paul, in a contradictory light. On one hand, Paul advocates the full equality of men and women (Gal 3:28). On the other, he capitulates to societal norms and writes from a sexist position (1 Tim 5:3-16).

Further, Scholer's stance assumes an evangelical feminist presuppositional perspective of the Old and New Testaments. He labels certain passages as sexist and patriarchal because an egalitarian position on the role of women in the church and home is a foregone conclusion.

Finally, a patriarchal culture does not necessarily mandate an improper view of women. Poythress is helpful in this area when he states,

Note also that the patriarchy of OT and NT cultures did not necessarily exclude women from ever occupying a role of social and religious prominence. Prov 31 illustrates the breadth of scope possible even in ordinary circumstances. Moreover, Esther was a queen. Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, and Isaiah's wife were prophetesses (Exod 15:20; Judges 4:4; 2 Kings 22:14; Isa 8:3). Deborah judged Israel (though this role functioned to rebuke the inadequate male leaders: Judges 4:8-9; Isa 3:12). Salome Alexandra, wife of Alexander Jannaeus, ruled over the Jews from 76 to 67 B.C. Women played an important role in Jesus' earthly ministry and as witnesses to his

resurrection. Lydia, Priscilla, Phoebe, and others obviously had significant roles.⁹⁰

Results of the Evaluation

This completes the evaluation of seven major principles that distinguish the hermeneutics of evangelical feminism from those of hierarchialists and, in many cases, from the grammatico-historical approach to interpreting Scripture.⁹¹ This evaluation has shown the weaknesses of the hermeneutics of evangelical feminism. An *ad hoc* hermeneutic that limits the teaching of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 is inadequate, because it fails to consider both the purpose of 1 Timothy and the *ad hoc* nature of other Pauline epistles. Any attempt to establish one passage as the interpretive grid for all other passages is inconsistent with two standard tenets of the grammatico-historical method of interpretation: (1) the plenary inspiration of Scripture; and (2) the necessary harmonization of texts. The principle of the analogy of faith is valid, but not when it is brought into the interpretation process too early, as evangelical feminists tend to do.

Furthermore, to parallel the role of women with the role of slaves is to assume that God ordained slavery, a teaching not found in Scripture. The role of women has its roots in the order of creation, however (Gen. 2). To argue that objective interpretation is a myth and that the Bible contains sexist and patriarchal texts is to differ again from the grammatico-historical method of exegesis. This preferred procedure for understanding Scripture has argued that objective interpretation is possible and that it is not necessary for the interpreter to be concerned with and knowledgeable of "the biases" of the author.

Evangelical feminists are correct in observing that certain biblical texts are cultural. Yet their procedure for determining which ones is questionable. In light of 2 Timothy 3:16-17, it is best to consider all Scripture as normative, unless answers to the above questions presented by McQuilkin prove otherwise.

Evangelical feminists must take a hard look at their hermeneutics in view of evident weaknesses in the system, many of which contradict the grammatical-historical method of interpretation. Since these defects are present, the position of evangelical feminism on the role of men and women in the church and home rests on less than a solid biblical foundation. ■

SUMMARY OF “THE HERMENEUTICS OF EVANGELICAL FEMINISM”

<i>Principle</i>	<i>Evangelical Feminist Perspective</i>	<i>Grammatical-Historical Perspective</i>
<i>Ad Hoc Documents</i>	teaching restricted to original audience; no universal application	teaching is normative, with application to Christians of all times and places
An Interpretive Center	a starting point as a filter for other texts in analyzing the NT view	equal weight given to each text in arriving at the NT view
Analogy of Faith	clearer passages determine the meanings of less clear ones	equal attention to obscure passages; analogy of faith used only after exegesis
Slavery as a Model	cultural growth in applying biblical principles brings change of understanding	role of women rooted in Creation ordinance, not culture; role of slaves different
Culturally Based Interpretation	objective interpretation a myth; each reader determines what is universal and what is culturally specific	advocates objectivity in interpretation; interpreter strives to eliminate cultural prejudices
Cultural Relativity in Revelation	text is culture limited; widespread distinction between universal principles and localized applications	text is transcultural; Scripture presents what is normative unless Scripture itself indicates otherwise
Patriarchal and Sexist Texts	recognized as limited texts and assumptions with negative view of females	patriarchal culture not synonymous with bias against females

¹This article was originally published as chapter thirteen (“The Hermeneutics of Evangelical Feminism”) in Robert L. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 373-405. Used by permission of the publisher. All rights reserved.

²Thomas J. Fricke, “What is the Feminist Hermeneutic? An Analysis of Feminist Interpretation of the Bible,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 91 (Winter 1994) 45.

³R. Letham, “The Hermeneutics of Feminism,” *Themelios* 17 (April/May 1992) 4.

⁴*Ibid.*, 4. Fricke refers to this category as “liberal feminists” (“Feminist Hermeneutic,” 45).

⁵Daniel G. Lundy, “A Hermeneutical Framework for the Role of Women,” *The Baptist Review of Theology* 2 (Fall 1992) 57. Other labels that coincide with “evangelical feminists” are biblical feminists, conservative Christian feminists, and evangelical egalitarians.

⁶See “Men, Women, & Biblical Equality,” *Journal for Biblical Equality* 3 (1991) 1-3. Also cited without approval in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway, 1991) 469-72.

⁷Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, *Women Caught in the Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994) 110.

⁸Groothuis recently identified the following eight strategies as part of the biblical feminist hermeneutic: (1) Biblical interpretation is to endeavor to be faithful to the biblical author’s intent in writing the specific passage in question. (2) It is important to know the accurate translation of the passages traditionally used to silence and subjugate women. (3) It is crucial to maintain interpretive consistency with the rest of a biblical author’s writings as well as the whole of Scripture. (4) Texts couched in a context of culturally specific instructions are not to be taken *a priori* as normative for the present day. (5) Culturally specific instructions are to be interpreted not only in light

of biblical doctrine and principle, but also in light of the culture to which they were written and the author’s reason for writing them. (6) Events recorded in the Bible should be understood in light of the culture of that time. (7) In light of the progressive nature of God’s revelation in the Bible, NT texts concerning women should be considered more accurate indicators of God’s intent for women than those provided in the OT. (8) The need to guard against interpreting the Bible in conformity with one’s own cultural pre-understanding or personal expectations. *Ibid.*, 112-15.

⁹The hierarchicalist position also has the labels “traditionalist” and “complementarian.” Swartley sees the distinguishing marks of this view as: (1) Women are expected to be subordinate to men—in the home, church, and society. (2) Especially in the home, husbands are to exercise headship over wives, with roles prescribed in accord with this pattern. (3) Within the church, women are restricted from the preaching ministry and from teaching men. Other forms of leadership are to be exercised under the authority and leadership of men (Willard M. Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, War and Women* [Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald, 1983], 151). Eight points summarize the “Danvers Statement” with its more detailed description of the traditionalist position: (1) Both Adam and Eve were created in God’s image, equal before God as persons and distinct in their manhood and womanhood. (2) Distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order, and should find an echo in every human heart. (3) Adam’s headship in marriage was established by God before the Fall, and was not a result of sin. (4) The Fall introduced distortions into the relationships between men and women. (5) The OT, as well as the NT, manifests the equally high value and dignity which God attached to the roles of both men and women, with both testaments also affirming the principle of male headship in the family and in the covenant community. (6) Redemption in Christ aims at removing the distortions introduced by the curse. (7) In all of life Christ is the supreme authority and guide for men and women, so that no earthly submission—domestic, religious, or civil—ever implies a mandate to follow a human authority into sin. (8) In both men and women a heartfelt sense of

call to ministry should never be used to set aside biblical criteria for particular ministries, but rather biblical teaching should remain the authority for testing our subjective discernment of God's will.

¹⁰Pauline "hard passages" are those which speak against the equality of roles between men and women in the church and home: 1 Cor 11:2-16; 14:33b-36; 1 Tim 2:8-15; Eph 5:21-33; 1 Pet 3:1-7 (Robert K. Johnston, "The Role of Women in the Church and Family: The Issue of Biblical Hermeneutics," in *Evangelicals at an Impasse*, ed. Robert K. Johnston [Atlanta: John Knox, 1979], 52).

¹¹*Ibid.*, 50. France affirms this point. He argues that evangelical disagreements over the ordination of women, with special reference to the priesthood of the Church of England, center on the right way to interpret and apply Scripture (R. T. France, *Women in the Church's Ministry: A Test Case for Biblical Interpretation* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997], 9-28).

¹²Cf. Andreas J. Köstenberger, "Gender Passages in the NT: Hermeneutical Fallacies Critiqued," *Westminster Theological Journal* 56/2 (Fall 1994) 259-283; Robert W. Yarbrough, "The Hermeneutics of 1 Timothy 2:9-15," in *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger, Thomas R. Schreiner, and H. Scott Baldwin (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 155-96. The exegetical fallacies critiqued by Köstenberger are: (1) underestimating the power of presuppositions; (2) lack of balance in hermeneutical methodology; (3) underrating the importance of the use of the OT in the NT; (4) improper use of background information; (5) an arbitrary distinction between "paradigm passages" and "passages with limited application"; (6) isolationist exegesis; and (7) leveling the distinction between historical exegesis and modern contextualization. This analysis along with the hermeneutical framework of 1 Timothy 2:9-15 provided by Yarbrough offer additional insight into the two different hermeneutical approaches to gender passages.

¹³Johnston, "Role of Women" 70.

¹⁴Gordon D. Fee, "Reflections on Church Order in the Pastoral Epistles, with Further Reflection on the Hermeneutics of *Ad Hoc* Documents," *JETS* 28 (June 1985) 141-51.

¹⁵David M. Scholer, "1 Timothy 2:9-15 and the Place of Women in the Church's Ministry," in *Women, Authority and the Bible*, ed. Alvera Mickelsen (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1986), 199. Others taking this position are Bruce Barron, "Putting Women in Their Place: 1 Timothy 2 and Evangelical Views of Women in Church Leadership," *JETS* 33 (December 1990) 453; Gordon Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984), xx; Alan Padgett, "Wealthy Women at Ephesus," *Interpretation* 441 (January 1987) 20.

¹⁶Fee is reputedly the commentator who originated and popularized this view. He writes, "It must be noted again that 1 Timothy is not intended to establish church order but to respond in a very *ad hoc* way to the Ephesian situation with its straying elders" (Fee, "Reflections on Church Order," 146). Also prominent in the discussion about the *ad hoc* nature of 1 Timothy is Scholer, "1 Timothy 2:9-15" 200.

¹⁷Gordon D. Fee, "Issues in Evangelical Hermeneutics, Part III: The Great Watershed—Intentionality & Particularity/Eternality: 1 Timothy 2:8-15 as a Test Case," *Crux* 26 (December 1990) 35.

¹⁸Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Study on the Role of Women in the Church* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Biblical Perspectives, 1987) 146-47.

¹⁹Douglas J. Moo, "The Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:11-15: A Rejoinder," *Trinity Journal* 2 (Fall 1981) 219.

²⁰James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Grand

Rapids: Zondervan, 1981) 196. Also agreeing with this viewpoint are Bacchiocchi, *Women in the Church*, 115; Douglas Moo, "What Does it Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority Over Men?: 1 Timothy 2:11-15," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Westchester, Ill: Crossway, 1991) 180.

²¹Hurley holds this position and summarizes it by saying, "Despite the obviously general intention of the author, a large number of recent writers on the subject of the role of women have suggested that the matters discussed and the instructions given in this letter ought to be seen as relevant only in its particular time period. Even a superficial reading of the letter shows, however, that its author would not accept such a view of it" (*Man and Woman*, 196-97).

²²E.g., *Ibid.* 198.

²³This is an improvement over the view of Gritz who sees a twofold purpose for writing given in 1:3 and 3:15 (S. H. Gritz, *Paul, Women Teachers, and the Mother Goddess at Ephesus* [Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1991] 107-8).

²⁴Scholer, "1 Timothy 2:9-15" 213.

²⁵C. Powell, "A Stalemate of Genders? Some Hermeneutical Reflections," *Themelios* 17 (April/May 1992) 18.

²⁶Grant R. Osborne, "Hermeneutics and Women in the Church," *JETS* 20 (December 1977) 348.

²⁷Letha D. Scanzoni and Nancy A. Hardesty, *All We're Meant to Be* (Waco: Word, 1974) 18-19.

²⁸Scott E. McClelland, "The New Reality in Christ: Perspectives From Biblical Studies," in *Gender Matters*, ed. June Steffensen Hagen (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990) 67.

²⁹W. Ward Gasque, "The Role of Women in the Church, in Society, and in the Home," *Crux* 19 (September 1983) 4.

³⁰F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 190. See also Richard N. Longenecker, *New Testament Social Ethics for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984) 74-75; McClelland, "New Reality in Christ," 65-67; Gasque, "Role of Women," 4. Grenz and Kjesbo are also in basic agreement with this statement. They write, "Complementarians read texts such as 1 Timothy 2:11-14 as giving a universal application to Paul's principle of church order. But if Paul ever acknowledged the ministry of a woman Christian leader—and we have noted several examples indicating that he not only acknowledged but actually supported women in ministry—then egalitarians are following Paul's own lead in their application of Galatians 3:28. And the seemingly restrictive texts complementarians cite, in turn, cannot be universal rules but Paul's attempts to counter the abuses of specific situations (Stanley J. Grenz with Denise Muir Kjesbo, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995] 106).

³¹Scanzoni and Hardesty, *All We're Meant to Be*, 18-19. It is interesting that the authors remove this statement from their revised edition of this work (Letha Dawson Scanzoni and Nancy A. Hardesty, *All We're Meant to Be*, rev. ed. [Nashville: Abingdon, 1986] 25). Yet, their essential position is now being championed by Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (*Good News for Women: A Biblical Picture of Gender Equality* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997]). For an excellent evaluation of Groothuis' interpretation and application of Galatians 3:28, consult Richard Hove, *Equality in Christ? Galatians 3:28 and the Gender Dispute* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1999) 125-42.

³²Timothy P. Weber, "Evangelical Egalitarianism: Where We Are Now," *Journal for Biblical Equality* 1 (1987) 80.

³³Alvera Mickelsen, "There is Neither Male nor Female in Christ," in *Women in Ministry*, ed. Bonnidell and Robert G. Clouse (Downers

Grove: InterVarsity, 1989) 177-79.

³⁴David M. Scholer, "Feminist Hermeneutics and Evangelical Biblical Interpretation," *JETS* 30 (December 1987) 417-18. Scholer appears to ignore his own advice, however, when he writes in his conclusion, "Such limited texts need not be ignored, excluded or polemicalised against. Rather, they should be interpreted from a particular vantage point—the dual commitments to the equal dignity and equality of men and women and to Scriptural authority" (Ibid. 419).

³⁵Ibid. 418.

³⁶Craig Blomberg, "Response to Catherine Kroeger on I Timothy 2," *Journal of Biblical Equality* 1 (December 1989) 44. Blomberg expresses agreement with Kroeger's proposal of evaluating and comparing all Scriptures to arrive at a proper position regarding women's role in the church (Catherine C. Kroeger, "Women in the Church: A Classicist's View of 1 Tim 2:11-15," *Journal of Biblical Equality* 1 [December 1989] 3).

³⁷Powell, "A Stalemate of Genders?" 18.

³⁸Robert L. Thomas, "Some Hermeneutical Ramifications of Contextualization and Feminist Literature" (paper read at Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Atlanta, November 1986) 18.

³⁹"The analogy of faith" is defined by Ramm as "the system of faith or doctrine found in Holy Scripture." He goes on to say, "The basic assumption here is that there is one system of truth or theology contained in Scripture, and therefore all doctrines must cohere or agree with each other. That means that the interpretation of specific passages must not contradict the total teaching of Scripture on a point. This is similar to saying that Scripture interprets Scripture" (Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970] 107).

⁴⁰Susan T. Foh, *Women and the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979) 27.

⁴¹Johnston, "Role of Women" 73.

⁴²Scholer, "Feminist Hermeneutics and Evangelical Biblical Interpretation" 417; Powell, "A Stalemate of Genders?" 17; Gasque, "Role of Women" 6; Johnston, "Role of Women" 73. Groothuis' comments on 1 Timothy 2:11-15 are reflective of this perspective: "The interpretational ambiguities in this text, however, do not deter traditionalists from making it the basis of a biblical doctrine of women's ministry. Yet it does not seem that our understanding of an important biblical teaching should begin with, and be based upon, an isolated text in which there are numerous exegetical uncertainties. Rather, such a study should begin with the clear message of the whole of Scripture—which is incompatible with any doctrine that deems scriptural authority a male prerogative. Obscure and isolated texts need to be interpreted in light of and in conformity with the overall message of the Bible" (Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, *Good News for Women* 212).

⁴³Pierce states, "The clearer, more general proclamation of Gal 3:28 rightly serves as a foundation principle against which the more obscure text of 1 Tim 2:8-15 can be interpreted" (Ronald W. Pierce, "Evangelicals and Gender Roles in the 1990s: 1 Tim 2:8-15, a Test Case," *JETS* 36 [September 1993] 353-54).

⁴⁴John Piper and Wayne Grudem, "An Overview of Central Concerns: Questions and Answers," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway, 1991) 90.

⁴⁵Robert L. Thomas, "Introduction to Exegesis" (class notes, Greek Exegesis I, The Master's Seminary, Sun Valley, CA, 1987) 17.

⁴⁶Piper and Grudem, "Overview of Central Concerns" 90.

⁴⁷Ibid. 91.

⁴⁸For a sampling, see Clarence Boomsma, *Male and Female, One in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993) 43-52; Kevin Giles, "The Biblical Argument for Slavery: Can the Bible Mislead? A Case Study in Hermeneutics," *Evangelical Quarterly* 66 (1994) 3-17; Craig Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992), 184-224.

⁴⁹Johnston, "Role of Women" 74. This is not a claim of progressive revelation, but of progressive understanding. This progressive understanding has manifested itself in the church's doctrine of the Trinity and the Christian abolitionist movement. It also is worthy of consideration in determining theological truth for women in our day.

⁵⁰Gasque, "Role of Women" 9. The point is that the interpreter should be informed by the change in attitude among Christians toward slavery when considering the role of women.

⁵¹Keener, *Paul, Women, and Wives* 207-8.

⁵²Boomsma, *Male and Female*, 48. In addition to these scriptural parallels, Giles cites a number of general similarities between the biblical arguments for slavery and the permanent subordination of women (Giles, "Biblical Argument for Slavery" 17).

⁵³Piper and Grudem, "Overview of Central Concerns" 65. Contra Giles, who states, "The biblical case for slavery is the counterpart of the case for the subordination of women, the only difference being that the case for slavery has far more weighty biblical support" ("Biblical Case for Slavery" 16).

⁵⁴Vern S. Poythress, "Two Hermeneutical Tensions in Evangelical Feminism" (paper presented at the Eastern Regional Evangelical Theological Society Conference, Philadelphia, April 5, 1991) 2.

⁵⁵Mary A. Kassian, *Women, Creation and the Fall* (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway, 1990) 147. Kassian has overstated her case regarding some biblical feminists. She probably has in mind primarily liberal feminists, but her point is valid regarding some evangelical feminists as Fricke comments: "Evangelical feminists follow the notion of a kind of progressive revelation, an evolutionary development of doctrine in the Christian church" ("What Is the Feminist Hermeneutic?" 55).

⁵⁶Scholer, "Feminist Hermeneutics and Evangelical Biblical Interpretation" 412.

⁵⁷Robert K. Johnston, "Biblical Authority and Interpretation: The Test Case of Women's Role in the Church and Home Updated," in *Women, Authority and the Bible*, ed. Alvera Mickelsen (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1986) 35.

⁵⁸Ibid. 35.

⁵⁹Powell, "A Stalemate of Genders?" 17.

⁶⁰It is beyond the scope of this paper to identify and evaluate what is the currently recommended hermeneutical procedure to remedy the problem of bias in interpretation. For detailed presentations, see Anthony Thiselton, *The Two Horizons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980); and Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1991).

⁶¹Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "Legitimate Hermeneutics," in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979) 118.

⁶²David S. Dockery, "The Role of Women in Worship and Ministry: Some Hermeneutical Questions," *Criswell Theological Review* 1 (1987) 376.

⁶³R. C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1977) 105.

⁶⁴As a proponent of the grammatico-historical hermeneutic, Thomas offers a ten-point response to those who insist on the impossibility of excluding the interpreter's biases in the hermeneutical process. See

Thomas, "Hermeneutical Ramifications" 4-9).

⁶⁶Piper and Grudem, "Overview of Central Concerns" 84.

⁶⁷Thomas, "Hermeneutical Ramifications" 10.

⁶⁸Fee, "Issues in Evangelical Hermeneutics" 36.

⁶⁹J. Robertson McQuilkin, "Problems of Normativeness in Scripture: Cultural Versus Permanent," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy and the Bible*, ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 222.

⁷⁰William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word, 1993) 409.

⁷¹Weber, "Evangelical Egalitarianism" 77.

⁷²McQuilkin, "Problems of Normativeness" 230.

⁷³William J. Larkin, Jr., *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988) 316.

⁷⁴Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983) 1:120.

⁷⁵Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation* 410.

⁷⁶George W. Knight, III, "A Response to Problems of Normativeness in Scripture: Cultural Versus Permanent," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy and the Bible* 243.

⁷⁷Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation* 410-11.

⁷⁸McQuilkin, "Problems of Normativeness" 222.

⁷⁹Larkin, *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics* 315.

⁸⁰The importance, as well as the difficulty, of the question is seen in the many suggested methodologies. The cited references are just a sample of what is available: Bacchiocchi, *Women in the Church* 147; Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982) 66-68; Alan F. Johnson, "A Response to Problems of Normativeness in Scripture: Cultural Versus Permanent," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy and the Bible* 279-80; Kaiser, "Legitimate Hermeneutics" 142-44; Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation* 411-21; Larkin, *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics* 354-356; McQuilkin, "Problem of Normativeness" 230-36; Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral* 328-29; David M. Scholer, "Unseasonable Thoughts on the State of Biblical Hermeneutics: Reflections of a New Testament Exegete," *American Baptist Quarterly* 2 (June 1983) 139-40; R. C. Sproul, "Controversy at Culture Gap," *Eternity* (May 1976) 14-15, 40; Michael F. Stitzinger, "Cultural Confusion and the Role of Women in the Church: A Study of 1 Timothy 2:8-14," *Calvary Baptist Theological Journal* 4 (Fall 1988) 36-38; Terrance Tiessen, "Toward a Hermeneutic for Discerning Universal Moral Absolutes" *JETS* 36 (June 1993) 192-203; David P. Kuske, "What in Scripture is Universally Applicable and What is Historically Conditioned?" *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 91 (Spring 1994) 83-105.

⁸¹McQuilkin, "Problem of Normativeness," 230-36. Knight is in substantial agreement with McQuilkin ("Response to Problems of Normativeness" 243-253; idem, "From Hermeneutics to Practice: Scriptural Normativity and Culture, Revisited," *Presbyterian: Covenant Seminary Review* 12 [Fall 1986] 93-104). So is Larkin, *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics* 354-56).

⁸²Johnson, "Response to the Problems of Normativeness" 279-80. The cited article is a response to the list offered by McQuilkin. Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard state that their list shares important similarities with Johnson, but is by no means identical with it (*Biblical Interpretation* 411). For an evaluation of the two foundational methodologies, see Larkin, *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics* 114-25.

⁸³The preference of McQuilkin's list is not to reject wholesale the lists provided by others, especially Tiessen, "Toward a Hermeneutic,"

193-207; Larkin, *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics* 354-56; Kuske, "What in Scripture is Universally Applicable?" 99-105; and Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation* 411-21.

⁸⁴A caveat to this question would be to add the words "my understanding of," so that the question reads "Is my understanding of this specific teaching in conflict with other Biblical teaching?" (Knight, "Response to the Problems of Normativeness" 247).

⁸⁵For a complete discussion of this list, see McQuilkin, "Problem of Normativeness" 230-36.

⁸⁶David M. Scholer, "Contours of an Evangelical Feminist Hermeneutics," *Catalyst* 15 (April 1989) 4. See also: idem, "Feminist Hermeneutics" 413-17; idem, "Participation in the Issues of Women and Ministry in the New Testament," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 15 (1988) 103-4.

⁸⁷Scholer, "Feminist Hermeneutics and Evangelical Biblical Interpretation" 414.

⁸⁸Ibid. 415.

⁸⁹Ibid. 419.

⁹⁰Kassian, *Women, Creation, and the Fall* 144.

⁹¹Poythress, "Two Hermeneutical Tensions" 7.

⁹²The scope of this essay does not permit a consideration of other areas, such as the relationship between didactic and descriptive passages, Pauline use of the Old Testament, and the use of logic in understanding 1 Timothy 2:8-15.

Portraying Christian Femininity¹

Patricia A. Ennis

Chairperson, Professor of Home Economics,
The Master's College
Santa Clarita, California

Holding to a biblical view of femininity is quite unpopular in our contemporary society; it is frequently perceived as demeaning, inferior, and limiting. Regrettably, this attitude has now affected American evangelicalism so that the issue must be clarified by recovering a biblical worldview of femininity.

Femininity, by dictionary definition, means “having qualities or characteristics traditionally ascribed to women, as sensitivity, delicacy, or prettiness.”² According to Elisabeth Elliot, “That word ‘femininity’ is one that we don’t hear very often anymore. We’ve heard the word ‘feminist’ quite often in the last couple of decades, but we haven’t really heard much about the deep mystery that is called femininity. The word has fallen on hard times, partly because of stereotypes as opposed to archetypes.”³

She then offers several thoughts that place *femininity* in a Christian context:

To me, a lady is not frilly, flouncy, flippant, frivolous and fluff-brained, but she is gentle. She is gracious. She is godly and she is giving. . . .

You and I, if we are women, have the gift of femininity. Very often it is obscured, just as the image of God is obscured in all of us. . . .

I find myself in the sometimes quite uncomfortable position of having to belabor the obvious, and hold up examples of femininity to women who almost feel apologetic for being

feminine or being womanly. I would remind you that *femininity* is not a curse. It is not even a triviality. It is a gift, a divine gift, to be accepted with both hands, and to thank God for. Because remember, it was His idea. . . .

God’s gifts are masculinity and femininity within the human race and there was never meant to be any competition between them. The Russian philosopher Bergiath made this statement: “The idea of woman’s emancipation is based upon a profound enmity between the sexes, upon envy and imitation.”

The more womanly we are, the more manly men will be, and the more God is glorified. As I say to you women, “Be women. Be only women. Be real women in obedience to God.”⁴

Femininity’s contemporary downward spiral began in the early 1960s with the advent of Betty Friedan’s book, *The Feminine Mystique*.⁵ Friedan advocated that strong women pursue power that provided the path toward self-actualization and happiness. Her philosophy drew thousands of women into “the power trap” that eventually resulted in their cynical approach to life and disillusionment in their newfound freedom. Gloria Steinem perpetuated Friedan’s teachings in the 1970s, and moved the feminist agenda to middle-class suburban mothers. Eventually the trickle-down effect occurred and the feminist agenda infiltrated evangelicalism; today many women in mainline evangelical churches have

substituted the contemporary, cultural view of femininity for the biblical view. However, it was neither Friedan nor Steinem who authored the philosophy that power provides self-actualization and happiness; rather, it was Satan who first suggested this lie to Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:1-8) and prompted her to challenge God's command to refrain from eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:16-17).

The woman desiring to embrace *Christian* femininity begins with the presuppositions that God 1) created her in His own image (Gen 1:27) and 2) designed her to fulfill specific roles (Gen 2:18). John Piper and Wayne Grudem write:

The tendency today is to stress the equality of men and women by minimizing the unique significance of our maleness or femaleness. But this depreciation of male and female personhood is a great loss. It is taking a tremendous toll on generations of young men and women who do not know what it means to be a man or a woman. Confusion over the meaning of sexual personhood today is epidemic. The consequence of this confusion is not a free and happy harmony among gender-free persons relating on the basis of abstract competencies. The consequence rather, is more divorce, more homosexuality, more sexual abuse, more promiscuity, more emotional distress and suicide that come with the loss of God-given identity.⁶

Scripture is replete with directives that instruct the Christian woman to portray her femininity by helping (Gen 2:18), exhibiting graciousness (Proverbs 11:16), living a pure life (1 Pet 3:1-2), dressing modestly (1 Tim 2:9; 1 Pet 3:3), developing a gentle and quiet spirit (1 Pet 3:4), submitting to her husband (Eph 5:22), and teaching the younger women (Titus 2:3-5). Of all the Scriptures that teach on this subject, Proverbs 31:10-31 is the only one which presents a thorough literary sketch of the woman who portrays Christian femininity. Thus, it demands our attention for this study.

A Biblical Sketch of the Worthy Woman

Virtuous, trustworthy, energetic, physically fit, economical, unselfish, honorable, lovable, prepared, prudent, and God-fearing encompass eleven features highlighting the character of the worthy woman in Proverbs 31:10-31⁷. While many believe that the woman described in this passage is simply a fictional rather than a real woman whose life Christian women are challenged to emulate in principle, the divinely intended truth application cannot be doubted (2 Tim 3:16-17). The immutability (unalterableness) of God demands that Proverbs 31:10-31 timelessly relevant in principle. If one

thinks that God changed his mind about the chief application of one passage of Scripture, how then can we be sure that he has not changed his mind about others? J.I. Packer in *Knowing God* lists six attributes of God that are helpful to be reminded of prior to studying the eleven characteristics presented in the Proverbs 31 passage.⁸

1. God's life does not change.
2. God's character does not change.
3. God's truth does not change.
4. God's ways do not change.
5. God's purposes do not change.
6. God's Son does not change.

Since God does not change, then fellowship with him, trust in his Word, living by faith, and embracing his principles are the same for twenty-first century believers as they were for those in Old and New Testament times. The description of the godly woman in Proverbs 31:10-31 is not designed to develop an inferiority complex. Rather, it provides a biblical foundation for the development of principles by which Christian femininity can be portrayed. While the outward historical context and practice have changed since King Lemuel wrote that passage in the book of Proverbs, the character principles have not.

Learning from the Wisdom of Others

Biblical wisdom "is both religious and practical. Stemming from the fear of the Lord (Job 28:28; Ps 111:10; Proverbs 1:7; 9:10) it branches out to touch all of life, as the extended commentary on wisdom in Proverbs indicates. Wisdom takes insights gleaned from the knowledge of God's way and applies them in the daily walk."⁹

Scripture provides the basis for wise instruction (2 Tim 3:16-17). Paul, in 1 Corinthians 10:6, reminds believers "now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did." Titus 2:4-5 instructs the older women to "train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled."

The MacArthur Study Bible introduces the book of "Proverbs" by stating,

The proverbs are short, pithy sayings which express timeless truth and wisdom. They arrest one's thoughts, causing the reader to reflect on how one might apply divine principles to life situations. . . . To the Hebrew mind, wisdom was not knowledge alone, but the skill of living a godly life as God intended man to live.¹⁰

Essential to becoming a worthy woman is the personal appropriation of biblical principles that motivate one's decisions and actions. *Principle* can be described as "an accepted or professed rule of action or conduct."¹¹ Reflecting upon the question, "What are my specific abilities, heritage, and talents that make me unique and determine my professed rules of action or conduct?" can motivate the manner in which the principles are obeyed. Their implementation ultimately determines the character of a woman and whether she is considered wise or foolish; thus, the worthy woman possesses an open heart to learning from the experience and wisdom of others, including the woman of Proverbs 31, who exhibits at least eleven principles by which to live a godly life.

Being Virtuous

An excellent wife who can find?
She is far more precious than jewels.
—Proverbs 31:10

Moral excellence, right actions, and thinking that is true, worthy, just, pure, lovely, of good report, possessing virtue, and praiseworthy (Phil 4:8-9) characterize the principle of being virtuous. Virtue is an effective power and force that should permeate all thoughts, actions, and relationships of the worthy woman. When integrated into her life, the principle generates power and demands respect.

The worthy woman establishes godly guidelines for living according to the Scriptures and purposes, through the strength of the Holy Spirit, to abide by them (Phil 4:13). The Old Testament book of Ruth describes such a woman. Ruth 3:11 is the only scriptural reference to a "virtuous" woman (KJV, NKJV, NIV; ESV "worthy") and explains that Boaz knew of Ruth because of her reputation for excellence. In contrast, Rahab's reputation as a harlot followed her throughout the Scriptures (Josh 2:1; 6:17; Heb 11:31; Jas 2:25). Though God saved Rahab and by His grace allowed her to be included in the Messianic line (Matt 1:5), her reputation as a harlot lingered.

The worthy woman is a crown to her husband. A woman lacking in virtue causes him shame and produces suffering that is like a painful, incurable condition (Proverbs 12:4). A woman's character prior to marriage will determine her quality as a marital spouse—thus underscoring the importance for every Christian woman to embrace virtue at an early age. To live a life characterized by virtue should be the ambition of every Christian woman (Matt 5:8).

Being Trustworthy

The heart of her husband trusts in her,
and he will have no lack of gain.
She does him good, and not harm,

all the days of her life.
Her husband is known in the gates
when he sits among the elders of the land.
—Proverbs 31:11-12, 23

The principle of being *trustworthy* is demonstrated by behaviors that lead to confidence in the honesty, integrity, reliability, justice, and loyalty of an individual. Integrity, i.e. the quality or state of being complete (Col 2:10), is demonstrated through how one handles abundance, because prosperity tends to reveal our value system (1 Cor 10:1-10).

The character of the worthy woman motivates her husband to respond with trust (Proverbs 31:11). This trustworthy lifestyle includes the nurturing of security, love, service, limits, freedom, enjoyment, faith, and encouragement. Her husband and those under her leadership are challenged to reach their full potential (Proverbs 18:22; 19:14). She understands that she has the ability to feed or starve their character and thus handles this privilege through the strength of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:16-26).

The worthy woman can live in today's world with or without a husband. As she 1) implements Psalms 37:3-4, Proverbs 3:5-6, and Jeremiah 29:11-13, 2) trusts in her Heavenly Father, and 3) affirms that he is a sun and shield, that he gives her grace and glory, and that there is no good thing that he withholds from those who walk uprightly (Ps 84:11). If married, her husband's response to her character is trust. If unmarried, trustworthiness is the evaluation of those closest to her.

The fruit of trustworthiness is an understanding, encouraging, sympathetic, and tactful spirit. A trustworthy woman has the ability to retain another's confidence (Proverbs 10:19), and possesses stability in her life, based upon a growing relationship with the Lord rather than circumstances (Jas 1:5-6). She also has the ability to resist temptation and exhibits dependability (1 Cor 10:12-13).

Being Energetic

She seeks wool and flax,
and works with willing hands.
She is like the ships of the merchant;
she brings her food from afar.
She rises while it is yet night and provides food
for her household
and portions for her maidens.
She considers a field and buys it;
with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.
She perceives that her merchandise is profitable.
Her lamp does not go out at night.
She makes linen garments and sells them;
she delivers sashes to the merchant.
She looks well to the ways of her household

and does not eat the bread of idleness.

—Proverbs 31:13-16, 18, 24, 27

Being energetic suggests that strength or power is efficiently exerted. A worthy woman knows her assets and liabilities, develops her talents, exhibits the attributes of being alert and aware, and is a worker, not a shirker. She works willingly with her hands (the word *hands* is used 10 times in the 22 verses of Proverbs 31:10-31).

This worthy woman sets an example for her children by her personal and physical involvement in the management of her home. In the context of Proverbs 31, she trained her servants and then supervised the tasks they performed. She was actively involved in her well-managed household (31:27), fabric and garment construction (31:13-24), trading in the marketplace (31:24), and ministry to others (31:19-20). Application to the twenty-first century would find the worthy woman training her children and then supervising them to efficiently use today's many "electrical servants." Concurrently, she is involved in Christian services that complement those of her children, rather than neglecting them to perform "her ministries." Her role model is Christ (Phil 2:5-11), who cares much more about those under Him than they care about Him.

Most twenty-first century women can identify with their "lamp not going out at night" because of the intense schedules they maintain. However, this verse does not suggest that the worthy woman deprives herself of sleep. Just as exercise contributes to a physically fit body, so sleep is necessary to an energetic woman's mental, spiritual, and physical well-being.

Being Physically Fit

She dresses herself with strength
and makes her arms strong.

—Proverbs 31:17

Physical fitness, i.e. being in good physical condition and healthy, is enthusiastically affirmed by many twenty-first century women. The biblical application is defined by three words . . . suitable, proper, and fit. They describe the worthy woman's attitude toward the condition of her body. A concern for what is *suitable* guides the worthy woman in the selection of physical toning activities that prepare her to fulfill the demands of her life. A concern for what is *proper* encourages her to select activities that are dictated by good judgment. A concern for what is *fit* expands the definition to challenge her to possess the qualifications necessary to meet the purposes, circumstances, and demands of her life.

First Timothy 4:8 directs wise women to the truth that "for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and

also for the life to come." The worthy woman will be more concerned about the highest priority of her character without neglecting her body tone (1 Pet 3:3-6). The following guidelines addressing her attitude toward her body will help balance the physical and spiritual sides of fitness.

First, she has a realistic attitude towards personal capabilities. God provides health parameters to assist us in being sensible about the responsibilities we assume. Just because a woman *can* perform a skill does not mean that she *should*. Purposely pushing beyond safe health parameters would be like a woman jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge and then praying on the way down that she won't get hurt! This would be sinfully presumptuous.

Second, the worthy woman acknowledges that her body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and that it is her responsibility to make it a fit dwelling place for Him (1 Cor 6:19-20). It is a sobering thought to acknowledge that the Holy Spirit will not empower a spiritually dirty vessel.

Third, she realizes that she must be healthy to perform her duties efficiently. Cultivating this quality requires the freedom from all habits that would injure her physically, mentally, or spiritually (Rom 12:1-2).

Fourth, she understands the importance of recreation to maintain a healthy body. Mark 6:31 and Luke 9:10 describe our Lord's sensitivity to his disciples' need for rest and privacy from their demanding ministry. The worthy woman will adopt our Lord's model.

Fifth, she accepts the fact that, sometimes "others can, she cannot." It is an exercise in futility to compare her capabilities with those of others, since each woman is "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps 139:14).

Finally, the worthy woman has a clear perspective regarding her body cycling. She wisely accommodates to its ebb and flow. The circumspect physical conditioning of the worthy woman allows her to be involved in the lives of others. She will balance the care of her home with the care of her body to avoid becoming a worried, frazzled, and defensive woman who sacrifices herself on the altar of domesticity or physical fitness.

Being Economical

She perceives that her merchandise is profitable.
—Proverbs 31:18A

Budget and *diet* are two words that conjure up visions of economic and nutritional deprivation. Each word, however, possesses a positive and negative connotation. A budget can be established for either a high or low income. A diet can

constitute an unlimited or restrictive daily caloric intake. The principle of being economical challenges the worthy woman to refrain from wasting time, money, fuel, or any other resource. Implementation of the principle ensures that she operates her home on a budget (a plan for spending) and that it balances each month (not too much month at the end of the money).

The worthy woman of Proverbs 31 perceives that money involves stewardship. As an accomplished seamstress and nutritionist, she recognizes quality. With a practiced eye, she seeks out a bargain that reflects excellence. Concurrently, her knowledge and skill allow her to make the appropriate decision of whether to make the purchase, pay for the service, or personally perform the task.

Being Unselfish

She puts her hands to the distaff,
and her hands hold the spindle.
She opens her hand to the poor
and reaches out her hands to the needy.
—Proverbs 31:19-20

Selfishness is a trait that the worthy woman seeks to eliminate from the list of her character qualities. By definition it means having such regard for one's own interests and advantage that the happiness and welfare of others become of less concern than is appropriate. Selfishness stems from pride and is first in the list of sins most detested by God (Proverbs 6:16-19). Taken to extremes, it can be deadly.

The body of an ancient woman mummified by the volcanic ashes of Mount Vesuvius was unearthed when the Roman City of Pompeii was excavated. Her feet pointed toward the city gate, but her outreached arms and fingers were straining for something that lay behind her. The treasure for which she was grasping was a bag of pearls. Of her it was written, "Though death was hard at her heels, and life was beckoning to her beyond the city gates, she could not shake off their spell . . . but it was not the eruption of Vesuvius that made her love pearls more than life. It only froze her in this attitude of greed."¹² Her position told a tragic story of selfishness.

Anything can fuel the flames of excessive desire and greed. If not checked, they can destroy women (Proverbs 1:19). The wealthy landowners in Isaiah's day acquired more and more houses and fields until they had a monopoly (Isa 5:8). But God said that they would become desolate and their lands would not produce (vv. 9-10). Wise is the woman who lives by the principle that if she is not satisfied with what she has, she will never be satisfied with what she wants.

Several characteristics describe the worthy woman's attitude toward money and material possessions. All resources are a gift from the Lord to be utilized with discretion (Deut

8:18; Acts 4:32-37; 1 Tim 6:17-19). God does not love the poor and hate the rich. The Bible reports a number of godly individuals who were exceedingly wealthy—Job, Abraham, Joseph, David, Solomon, Josiah, Barnabas, Philemon, and Lydia—to name a few. God does, however, hate false gain (Proverbs 1:19), wrong motives for acquiring wealth (Proverbs 13:11), and a lack of compassionate generosity among the wealthy (Proverbs 14:20-21; 16:19). The wise woman applies the truth of Proverbs 19:17, "Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed."

The worthy woman possesses an attitude of contentment that corresponds with the New Testament teaching found in 1 Timothy 6:6-8 which essentially means that *Godliness + Contentment = Great Gain!* Evidence that wealth is not the source of her contentment is found in her attitude of humility patterned after her Lord (Phil 2:8; 1 Pet 5:5). She does not trust in her wealth for security (Ps 20:7; Proverbs 11:28), and is a gracious (Proverbs 11:16), generous woman (Proverbs 31:19-20).

The worthy woman exhibits an absence of selfish attributes. She is not too busy with her own affairs to take time to assist others. The spindle and distaff—two flat, circular objects used to work textile fibers—were tools of the day. The worthy woman used them to provide for her family, herself, and the less fortunate. That "she opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy" indicates her response to calls for help (Proverbs 31:20). Her actions demonstrate both responsiveness and initiative; she gives when she is asked and is sensitive to offer assistance when she is not asked. Embracing a spiritual attitude toward helping, the worthy woman is like Dorcas, who was "full of good works and acts of charity" (Acts 9:36).

Unselfishness is most graphically demonstrated in the worthy woman's willingness to share her time with others. Time is our most precious commodity, and the highest compliment that can be paid to another is the time we share with them. This woman is not a respecter of persons (Jas 2:1-13) but rather is willing to place before the Lord the requests of all who desire to benefit from her wisdom.

Being Prepared

She is not afraid of snow for her household,
for all her household are clothed in scarlet.
She makes bed coverings for herself;
her clothing is fine linen and purple.
She looks well to the ways of her household
and does not eat the bread of idleness.
—Proverbs 31:21-22, 27

Putting events, objects or people in order, as well as *making suitable and receptive* are phrases that describe the principle of preparedness in action. The worthy woman

demonstrates planning and foresight that equip her for unforeseen circumstances. She acquires adequate provisions for unknown needs rather than living from crisis to crisis. Concurrent with physical provisions this worthy woman knows the value of being spiritually prepared. Similar to saving a percentage of each paycheck, she builds a spiritual reserve for challenging times. The prophet Jeremiah refers to the woman who trusts in the Lord as being prepared in that she will be “like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit.” (Jer 17:7-8). The heat will come and the drought is certain; however, there is no fear when one is prepared.

Her firm grip on spiritual priorities allows her to be prepared for the future. Charles Hummel urges his readers to evaluate their priorities daily:

Sometime ago, Simba bullets killed a young man, Dr. Paul Carlson. In the providence of God his life’s work was finished. Most of us will live longer and die more quietly, but when the end comes, what would give us greater joy than being sure that we have finished the work that *God* gave us to do? The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ makes this fulfillment possible. He has promised deliverance from sin and the power to serve God in the tasks of His choice. The way is clear. If we continue in the world of our Lord, we are truly his disciples. And he will free us from the tyranny of the urgent, free us to do the important, which is the will of God.¹³

The worthy woman will refuse to allow the urgent to take the place of the important in her life.

Being Honorable

Strength and dignity are her clothing,
and she laughs at the time to come.
—Proverbs 31:25

Being *honorable* is synonymous with having *integrity* and is evidenced by others’ high regard or respect for the worthy woman. She possesses a keen sense of right or wrong, and her moral uprightness is apparent to all. Several attributes will emerge as the worthy woman assimilates this principle into her life:

- Her outer adorning complements her inward qualities (1 Pet 3:3-4).
- She abstains from every appearance of evil (1 Thess 5:22).

- She possesses strong convictions of right and wrong (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25; Matt 7:13-14).
- The convictions she embraces are based upon biblical principles (Ps 119:11, 105) rather than cultural trends.

If married, the worthy woman’s high standards of behavior make a significant contribution to her husband’s position (Proverbs 12:4; 18:22; 19:14; 31:23). She functions as a helpmate (Gen 2:18) and purposes to never be an embarrassment or a hindrance to her husband.

The worthy woman acquires a stable, honest reputation. Strength and honor accompany her business acumen (Proverbs 31:25). Desiring to walk worthy of her calling (Eph 4:1-2), she leads a life that brings glory to God (1 Cor 10:31). Humility, unselfishness, gentleness, mildness, patience, bearing with others, and making allowances for others are characteristic of her godly posture.

The honorable woman has control of her body—it is presented as a living sacrifice to the Lord (Rom 12:1-2). She refuses to yield her body as an instrument to sin (Rom 6:12-13) and acknowledges that her body belongs to Christ (1 Cor 6:15). Realizing that her body is a temple literally inhabited by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:15), she chooses to glorify God in her body (1 Cor 6:20). She becomes a student of her body so that she knows how to control it in honor (1 Thess 4:4) and understands the need for accountability to the body of Christ to maintain her purity (Gal 6:1-2; Jas 5:19-20).

Being Prudent

She opens her mouth with wisdom,
and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.
—Proverbs 31:26

Mothers frequently remind their children, “If you can’t say something nice, don’t say anything at all!” James 3:2, 6 teaches us that “. . . we all stumble in many ways, and if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man able also to bridle his whole body. So also the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, straining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell!” The principle of prudence, i.e. connoting wisdom and careful consideration of consequences, specifically addresses the use of her tongue. Miriam, Moses’ sister, serves as a graphic illustration of the impact of a sharp, complaining tongue (Num 12:1-15). The entire nation of Israel was delayed for seven days because she chose to use her tongue in an inappropriate manner.

The worthy woman’s speech exhibits good judgment and discretion (Col 4:6). Rather than being too aggressive or domineering, gentleness (Proverbs 15:1) and compassion

characterize her words (Proverbs 25:1). She possesses the ability to be kind, yet very firm, as well as the ability to maintain confidences (Proverbs 11:13). Truthfulness is evident in her relationships with others (Eph 4:15), and she realizes that what she meditates upon will emerge in her speech (Ps 19:14; Luke 6:45). Within her family relationships, she refuses to defame her husband's character and speaks with firmness, balanced with kindness and gentleness to her children. Prior to speaking she asks herself questions that insure the attitude of Proverbs 31:26 ("she opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue") will characterize her conversations. She inquires:

- Is it kind?
- Is it necessary?
- Is it true?
- Is it gossip?
- Am I defending my own opinion rather than listening to the individual?

Having implemented these criteria for her speech, the worthy woman chooses to make encouragement a part of her lifestyle because it is a spiritual mandate (Heb 10:25). An act of encouragement inspires others with renewed courage, spirit, and hope. It affirms individuals for who they are rather than what they do. Proverbs 25:11 teaches the value of appropriate words. A myriad of actions can provide encouragement to others, including:

- Bestowing notes and small gifts at unexpected times.
- Commenting on desirable character qualities (punctuality, good attitude, tolerance, etc.).
- Calling with specific, encouragement-oriented purposes.
- Affirming a job well done.
- Supporting someone who is hurting.
- Choosing to use confrontation in the appropriate manner (Matt 18:15-19) rather than as a Christian way of "telling someone off."

The worthy woman cultivates a positive, reassuring attitude, knowing that encouragement does not thrive in a negative atmosphere. She realizes that developing this character quality takes time and does not anticipate repayment (Luke 6:30-31; 1 Tim 6:17-19).

Being Loving

Her children rise up and call her blessed;
her husband also, and he praises her;
Many women have done excellently,
but you surpass them all.
—Proverbs 31:28-29

The sense of benevolence that one should possess for another person involves an intense love for others, including one's husband, children, friends, and relations, plus a steadfast commitment to God. She demonstrates a strong liking for others and purposes to activate the Titus 2:3-5 principle of the "younger women learning from the older women" in her life. The worthy woman is approachable by others and refuses to be a "respector of persons" (Jas 2:1-13).

That the worthy woman first concentrated her domestic efforts on those in her own home is demonstrated by their response to her. Her husband and children spontaneously cheer her (Proverbs 31:27-29). Every day, when they open their eyes, they rejoice that she belongs to them. She chooses to live a consistent life as a wife and mother.

Having made her home her priority, the worthy woman works creatively with her husband (Amos 3:3; Eph 5:22-24; Col 3:18; 1 Pet 3:1-6). She knows him well enough to respect and honor him (Eph 5:33b), as well as to be his helpmate and friend (Gen 2:18). Training her children well by implementing child-rearing principles based on the Word of God (Deut 6:6-7; 11:18-21; Ps 78:1-4; Proverbs 22:6; Eph 6:4; Col 3:21; 2 Tm 3:14-17) is the focus of her life while her children are at home. Finally, she sets an example for the character qualities that she wishes to instill in the lives of her children, realizing that they will assimilate the behaviors she models (1 Cor 11:1; Eph 5:1-2).

Fearing God

Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain,
but a woman who fears the Lord,
is to be praised.
—Proverbs 31:30

Fearing God denotes a reverential trust in God, including the hatred of evil. Romans 12:9 challenges the worthy woman to "abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good." She assimilates a true perspective of values based on the Word of God. The woman embracing the principle of God-fearing will stand in awe, venerate, worship, and love her Lord with all her heart (Matt 22:37). The practical application of the godly lifestyle will include an individual hunger and thirst after God (Ps 42:1-2a), an attitude of submission to God's will and ways (Jas 4:7), and a consistent evaluation of her spiritual status (1 Cor 11:31-32). She purposes to make spiritual principles a priority in her life (Matt 6:33) and refuses to slump

into a tired routine regarding her relationship with her Christ. The joy of the Lord is her strength (Neh 8:10b).

Exercising 1 Corinthians 10 as a warning, the worthy woman acknowledges the traps that the ancient Hebrews fell into regarding their spiritual condition. They craved evil things (v.6), were idolatrous (v.7), began practicing immorality (v.8), became guilty of presumption (v.9), and were cynical and negative (v.10). In the midst of God's best blessings, they became cool, distant, and indifferent. Not suddenly, but slowly, the keen edge of enthusiasm became dull. Applying the wisdom of 1 Corinthians 10:12-13, she is careful to learn from the example of the disobedient and indolent Jews in Moses' time.

The Reward

Give her of the fruit of her hands,
and let her own works praise her in the gates.
—Proverbs 31:31

The reward of cultivating these eleven principles is presented in Proverbs 31:31 as the worthy woman receives recognition "in the gates," which refers to the public assembly of people. The worthy woman does not have to brag about herself but, rather, is praised by those who know her best. The woman who chooses to embrace the principles found in Proverbs 31 is usually rewarded in this life and always in the hereafter. A review of these principles suggests some representative, potential benefits that the worthy woman might anticipate:

Being Virtuous

- An unobstructed relationship with her Heavenly Father (Matt 5:8).
- Blessing from the Lord and righteousness from the God of her salvation (Ps 24:1-5).
- The assurance that her influence will never die (Proverbs 31:28, 2 Tim 1:3-7).

Being Trustworthy

- That her husband trusts her (Proverbs 31:11).
- An honorable reputation (Proverbs 31:25).
- The confidence that as she walks uprightly her Heavenly Father will provide grace, glory, and all that is good for her (Ps 84:11).

Being Energetic

- The family benefits from her home business (Proverbs 31:24).
- Enjoying professional and spiritual stimulation (Proverbs 27:17).
- Exemption from reaping the fruit of slothfulness (Proverbs 19:15).

Being Physically Fit

- Enjoying the tasks she undertakes to their fullest potential (Col 3:23).
- That her body is an appropriate dwelling place for the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19-20).
- Avoiding the type of judgment and denouncement God executed on the women of Judah (Isa 3:16-26).

Being Economical

- Embracing a spiritual attitude toward money and material possessions (1 Tim 6:6-10).
- Experiencing the joy of generosity (2 Cor 9:6-8).
- Perceiving that her purchases are sound choices—no guilt (Proverbs 31:18).

Being Unselfish

- The joy of giving to others with the right attitude (2 Cor 9:7).
- Being pleasing to the Lord (Proverbs 19:17).
- Enjoying the fruit of giving to others (Acts 9:36-42).

Being Prepared

- Meeting the design of God's plan for her life (Jer 17:7-8).
- Being an authentic role model for others (1 Cor 11:1).
- A lack of frustration and regret (Matt 25:21, 23).

Being Honorable

- That her moral integrity allows her to reflect fulfillment in later life, rather than a wasted life filled with remorse and sin (2 Cor 9:6; Gal 6:7-9).
- Behaving in a way that reflects her position as a daughter in God's royal family (Gen 1:26-27).
- A confidence that her convictions are based upon biblical principles rather than cultural trends (Ps 119:11, 105).

Being Prudent

- That people are willing to confide in her and trust her to retain their confidences (Proverbs 15:1-2).
- That people will seek and follow her advice (Col 4:6).
- The privilege of encouraging and affirming others (Heb 10:24-25).

Being Loving

- Enjoying a healthy, growing, love relationship with the Lord (Matt 22:37).
- That her closest individuals love, honor, respect, and praise her (Proverbs 31:28-29).
- Living in such a way that she is an example for the "younger women" (Titus 2:3-5).

Fearing God

- Being a positive role model because of her faith (the epistle of James in action).
- Continuing as a faithful servant (Matt 25:21).
- Enjoying the benefits of learning from the experiences of others (1 Cor 10).

Realizing that her motive for cultivating these eleven principles is to glorify God (1 Cor 10:31), to hear her Heavenly Father say, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt 25:21), and to cast her rewards at the feet of her King (Rev 4:10-11), the worthy woman pursues the eternal crown with vigor!

A Final Thought

The conviction of this chapter is that original role

differentiations in the home can be biblically traced back to the standards in Eden before sin interrupted marital relationships (Gen 2:7-23). The original, specific roles for male and female were corrupted, not created, by the Fall. Genesis 2:18 reports God's final act of creation was the woman, to be a "helper fit for him" (literally, a "helper like man"). John MacArthur states that,

When God saw His creation as very good (1:31), He viewed it as being to that point the perfect outcome to His creative plan. However, in observing man's state as not good, He was commenting on his incompleteness before the end of the sixth day because the woman, Adam's counterpart, had not yet been created. The words of this verse emphasize man's need for a companion, a helper, and an equal. He was incomplete without someone to complement him in fulfilling the task of filling, multiplying, and taking dominion over the earth. This points to Adam's inadequacy, not Eve's insufficiency (cf. 1 Cor 11:9). Woman was made by God to meet man's deficiency (cf. 1 Tim. 2:14).¹⁴

The woman portraying Christian femininity embraces the truth of Genesis 1-2 and Proverbs 31:10-31, behaves in harmony with God's will, and glorifies God with her mind and life. She distinctly possesses a biblical worldview of her femininity. ■

¹ This article was originally published as chapter nine ("Portraying Christian Femininity") in *Think Biblically! Recovering A Christian Worldview*, ed. John MacArthur (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003) 169-186. Used by permission. Some of the material in this article has been adapted from Patricia Ennis and Lisa Tatlock, *Becoming a Woman Who Pleases God: A Guide to Developing Your Biblical Potential* (Chicago: Moody, 2003).

² *Random House Webster's College Dictionary*, s.v. "femininity."

³ Elisabeth Elliot, "The Gift of Femininity" <http://www.backtothebible.org/gateway/today/18731>, (October 6, 1998).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York, NY: Dell, 1963).

⁶ John Piper and Wayne Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991) 33.

⁷ See Ennis and Tatlock, *Recovering the Christian Woman's Home* for further elaboration.

⁸ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1973) 68-72.

⁹ *The New Bible Dictionary* (1962), s.v. "wisdom."

¹⁰ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible* (Nashville: Word, 1997) 877.

¹¹ *Random House*, s.v. "principle."

¹² Clovis Chappell, *Feminine Faces: Sermons on Women of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974) 21.

¹³ Charles Hummel, *Tyranny of the Urgent* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1967) 12-15.

¹⁴ MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible* 19.

Is God Wild at Heart?

A Review of John Eldredge's *Wild at Heart*

Randy Stinson

*Executive Director,
Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood
Louisville, Kentucky*

Whenever a book written for men (notoriously known for their lack of interest in reading) sells 500,000 copies, you can be sure that it has made a clear connection. There is a lot that is right with John Eldredge's *Wild at Heart*, and with his compelling style of writing it is no surprise that thousands of men all over the country have been drawn to it. Eldredge has called attention to some problems with which most men seem to intuitively resonate:

1. Our culture (and even our churches) has adopted a strategy that facilitates the feminization of men.
2. Masculinity, with its predilection to adventure, rowdiness, and risk has become a condition to be cured.
3. Consequently, boys are in big trouble. School systems and churches have not taken the unique features of masculinity into consideration when designing curriculum or programs.
4. Our culture, intent on emasculating its boys, has produced a huge sense of withdrawal and boredom from its men.
5. As disconcerting as it may be to mothers everywhere, masculinity can only be imparted by masculinity. In other words, a young boy is never really sure he has become a man until another man, or group of men, tells him so.

6. Sadly, many, if not most, men have abdicated this responsibility.

7. Every man needs a battle for which he can live and die.

Eldredge clearly knows how to write to men and by the testimonies of many, he has achieved one of his objectives, which is to give men permission to be men. With all of the good insights Eldredge offers in this book, it is actually a little painful to mention two of what should be considered very significant problems which undermine the entire book.

Problem One: An Unbiblical View of God

The first problem is that Eldredge appeals to a wrong view of God as his foundation for masculinity. Part of the thesis of *Wild at Heart* is that men have a battle to fight, an adventure to live, and a beauty to fight for. The problem occurs when he tries to project these activities onto the life of God. In the words of the title for chapter two, God is "the wild one in whose image we are made." Eldredge's description of God and his "adventure" leave the reader with a confusing and unbiblical picture of God. For him, men are risk-takers and adventure-seekers at heart because God is a risk-taker and adventure-seeker. He claims,

In an attempt to secure the sovereignty of God, theologians have overstated their case and left us with a chess-player God playing both sides of the board, making all his moves and all ours too. But

clearly, this is not so. God is a person who takes immense risks. No doubt the biggest risk of all was when he gave angels and men free will, including the freedom to reject him—not just once but every single day . . . there is something much more risky here than we are often willing to admit. (30)

He goes on to say,

[God] did not make Adam and Eve obey him. He took a risk. A staggering risk, with staggering consequences. He let others into his story, and he lets their choices shape it profoundly. (31)

It's not the nature of God to limit his risks and cover his bases. (31)

God's relationship with us and with our world is just that: a relationship. As with every relationship, there's a certain amount of unpredictability, and the ever-present likelihood that you'll get hurt . . . God's willingness to risk is just astounding—far beyond what any of us would do were we in his position. (32)

While one can appreciate Eldredge's desire to root his understanding of men in the character and nature of God, these statements do not portray God in the same way that the Bible portrays him which leaves Eldredge's understanding of manhood fundamentally flawed. The Bible depicts God as knowing the beginning from the end. He is aware of our thoughts before we say them. He knew all about us before we were formed in secret in our mother's womb. He removes kings and establishes kings. He holds the heart of the king in his hand. He is the potter and we are the clay.

In fact, the view of God that Eldredge proposes does not inspire my risk-taking, adventuresome inclinations, but quite frankly, it demotivates me. I am willing to take risks, not because God takes them too, but because I am confident that he knows no uncertainty. I engage in spite of my lack of knowledge, not because God shares my plight, but because he knows everything. I press on in spite of my powerlessness, not because God has limited himself, but because his power is unlimited. If God takes risks (which requires he is uncertain of the outcome) then I am left with a sense of hopelessness. If he doesn't know then who does?

For those familiar with the current debate over what is sometimes called open theism, Eldredge explicitly states that he is not advocating this position. But this is even more problematic. If he is familiar with the debate, and he is not an open theist, then why would he use language that is so closely tied to that position?

Based on the language that Eldredge uses, there are several problems. First, the sovereignty of God is placed in subjection to man's freedom. It is a man-centered model that develops a picture of God based on a particular understanding of human relationships. The best approach would be to begin with the nature of God as revealed in Scripture. Second, if God is taking risks, there are no assurances that God's purposes will actually be accomplished. If God is uncertain about how his creatures will respond, then how can we really be guaranteed that he will be ultimately victorious over evil in the end? Third, if Eldredge is correct, there is a diminishment of the power of God since there is no certainty regarding the outcome of his "risky" decision to create. God's power would seem to be limited to his creation's willingness to cooperate. The biblical view of God's omnipotence, his ability to bring about his will, shows that God is not subject to or dependant upon his creatures (Is 14:24-27; Matt 19:26; Eph 1:11; Luke 1:37).

A biblical view of manhood should be connected to the roles and responsibilities assigned in Scripture. Why not just argue that while God has made men and women in his image, he has also given them particular roles and functions that correspond to their gender? This can be easily seen in the warp and woof of Scripture where men are consistently called upon to lead and protect. They are called upon to fight and defend. In the contexts of homes and the community of faith, they are given the responsibility of headship and oversight. In cases where men like Moses or Abraham faltered in their courage or faith, they hear from the God of the universe that He will bring about his plan. He is in control. This is where they place their confidence. This is the point from which they draw their strength.

Problem Two: An Unbiblical View of the Believer

The second problem is that Eldredge, in his effort to encourage men to follow their heart in these matters of masculinity, has given a false view of the condition of the heart of the believer. His line of thinking can be seen in what follows:

Too many Christians today are living back in the old covenant. They've had Jeremiah 17:9 drilled into them and they walk around believing my heart is deceitfully wicked. Not anymore it's not. Read the rest of the book. In Jeremiah 31:33, God announces the cure for all that: 'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.' I will give you a new heart. That's why Paul says in Romans 2:29, 'No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly, and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit.' Sin is not the deepest thing

about you. You have a new heart. Did you hear me? Your heart is *good*. (133, Italics his)

Later in the book, he takes up this topic again. He says,

To put it bluntly, your flesh is a weasel, a poser, and a selfish pig. And your flesh is *not you*. (Italics his) Did you know that? Your flesh is not the real you. When Paul gives us his famous passage on what it's like to struggle with sin (Rom 7), he tells a story we are all too familiar with . . . (144)

After quoting part of Romans 7 from *The Message*, he picks up the discussion once again:

Okay, we've all been there many times. But what Paul concludes is just astounding: 'I am not really the one doing it; the sin within me is doing it' (Rom 7:20 NLT). Did you notice the distinction he makes? Paul says, 'Hey, I know I struggle with sin. But I also know that *my sin is not me* (italics his)—this is not my true heart.' You are not your sin; sin is no longer the truest thing about the man who has come into union with Jesus. Your heart is good. 'I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you . . .' (Ezek. 36:26). The Big Lie in the church today is that you are nothing more than 'a sinner saved by grace.' You are a lot more than that. You are a new creation in Christ. The New Testament calls you a saint, a holy one, a son of God. In the core of your being you are a good man. Yes, there is a war within us, but it is a civil war. The battle is not between us and God; no, there is a traitor within who wars against the true heart fighting alongside the Spirit of God in us. . . . (144)

These descriptions of the life and heart of the believer drastically misconstrue or overstate the principles behind the doctrines of justification and sanctification. First, to say that the heart of the believer is "good" is not even biblical language. Eldredge makes a jump from the Bible's use of terms like "saint" and "child of God" to the conclusion that the heart must, in its converted state, be good. The Bible never uses language like this to describe the heart of the believer. Eldredge has confused the biblical concept of newness with complete goodness. Descriptions in the Bible such as the old passing away to make way for the new, being born again, being a new creature, and receiving a new heart are certainly helpful and instructive when trying to understand the life of the believer. There is definitely something new and the beginning of something good. But our confidence is not in the idea of goodness, but in God who started the good work. This is why Paul said to the Philippians, "being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." (Phil. 1:6) However, glaringly absent from Scripture is the kind of

goodness to which Eldredge seems to allude. The Bible describes the act of justification as a declaration of righteousness upon a heart that is not righteous. In fact, this is at the heart of the Christian message. The righteousness of the believer is not his own, but is the righteousness of Christ. So contrary to Eldredge, here is the Big Truth in church today: We are merely sinners saved by grace!

Not only does Eldredge confuse the doctrine of justification, but he also misrepresents the doctrine of sanctification. Once we are justified by faith in Christ, the indwelling Holy Spirit begins to conform us into the image of the One through whom we were justified. Eldredge's explanation that "my sin is not me" only adds to the confusion he began. If it is not you, then who is it? In fact, the Bible, when describing the battle regarding the flesh, typically uses the word "flesh" to describe the unified actions of the physical body along with the emotions, mind, and will. The problem here is not one of passivity (it is not the real me) but one of activity (it really is me), emphasizing our own complicity in the sin that we committed. Only now, through the Holy Spirit, I am able to overcome these sinful inclinations of my flesh. This is not about whether or not my heart is good but about whether or not I will yield to the Holy Spirit (made possible by the new life in Christ) in these various battles with the flesh.

The distortion of these crucial categories has produced an unbiblical and confusing approach to the Christian life. Men do not need to sense confusion over their identity in Christ and how their sin impacts their decisions and inclinations. The overtones of this book to follow your new and good heart only help to create the "false self" that Eldredge is so intent on destroying. What men need is a clear picture of who God is and the truth about their own sinful tendencies as they attempt to follow him. What they need to know is that their regenerated heart still has an inclination to sin, but they can overcome their inclinations to sin by the power of the Holy Spirit who indwells them. They do not need to place confidence in their "good" heart but in the God of the Bible who is not taking risks, wringing his hands, or waiting to see how all of this turns out.

Eldredge has some good things to say to men today, but coupling these good things with an unbiblical view of God and the believer in Christ, deals a blow to the entire book from which it cannot recover. ■

Saved in Childbearing? God's High Calling for Mothers

(1 Timothy 2:9-15)

David E. Prince

Senior Pastor,
Ashland Avenue Baptist Church
Lexington, Kentucky

Editor's Note: The following sermon was preached by David Prince at Raleigh Avenue Baptist Church in Homewood, Alabama, on May 11, 2003.

⁹In like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing,¹⁰ but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works. ¹¹Let a woman learn in silence with all submission.

¹²And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.

¹³For Adam was formed first, then Eve. ¹⁴And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.

¹⁵Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control

(1 Timothy 2:9-15, NKJV).

One of the things I always say in premarital counseling concerning God's design for marriage roles is this: "You have been affected by cultural feminism, and there are certain ways in which you think like a feminist. Whether you are the man or woman is of no import; everyone has been affected by cultural feminism, and to some degree, we all think like feminists." In saying this, I tend to see what I just saw from many of you—a look of surprise or incredulity and even a tinge of outrage. We think, "No, not me; I reject that! I am not a feminist!" However,

someone came to me this very week and said that what I had told him during their premarital counseling was true.

Every single force in our culture is driving us away from thinking biblically about gender roles. For instance, many of you have probably seen the shoe company advertisement that says, "Get your girls sports balls, not dolls. She can be anything she wants to be." It shows a girl caked in mud, playing some physically challenging sport. The message is that real women are tough, hard-driving, and aggressive, and if you get in their way, they'll knock you out of it. That's a *real* woman.

Our society also pervasively accepts homosexuality, particularly on television. We see the feminization of manhood at every turn, but strong and godly leaders are not portrayed positively anywhere; the television portrays them as bumbling, close-minded old relics. What was once culturally taboo is now commonplace. Just a few years ago, shock struck the nation because a clearly homosexual couple showed affection to one another on television, but now that sort of thing is on every night. Homosexual males are almost always portrayed as loving, kind, and endearing, which is just one more example of how society is pushing harder for gender lines to be blurred. What are girls to be? They should be the ones that knock you out of the way. What are men to be? They are to be passive, mild, perhaps even confused about their own gender.

This confusion about gender roles can also be seen in the family and among God's people in the church. We face these issues within our own area because there are churches in

our own city that ridicule that idea that God has ordained role distinctions based on gender. One local congregation has called a woman to be its pastor, and when the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* was embraced by the Southern Baptist Convention, some churches were outraged about the idea that men were to be leaders of their homes, and that the office of pastor was limited to men. We must face these issues knowing that we are not removed from such thinking. The gender confusion is not just “out there”; it is upon us.

However, these types of issues should not surprise us. When we think about Satan’s attack on humanity in the garden, it becomes clear that this was always an issue of contention. The neglect of biblical gender responsibilities has always been a siege on God’s design for the family. Satan has attacked the family model of husbandly headship and wifely submission, both of which were part of God’s design for the created order.

Genesis 2:15 and the following verses show us that the role of Adam as leader, protector, and provider was rooted in God’s created order. Notice that the problem with the Fall was that Adam was not leading in the way that God had intended, and Eve was not seeking the leadership and protection of her husband in the way that God had intended.

¹⁵ Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. ¹⁶

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.

Here, man is given the responsibility to work, to tend the garden, and to exercise his dominion over the land that the LORD has provided. Verse eighteen continues, “And the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.’” Note the word that is used to describe Eve’s role in the relationship. God said that he made Adam to be a provider and protector, and here we see that God is going to make for Adam a “helper,” a complement to him. The passage continues:

¹⁹ Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him.

²¹ And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and

closed up the flesh in its place. ²² Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.

²³ And Adam said:

“This is now bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh;
She shall be called Woman,
Because she was taken out of Man”

This is a Hebrew play on words that actually comes across in the English rendering, “She shall be called *Isha* [woman] because she was taken out of *Ish* [man].” There is a connection, a complementary relationship, between these two in the design of God. Verse twenty-four continues:

²⁴ Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. ²⁵ And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

³ ¹ Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’” ² And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; ³ but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’” ⁴ Then the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate.

We notice that Eve’s sin was not only rebellion against a direct command of God, but also a unilateral decision in complete and absolute independence from the protector that God had provided. Verse six continues by saying, “She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.” Adam shows his weakness by following his wife into sin.

⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.

⁸ And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

⁹Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, ‘Where are you?’”

By the way, that’s one of the most important questions in the text: just where was he? Now, skip ahead to verse 17:

Then to Adam He said, “Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it’: Cursed is the ground for your sake . . .”

Because Adam heeded the voice of his wife and failed to act in his assigned leadership role, Adam has merited the LORD’s judgment.

Let’s examine the context of our passage, I Timothy 2:9-15. Paul’s letter to Timothy, one of the Pastoral Epistles, was written after he had left Timothy in Ephesus. In it, Paul is exhorting him to do primarily two things: to deal with false teaching and disorder in the Ephesian church. False teachers were propagating untruths, and problems of disorder in the church were surfacing. One of these was a failure to understand gender roles. Our text begins in chapter two, verse eight:

⁸I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting; ⁹in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, ¹⁰but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works. ¹¹Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. ¹²And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. ¹³For Adam was formed first, then Eve. ¹⁴And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. ¹⁵Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.

Here, Paul’s words “I desire” (v. 8) could also be translated, “I purpose.” These are very serious words. He is not saying this in his own authority, but with the authority of the Lord. Paul’s desire is that the men pray “everywhere.” These men are the male members of the congregation, and the word *everywhere* could be translated *every spot*. In this particular context, it is a reference to corporate worship. It means that in *every spot that is marked out* men should be found praying. As leaders in the assembly, they are to be men of prayer, and it says that they are to be “lifting up holy hands”; holy hands are set apart hands. The main focus here is not the physical position of prayer, although a common position of prayer included upraised hands, but instead that the lifted hands are to be holy and set apart to God, not marked by hypocrisy. Verse eight specifies this by including the phrase, “without

wrath.” He desires holy hands to be lifted without doubting, without vacillating, and without anger. The Lord desires the men in the gathered assembly to be men of prayer, and their hands to not be unclean with hypocrisy, disputing, and anger. The men who lift up their hands are to be leaders, and they should lift up hands of integrity.

This entire discussion is set in the context of the church and how it is to be ordered. Paul begins by talking about general issues related to women in the church, but in the end, he focuses on the example of motherhood specifically. Therefore, the matters we will examine today will apply to women in general and mothers in particular.

The Woman’s Character

Verses nine and ten discuss the woman’s character in the church. Verse nine says, “In like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing.” The phrase *in like manner also*, suggests that there are things for women to consider about their role in the church body, just as there are for men. The word translated *adorn* is the Greek word *kosmeo*, which is where we get the term *cosmetics*; it means, “to put into order,” or, “to arrange.” You’ll sometimes hear a woman say that she has to put her face in order, meaning that she needs to apply cosmetics and those kinds of things. *Adorn* here carries the idea of making ready and could be translated *beautify*. Read this way, the text would state, “In like manner also, let the women beautify themselves.” There is to be a specific way in which they are to beautify themselves, and therefore, we know that not everything that a woman does to beautify herself is acceptable in the sight of God.

What does it mean to “make yourself ready” or to “put yourself in order?” Notice the way women adorn themselves in verse nine—“modestly.” In I Timothy 3:2, the word is translated *respectable*. Understand that decent, modest dress is not a holdover from bygone days; it is the command of a sovereign God. Decency in dressing habits is not embracing the efforts of a past generation to be prudent; modesty is the command of the thrice holy God. The text commands that women dress self-consciously every day to the glory of God. When a woman opens the closet and pulls out the drawers, she should think, “I will dress today to the glory of God; I will adorn myself in modest apparel.” If the apparel is not modest, it does not glorify God. The word *modest* is the opposite of *provocative*, *seductive*, and *revealing*. Melody Green, the wife of Keith Green, the songwriter and musician who was killed in a plane crash many years ago, wrote a little booklet called *Uncovering the Truth about Modesty*. In it she pens these words:

Our bodies are precious because they are a gift from God. They are attractive because God has

made us in His image for His pleasure, and if we are married, then to please our mates as well. But God never intended for us to flaunt ourselves or exhibit our bodies in an immodest way. Many Christians are either oblivious or uncaring about the effect that they have on others. They may even appear to have a real excitement and love for the Lord, however, their body is sending out a totally different message.

Of course, many people today do not think like this. Many have no knowledge of the pervasive command for modesty in the Bible. I must admit that I was somewhat taken aback by a comment of Randy Stinson's when he was conducting a marriage conference at our church. He said that one of the things he does to promote modesty in his home is that he will not allow his daughter's dolls to be naked. He'll say, "Get some clothes on that doll! We don't go around this place naked, and neither will that doll." That may sound strange, but it is a small way to communicate to your children the biblical mandate for modesty. As verse nine continues, it also says that women are to be clothed with propriety. *Propriety* means reverence for God, and it actually connotes a sense of shame; we do not want to do anything or dress in any way that would dishonor God. Oh, how that is lost in our culture today! Including church culture.

Furthermore, the text continues by saying, "In moderation." The word means *discretion* and is translated elsewhere as *self-control*, or *sensibly*. One is to be dressed in attire that is marked by discretion, or in common terminology, not showing everything! In I Peter chapter three we find out that the issues of dress are not merely outward issues. You cannot be godly from the outside in, or measure a skirt length to find out who is godly and who is not. Some people may dress very modestly and be headed to Hell; the real issue for the people of God is the heart. I Peter 3:3 says:

Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.

Verse nine of our text tells us how women in the church should *not* dress. There is nothing inherently wrong with braided hair, but in the cultural context, the braids were fastened by jeweled combs and pins made of ivory and silver. Paul depicts women who wore their hair very high, filled with expensive jewelry. The braids were just a way of holding all those jewels in place, so it is not the braiding that is the problem, but what the braiding represents—gaudiness, extravagance, and showiness. Women of that time lavished gold and jewels all over their bodies to communicate their

wealth or importance. Pliny the Elder, a first century Roman historian, describes a dress of an emperor's wife that today would cost \$500,000. Dressing in this way is a propagation of self, but the goal of the Christian is to glorify God. Verse ten continues this thought: "But, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works." There is a way of dressing which is proper for women who profess reverence to God. The point is this: a woman cannot revere God if she disregards what His Word says about modesty.

The Woman's Conduct

Verse eleven concerns the woman's conduct in the church: "Let a woman learn in silence with all submission." You see, not only were there women who were showing a lack of reverence for God in their appearance, but it seems that they were also showing a lack of reverence for God by disregarding the leadership of their husbands in the church. The women whom Paul is addressing wanted to be preachers and teachers, delivering the Word; they wanted the spotlight to be on them. Notice at the beginning of verse eleven it says, "Let a woman learn"—a present active command. Those words were shocking in their day. Paul says here that a woman should *learn*, which was not a well-accepted thought at the time. In that culture, it was not important if women learned, and in fact, they were often not allowed in the assembly at all. With these words, Paul shows himself to be a great liberator of women. Paul's words are not shocking because they are so oppressive, but because they are so permissive; Paul says here that God commands women to learn in the gathered assembly.

However, the manner in which a woman is to learn, according to verse eleven, is in silence, with all submission. The *all* is emphatic in the text. Women were to learn in submission, voluntarily putting themselves under the leadership of their husbands and their church leaders. Women should learn because they have a godly, important role in the church, but it is not the preaching or public teaching role. Rather, they should learn in quietness, submitting themselves to the authority that God has ordained.

Verse twelve says, "And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence." The phrase *to have* would be better translated *to exercise*. The verb *permit* deals with actions that individuals desire to perform. By virtue of "not permit[ing]" women to teach, Paul communicates that there were women in the church who desired to be teachers or pastors, exercising authority over men in the church.

There are many today that ask, "You say the office of pastor is for men? Who are *you* to say whom God has called? What gives *you* that right?" Understand, beloved, that *God* has said it! If anyone has the right to determine who has what role, it

is the Maker of heaven and earth! Recently I was in a meeting with some local pastors to talk about these issues. As the discussion went on, one of the pastors said, “You don’t have the right to question *anybody’s* call! I would never question a person call to the ministry!” I replied, “Okay, sir, what will happen when a young man in your church who is a practicing homosexual or drug abuser comes forward and says that he has been called to preach? Are you going to ordain him?” Of course not! Suddenly, he’s going to question the call—and why? Because it’s wrong! The person struggling with those issues has misunderstood the call of God.¹ God’s words on this subject are not ambiguous. He does not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man, but to be in silence. The person’s desire for the office is irrelevant; God’s desires as He has expressed them in His Word are what matters.

The words translated *to teach* in verse twelve mean *to be a teacher*. The text refers to official, doctrinal, biblical instruction for the church. It is not talking about dialogue in an informal setting, but about having authority over a man or over the church. God has designed the office of pastor/teacher to be reserved for men. The Scriptures encourage women to teach other women; it encourages women to teach children; it encourages them to speak evangelistically and informally, but the preaching/teaching seen in this passage, is clearly limited to men.

The Woman’s Perspective

Next, I want you to see the woman’s perspective in verses thirteen and fourteen. Many people may ask, “Why shouldn’t a woman be a pastor? After all, I saw a woman preaching on TV last night, and she sure was a lot better than you. Who are you to say she can’t preach?” The Spirit-inspired text often anticipates human arguments and stands ready to answer our objections. The reason given in the text is simply that God has designed it that way. Verse thirteen says, “For Adam was formed first, then Eve.” Paul appeals to the created order to prove his point. Adam was created first as the head, and Eve was created next to be the helper. God created Adam and Eve to complement one another, not to compete with one another.

Many argue today that the position of man as head of the home is a result of the Fall, and that we should try to reverse the Fall by practicing absolute equality, but such a position is untenable. The Bible never roots the issue of male headship in the Fall; it was God’s design, part of His created order from the beginning. No one can say these words are culturally bound, because at the time Adam and Eve were created, they *were* the culture; they were the only human beings that existed. It is a dangerous thing to take what God created, what He called holy and good, and call it sinful. For someone to say that the issue of male leadership and authority is rooted in the Fall is to take what God called good and declare it not good. I wouldn’t want

to answer to God for that.

Verse fourteen continues, “And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.” Note that Adam was not deceived, yet he is not guiltless. The reason Adam was not deceived was because he was *absent*! He wasn’t protecting, providing, and leading. When tempted, he willingly fell, following the leadership of his wife. The text says that she was being deceived, and the words are strong, meaning that she was completely and utterly deceived. She was acting outside of God’s design for her, and so she was vulnerable. Thus, we have a role reversal with Eve leading and Adam following, along with the consequences that ensue when we stray from God’s design.

Eve stepped outside of her role, and Adam failed to live up to his, but who does the New Testament hold accountable? Romans chapter five says Adam is responsible for the Fall. We have the tendency to say, “But Adam wasn’t deceived! It was his wife!” Adam gives the same response to God: “It wasn’t me! It was the woman whom You gave me! If that woman wasn’t here, I wouldn’t have done it.” However, Adam *is* responsible because he was the God-ordained head of his home and the representative for all of humanity, plunging the human race into sin by violating God’s design and God’s command. A woman’s perspective must be that of embracing her role fully, realizing it is God’s design. She must think, “God’s wisdom is perfect, and His ways are right. God’s design is good for me.”

The Woman’s High Calling

Finally, we get to verse fifteen, a notoriously difficult passage to interpret. We have seen that Paul talks about the woman’s character and how it is to be marked by modesty, propriety and moderation. In her conduct in the church she is not to exercise the functions of teaching or exercising authority over men. Rather, she has a role of learning in submission. Her perspective must be that this is not just some cultural dictate, but God’s design.

John MacArthur writes the following concerning this subject: “Women must stop believing the Devil’s lie that the only role of significance is that of leadership.” The world thinks, “Why in the world would you cheat women from having the blessings of being a pastor/teacher? That’s just chauvinism!” Many women today think similarly, but the truth is that while God has made us with *different* roles, one is not *inferior* to the other. We are to complement one another, and we can only achieve God’s high calling if we embrace the roles that He has assigned for our lives. The idea is not that an angry woman grits her teeth and says, “Okay, I won’t be a pastor! I won’t wear immodest clothing either, because I’m supposed to be godly.” Instead, a woman should joyfully embrace God’s design for her life, knowing that it is good for her soul and her

pathway to joy.

Verse fifteen says, “Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.” The word *nevertheless* suggests a contrast to what has been said, that Eve was involved in bringing about the Fall through the sin of gender rebellion and that women aren’t to be pastors, having authoritative roles in the church. Nevertheless, the text tells us that a woman has a high calling: she will be saved, or rescued, in child bearing. What in the world does that mean? Does it mean that every woman that has a baby goes to heaven?

Some interpret the verse like this: the *she* here is a reference to Eve. Eve would be saved in childbearing because, in fulfillment of Genesis 3:15, her seed would crush the head of the serpent. According to this interpretation, Eve will be saved in childbearing because her descendant, the Messiah, will save all His people. Although there may be an allusion to that here, it is not the primary issue. The primary issue of the entire context has been the role of women in general.

Holding that the *she* refers to Eve cannot be the best interpretation of the text because it ignores the conditional clause at the end of the verse: “if *they* continue. . .” Who are “they”? The pronoun here is not referencing Eve, but all women. The *she* is a generic reference to women in general. Is the text saying that if Eve continues in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control, she will ultimately be saved? No, the conditional clause tells us that the verse refers to women generally. It is very important to note that the verse says, “. . . if *they* continue *in faith*.” The “if clause” shows us that the women about whom Paul is speaking are in Christ. This passage concerns those who are continuing in the faith, those who are showing Christian love and being sanctified. They are already believers, Christian women, who are reflecting Christ in the way they live their lives.

But what does “she will be saved in childbearing” mean? Childbearing is used in this passage to represent the essence of what it is to be a woman. We could say that she will be saved in motherhood. This is one thing that no man can do! Someone told me the other day that Jason is having a baby. Well, that’s a news story! Having children is bound up with the essence of womanhood, so Paul uses it here to represent the whole of God’s design for women. “She will be saved in childbearing,” means that a woman who is embracing the design that God has for her life, living by faith, pouring her life into raising godly seed, children who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, is triumphing through Jesus Christ over the terrible effects of the Fall.

Part of the curse of the Fall was pain for women in childbearing, but by the sovereign grace of God and His calling out of women from the kingdom of darkness, who continue in the faith and pass on the faith to the next generation, the effects

of the fall are, in a sense, reversed! Even things initially related to judgment, such as pain in childbearing, can ultimately be means of glorifying God. This is what happens when a believing woman bears children and raises them in the fear of the Lord. God’s high calling for women is not that they would become like men, but that they would be *real* women, and real women embrace God’s design.

But what does it mean that “she will be *saved* in childbearing?” The word “saved” here is used in the same way it is used in 1 Corinthians 9:22, when Paul says, “To the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men that I might by all means save some.” Does Paul mean that he is the one actually saving people? Is he rejecting the sovereignty of God or think that by doing these things that he can actually be the one that saves people? Of course not—Paul is committed to the sovereignty of God in salvation! He is saying that he will order his life so that God would be pleased to use him as an instrument to bring people to faith in Christ.

This text does not mean that women are saved by physically giving birth to children. Instead, it means that women who embrace their divinely-assigned role are showing that they know God’s sovereign grace through Jesus Christ. They are showing that they believe in the promises of God and are continuing in the faith and are saved. Joyful Christian motherhood is a magnification of God’s salvation in the world and helps to reverse the curse of the fall, reflecting the kingdom of God on earth—what a high calling!

Conclusion

The responsibility of raising godly children is great, and mothers have a special relationship with their children that cannot be replaced. Women in the church are on the front lines of leading this fallen world out of sin and into godliness by childbearing and raising their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord. Who can think that is not a high calling? What are women thinking when they forsake God design and purpose for something else? Motherhood is a very high calling and requires strength for continuance in the faith; there is no spotlight when you’re changing a dirty diaper. No one shows up at my house during the day to congratulate my wife for raising our children well. I sometimes hear, “That was a good sermon,” but my wife is in the trenches of mothering our children without any spotlight, and it is imperative for her to see her role as part of God’s design, rejoicing in being on the front lines of kingdom work!

If you have a godly mother, oh how you should be thankful! She probably wasn’t perfect, but if she taught you the things of God, you should be eternally thankful. What a gift! What a high, holy calling! Praise God that He saves

women who are among the fallen children of Adam, who walk in the doomed steps of Eve, and weaves them into the fabric of His redemptive purposes! ■■

¹ My only point here is that this man's logic is not valid. He said that he would never question anyone's call to the ministry but the truth is that he most certainly would under certain circumstances. If we agree that there are qualifications and certain standards involved with being a minister of the gospel the only question left is "Who sets the standards?" The answer is that God does according to His self-revelation in His word. I am not in any way comparing women to homosexuals or drug abusers. Womanhood is a wonderful blessing from God.

Cultural Commentary¹: Television Sex: Too Boring for Christians

Russell D. Moore

*Assistant Professor of Christian Theology,
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
Louisville, Kentucky*

Never has network television been so explicitly sexualized. Never has television sex been so promoted and packaged for commercial consumption. And there is at least one reason why orthodox Christians should turn off the televisions — the sex is too boring for us.

Some NBC television executive thought he'd found the Holy Grail of Nielsen ratings. Since American culture is so sexualized, why not just organize a situation comedy around the gimmick of pushing the sexual envelope as far as possible, as many times as possible in a 22 minute segment. And so NBC advertised endlessly the new situation comedy *Coupling* highlighting the sexual vocabulary and bedroom scenes of the actors. This comedy might be decadent, and it might be inappropriate, but one would think that it would at least be sexy. Not according to *USA Today* television critic Robert Bianco. According to the newspaper, *Coupling* "tackles the subject of sex with all the single-minded fervor of a Soviet tractor documentary, and with just as much allure." Much the same could be said of the rest of the vast wasteland of the flickering screen.

But it is not only this television season that has managed to make sex boring. Psychologists tell us that pornography addiction is an accelerating cycle of the addict trying to find a "high" in images more explicit than the ones he now considers "boring" and mundane. In fact, *Slate* magazine now reports that the fad in Japan is pornography without humans—computerized animated characters acting out the most violent and anti-social sexual fantasies with alien-like creatures. Why? Pornographic sex-of the human sort-has grown boring. The

same trend extends even to the most sexualized of all demographic groups—teenagers. When I was in junior high school, a group of boys would laugh and wink while reading the King James Version of Song of Solomon. Now, just a few years later, boys like us stare blankly at the ceiling while comprehensive sex education teachers explain every conceivable detail of human anatomy and sex technique. It is just, well, boring.

This is where the church has an explanation—and a glorious alternative—that we have been too hesitant, or too ignorant, to reveal to the watching world. Evangelical Christians in particular have too often adopted the culture's view of sex—and so evangelical Christians wind up with sex lives just as boring as that of our neighbors. And so we publish advice manuals on contorted techniques and marital gimmicks. Remember "Wives, wrap yourselves in cellophane for your own husbands"? That's not from the Book of Ephesians. Walk into your local Christian bookstore, and you will find aisle after aisle of baptized Harlequin romance novels. They are nicely sanitized of bedroom scenes and profanity, but they are escapist romance for evangelical Protestant wives who seem to be missing something.

But what is it about sex that makes it so universally exciting for the human race? It is not the thrill of the forbidden. That is gone as soon as we wall over our calloused consciences—as any adulterer knows. It is the mysteriousness of the sexual union—the sense in which this act of union transcends everyday life, the sense in which this act reaches the very core of who we are. The apostolic faith tells us precisely why this is.

Why does the Creator pronounce it “not good” that Adam should be alone (Gen 2:18)? Why is it that Elohim gives to the primeval man a woman formed from his own flesh and bone, for whom he is to leave everything to become “one flesh” (Gen 2:22-24)? Why is it that rebellion against the Creator always manifests itself in rebellion against the order of human sexuality (Gen 6:1-2; Rom 1:24)? The Apostle Paul tells us precisely why—because human sexuality points to a grander cosmic mystery that has now been revealed in these last days of human history. Paul reveals the church at Ephesus that the “mystery” of God is now being revealed in the “summing up of all things” under the lordship of the Man from Nazareth (Eph 1:9-10). He reveals that the “mystery” of the ages is further revealed to the cosmic powers through the calling together of a Body for this Messiah—a Jew/Gentile church (Eph 3:10). And then Paul makes a stunning claim. He points to the male/female one-flesh union of Genesis and argues that human sexuality is patterned after the archetype of this mystery—the one-flesh union of Christ and his church (Eph 5:32).

This is why sexual revolutions always turn out so boring. This is why the sterile, condom-clad vision of sex in the contraceptive culture is so dull. This is why pornography is so numbing to the soul. This is because in the search for sexual excitement men and women are not really looking for biochemical sensations or the responses of nerve endings. And, in fact, they are not ultimately even looking for each other. They are searching desperately, not for mere sex, but for that to which sex points—something they know exists but they just can’t identify. They are looking to be part of an all-encompassing cosmic mystery. They are looking for a love that is stronger than death. They can’t articulate it, and they would be horrified to know it, but, behind all their sexual frenzy, they are looking for a glorious Messiah, Jesus, and his glorious bride, the church.

This is why biblical teaching on gender, sexuality, and marriage is so central to the existence of our churches. These things are not just about morality or ethics. They are about the gospel itself. This is why we must do more than preach marriage tips and sexual restraint. We must proclaim the reason for all these things. We must preach Christ. And this is why we cannot simply shake our heads at the sexual libertinism of our culture. We need to see it as a cry of desperation. And we need to show a more excellent way—in our marriages and in our churches.

In short, we need to stop acting as though the culture’s sexuality is too racy, too daring, too exciting. We need to tell them the truth — your sex is just too boring. ■

Sources: Robert Bianco, “Fall TV: It’s Not for the Squeamish, Prudish,” USA Today, 14 October 2003, D1; Seth Stevenson, “Tokyo on One ClichÉ a Day,” Slate, <http://slate.msn.com/id/2089630/entry/2089646/>

¹ This article is reprinted by permission from Russell Moore’s October 16, 2003 column on The Henry Institute website (<http://www.henryinstitute.org/>). Check the aforementioned site as well as CBMW’s website (www.cbmw.org) for regular commentaries by Dr. Moore.

Celebrity Biblical Womanhood: Caution! Your Clothes are Talking¹

Nancy Leigh DeMoss

Host of the *Revive Our Hearts* Daily Radio Program,
Niles, Michigan

Editor's Note: The following is the first in a series of columns on the issue of modesty by Nancy Leigh DeMoss. This series on modesty originally aired in the form of a three week radio broadcast, beginning June 16, 2003. Her radio program—"Revive Our Hearts,"—is heard on more than 230 stations.

If I tell you that there's a woman coming down this church aisle in a long, white, formal dress, what would you say is probably the occasion? It's a wedding; she's a bride. How did you know? Because clothing communicates.

If I tell you there's a teenager bundled up in a snowsuit, mittens, a wool hat and a scarf would you agree with me that the teenager is probably not on his way to a picnic?

Clothing and appearance send a message. They can communicate our occupation or an occasion we're marking. In some of the world's religions, women are clearly identifiable by their dress.

Clothing can communicate something about our socioeconomic status. You can look at some people and think, "She looks like a wealthy woman." Or you might look at another woman and—purely on the basis of her clothing—say, "She doesn't look like she comes from a financially stable background."

Clothing also communicates a message about our values, our character, our attitudes. For example, you can look at the dress of some and tell that neatness is not a concern to them.

The Bible speaks of occasions when people would wear sackcloth as a sign of mourning or repentance. So, if someone was wearing sackcloth, he was sending a message about what was going on in his heart.

Scripture also indicates that clothing can send a message about our morals or the lack thereof. For example, in Proverbs 7:10 we read of the adulteress that she was "dressed as a harlot" (NASB). The woman is dressed in such a way that you can look at her and see that her motives are not pure toward this man.

In Genesis 38:13ff., we learn of a woman named Tamar, a widow who wanted to seduce a man to whom she was not married. Accordingly, she took off her widow's garments (v.14). Such garments were a specific type of clothing that would have communicated that she was a widow. Tamar, however, changed her clothes and put on the clothing of a prostitute, for the man she was trying to seduce knew her. In fact, he was her father-in-law. But when she changed her clothes, he didn't recognize who she was. He just looked at her clothes, and judging her to be a prostitute, he went in to be sexually intimate with her. Of course, I point that out not to justify him, but to demonstrate that clothing can send a powerful message.

It is just as true today that women are sending a message with their clothing. Many of them know exactly what message they're sending. Perhaps some others are naïve, having become so influenced by this culture that they don't know any other way to think about clothing.

Kim Alexis was a super-model in the eighties. Her picture was on over 500 magazines covers including *Vogue* and the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit edition. She's had a change of heart about many things, and today she realizes that she made a lot of mistakes. Now she's challenging women to think about the message they are sending when they dress sensually.

Here's what she has to say, "Many women are playing with fire in the way they dress. Dressing like a floozy tells the world, 'Look at me, want me, lust after me. I'm easy and you can have me.' Displaying intimate parts of the body," she says, "is a form of advertising for sex."

As women, clothing and appearance are some of the most powerful and important means we have of sending a message about our hearts and our values.

So here's the question. What do your clothes and your appearance communicate about you? What message are you sending?

As Christian women we need to ask one another, "Is the message you're sending consistent with what you really believe, or are you sending a mixed message? Are you thinking one thing in your heart, but sending a message that you don't intend or ought not to send with your outward appearance?"

I find, today, that there are a lot of women who really do have a heart for the Lord. They may be faithfully involved in a local church. And they may be actively involved in gospel ministry. And they may lift up their hands in joyful acclamation to the Lord when singing songs of praise. And yet, many of these very same women may also be totally oblivious of the message that they are sending with their body and with their clothing.

Their clothing is communicating something far different than what's in their hearts.

Unfortunately, this issue represents an area where too many Christian women have accepted the secular world's way of thinking, with the rationalization that "Maybe it's okay so long as we just don't go to the farthest extremes."

That's why we have to go back to the Word of God and ask, "What is God's way of thinking about all this? What message should we be sending? And how can we send that message with our clothing and with our outer appearance?"

The way we think, the way we act, the choices we make, the way we relate to others, and yes, even the way we dress sends a message. ■

¹ Excerpted from Nancy Leigh DeMoss, *The Look: Does God Really Care What I Wear?* (Niles, Mich.: Revive Our Hearts, 2003). For information on Nancy's three week radio series on Modesty, the Modesty Packet (including two booklets) and other great resources, please visit www.ReviveOurHearts.com.

Annotated Bibliography for Gender Related Books in 2002

Compiled and Annotated by Rob Lister

Managing Editor,

Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood

Louisville, Kentucky

In this issue of the journal we profile some of the most significant gender-related books from 2002. Here is a brief reminder about the categories we are using and our intent in using them. By

Complementarian we simply seek to designate an author who recognizes the full personal equality of the sexes, coupled with an acknowledgment of role distinctions in the home and church. By

Egalitarian then, we intend to classify evangelical authors who see only undifferentiated equality, i.e. they see no Scriptural warrant for affirming male headship in the home or the church. Under the **Non-Evangelical** heading, we have classified important

secular works as well as books that broach the subject of biblical gender issues from a religious, albeit, non-evangelical point of view. This category also serves as our classification for Liberal scholars wanting to retain some sort of Christian identity. Finally, with respect to the **Undeclared** heading, we have listed those books that do not give sufficient indication of their fundamental stance for us to classify them more specifically.

Complementarian Authors/Books

Brownback, Lydia. *Legacy of Faith: From Women of the Bible to Women of Today*. Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2002.

Brownback examines the lives of twenty-four women of the Bible, with a view to connecting the lessons of their lives to the challenges that contemporary women face in our own day. She insightfully identifies the principles at work and points out their relevant applications.

Cornes, Andrew. *Divorce and Remarriage: Biblical Principles and Pastoral Practice*. Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2002.

After a thorough engagement with the relevant texts, Cornes concludes that divorce is allowable in the case of infidelity but that remarriage should never be considered a viable option. After drawing his conclusions, he then proceeds to an extensive section on pastoral application, wherein he offers suggestions for the ministerial application of this view in local congregations.

DeMoss, Nancy Leigh, ed. *Biblical Womanhood in the Home*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2002.

DeMoss has edited a very fine collection of essays by several leading female complementarians. The volume is designed to instruct and encourage Christian women in the face of massive cultural opposition to complementarity. Accordingly, the authors unite around a simple but profound theme: God has manifest his glory in creating us male and female—fully equal in personhood though designed for different functions. From that common ground then, the chapters spread out to cover a variety of issues, from the theological (e.g. knowing God as Father) to the practical (e.g. how to establish a Titus 2 mentoring program in the local church).

DeMoss, Nancy Leigh. *Brokenness: The Heart God Revives*. Chicago: Moody, 2002.

DeMoss has correctly seen that genuine revival is accompanied by brokenness—the right recognition of our sinful state, on the one hand, and the majestic splendor of who God is, on the other. From this basic thesis, she unfolds a winsome and personally vulnerable exposition of brokenness.

Graham, Anne. *Womanhood Revisited: A Fresh Look at the Role of Women in Society*. Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2002.

Following an overview of the dramatic cultural shifts in the twentieth century, Graham looks back to God's created intention for manhood and womanhood and discovers a complementarian intent—equal in personhood and worth, distinguished according to function. Upon tracing this theme through the biblical history, she then turns to relating these truths to women in the twenty-first century. For all that is helpful about her book, we must nevertheless disagree with her limited application of 1 Tim 2:8-15 only to the regular preaching ministry of a local congregation. This view fails to recognize the elder-like responsibilities in teaching the faith that theology professors and itinerants bear.

Grudem, Wayne, ed. *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2002.

This compilation is a veritable *tour de force* of several of the exegetical and theological underpinnings of complementarianism. The authors repeatedly demonstrate the sanity of a hermeneutic that is conscribed by authorial intent. In their theological formulations, they are careful to account for all the relevant data. Conversely, the egalitarian positions on these issues are often shown to fall back on special pleading.

Grudem, Wayne and Dennis Rainey, eds. *Pastoral Leadership for Manhood and Womanhood*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2002.

In this volume, the contributors furnish pastors and other church leaders with a bounty of biblical wisdom for equipping the church to deal with the abundance of marital and family issues confronting local congregations today. With penetrating insights and practical application, the authors engage a spectrum of issues ranging from ministry to homosexuals, to responses to domestic violence, to the cultivation of a man-friendly church atmosphere, to pastoral responsibilities in encouraging romance. In a day when so many of these concerns beg for the attention of church leaders—but do not receive it—we owe the contributors to this volume a great debt of gratitude.

Hill, Michael. *The How and Why of Love: An Introduction to Evangelical Ethics*. Kingsford, Australia: Matthias Media, 2002.

This is not, properly speaking, a text on gender issues. Rather, it is a thoughtful, biblical-theological approach to thinking through ethical issues, some of which center on marriage, sexuality, procreation, etc. Hill's approach to engaging ethical questions is a fruitful model for evangelical ethics.

James, Sharon. *God's Design for Women: Biblical Womanhood for Today*. Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2002.

James presents a fine exposition of complementarianism. Her keen biblical interpretation is complemented by her practical insights in applying the biblical data to questions of women in ministry today. Readers will find both the European perspective and fine academic interaction of James' book helpful and instructive on a wide range of issues. This is a must read for those truly wanting to understand biblically and theologically God's design for women.

Kitchen, John A. *Embracing Authority: The Challenge of Living God's Way in God's World*. Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2002.

Kitchen has seen the great folly of human sinfulness: we are rebels against God's rightful authority. This folly has been magnified to the extreme in our day, where virtually any mention of authority is seen to be some sort of illegitimate power grab. In the face of this mentality, Kitchen calls on us to reclaim the goodness and wisdom of the authority structures—including those in the family and the church—established by God.

Patterson, Dorothy Kelley. *The Family: Unchanging Principles for Changing Times*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2002.

Patterson, once again, displays her characteristic wisdom (and wit) as it pertains to God's plan for the family. In a day and age of familial chaos—seen not least of all in the multiple efforts to redefine the family—Patterson's summons is simply to return to the biblical model. Parents will come away from this book with a great sense of conviction about the weight of their stewardship in their respective roles as mother and father. Yet they will also find great encouragement as they are reminded of the wisdom of God's plan.

Rainey, Dennis, ed. *Building Strong Families*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2002.

This is another gem in the series of 2002 Crossway releases on gender and family issues. Once again, the reader will encounter solid, biblically based counsel on a host of issues that should be receiving strategic attention in the church (e.g. raising masculine sons and feminine daughters, Titus 2 women's ministry, etc.), though all too often, it is not so.

Robertson, O. Palmer. *The Genesis of Sex: Sexual Relationships in the First Book of the Bible*. Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing, 2002.

Robertson undertakes a thorough study of all the forms (over 20) of sexual relationships encountered in the book of Genesis. From God's intent for marriage all the way to adultery and rape, Robertson investigates the sexuality found in the book of beginnings with a view to recapturing God's good design for sexual relatedness in the midst of our sexually confused day.

Ryken, Leland. *The Word of God in English: Criteria for Excellence in Bible Translation*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2002.

Ryken takes on the recent but seemingly reigning Bible translation theory, often called "dynamic equivalence." In its place, Ryken offers a thorough literary analysis

and proposal of what he terms “essentially literal” translation. By “essentially literal,” he recognizes that the “syntax must be English rather than Hebrew or Greek” and he allows that incomprehensible idioms may be brought over conceptually instead of literally (10). Apart from these deviations, however, Ryken argues that translators must stay as close to the original wording of the Greek and Hebrew texts as possible. Indeed, the further we stray from “word for word” translation into the field of “thought for thought” translation is precisely the degree to which we make ourselves dependent on what certain translators think the text means as opposed to seeing a maximally equivalent reproduction of the original. Ryken warns that “dynamic equivalence” translations run the risk of flattening out the Bible, missing inter-canonical connections, and perhaps disregarding the unique expressions of the various biblical authors.

Egalitarian Authors/Books

Aune, Kristin. *Single Women: Challenge to the Church?* Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 2002.

Through her research with roughly 100 Christian single women, Aune attempts to address the particular challenges that face single women in the church. The majority of the book is concerned with reviewing the reflections of the various interviewees. She does present a chapter on her theology of singleness, and then concludes with some suggestions as to how the church can help make single women feel less disenfranchised. Interestingly, she interprets the teaching in 1 Cor 7 to mean merely that anyone who is presently unmarried has the gift of singleness. Of course, we’re dealing with a misnomer here in the first place, because the issue in view is not “singleness” in the contemporary understanding, but celibacy. And in the context of 1 Cor 7, the gift of celibacy for the purpose of expanded ministry is identified as not burning with passion (v. 9). Beyond that, Aune sees very little differentiation between the genders other than transparently obvious physical differences, suggesting that a great deal of social construction lies behind more traditional understandings of gender distinctives.

Bauckham, Richard. *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.

Bauckham attempts an in-depth study of each of the named women in the gospel narratives. He believes that such narratives allow for a “gynocentric” reading of Scripture that can balance the larger androcentric perspective in the text. Along the way, he concludes in

favor of such things as the capital “A” apostleship of Junia (whom he identifies as the Joanna of Luke 8:1-3) in Rom 16:7.

Boyd, Gregory A. and Paul R. Eddy. *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002.

Boyd and Eddy have authored a text that seeks to outline the major views on a number of evangelical debates. In the course of this volume, the authors invest a chapter on the debate over women in certain ministry positions. (In the book’s appendix, which is only available online at <http://www.bakeracademic.com/acrossthespectrum/boydappendix.pdf>, Boyd and Eddy briefly address twelve further issues, one of which concerns the question of submission and authority in the home.) In each case, the authors first outline the complementarian view followed by the egalitarian. Then the units end with a brief list of titles for further reading. Though the summaries are not long enough to sketch in a fully developed position, it does appear that the authors understand and attempt to give a fair summary of the complementarian position. Their stated intent is merely to outline the various positions and not to lobby their own. Of course, it’s probably not a coincidence that the egalitarian view is given the last word.

Giles, Kevin. *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002.

Giles’ thesis involves a denial of the eternal functional subordination of the Son to the Father. In fact, he suggests that such a view falls outside the bounds of orthodoxy (25). This, of course, is a grievous misunderstanding, for orthodoxy does not hang on this debate. Indeed, there are no shortage of weaknesses in the book, not the least of which are his rhetoric and inflammatory charges against complementarians. Given the purposes and space constraints of the annotation, the weaknesses of Giles’ Trinitarian model of gender roles deserve primary attention. First, he fallaciously argues that complementarians affirm eternal functional subordination on the basis of reading fallen male-female relationships back into the Godhead. The fact of the matter is that complementarians see male headship in the goodness of God’s creation, prior to the Fall, and grounded in the very being of God. Secondly, Giles proposes a “mutual submission” model (103) for the members of the Trinity. The major oversight here, of course, is that there is no biblical category for the submission of the Father to the Son or Spirit. What Giles and others are unable to explain then, is why the Father is called “Father,” a term which signifies authority. For a thorough review and critique by Peter

R. Schemm, see *JBMW* 7/2 (Fall 2002) 67-78.

Instone-Brewer, David. *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.

Instone-Brewer sets out to examine the biblical teaching on divorce and remarriage by closely investigating the Jewish and Greco-Roman worlds of the first-century, thereby suggesting that contemporary readers might be susceptible to hearing the biblical teaching on divorce and remarriage differently than a first-century counterpart. In laying out his conclusions, he readily acknowledges that he has arrived at different findings than the more traditional (though currently less popular) view, which would only allow divorce on the basis of the two NT exceptions and would not allow remarriage under any circumstances. Instone-Brewer thus argues, for instance, that both Jesus and Paul affirm the OT grounds for divorce, which include adultery, neglect, and abuse. And he further argues that both Jesus and Paul allow for remarriage after a "valid" divorce.

Kroeger, Catherine Clark and Mary J. Evans, eds. *The IVP Women's Bible Commentary*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002.

There is no avoiding the fact that this is a dangerous "commentary." In the first place, the title "commentary" is a misnomer for this book. As the editors indicate, great freedom was given to the various contributors such that some interacted with every passage in their assigned book, while others merely addressed themes, and still others limited their comments to a few select passages (xiv). Secondly, the volume is thoroughly egalitarian in its commentary on relevant passages and in the supplementary articles that are included. There is not enough space to critique each interpretation and each pertinent article. Suffice it to say that the authors trot out the fairly standard, yet unconvincing arguments, e.g. that Paul's prohibition on female authority and instruction over men in 1 Tim 2:9-15 was culturally limited to Ephesian women, when in actuality, Paul explicitly grounds the command in God's proper ordering of creation. Finally, there is thick irony in the mere production of this volume. The editors repeatedly labor the need for Scripture to be read through a different perspective, particularly that of women. But given the fact that egalitarians so stress the flattened out, undifferentiated equality of the sexes, it comes across as ironic that these editors and contributors saw a need to offer a specifically feminine reading of the Bible. Indeed, this is a "niche commentary." One is left to wonder then, whether the authors believe there is a gospel for women that is different from the one for men. Of course Galatians 3:28, properly interpreted, rules that out!

Strobel, Lee and Leslie Strobel. *Surviving a Spiritual Mismatch in Marriage*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002.

The Strobels offer a deeply personal reflection on what life was like when Leslie became a believer, while Lee remained an atheist. In the course of recounting their own story, they offer counsel to the believing partner in marriages of similar circumstances.

Van Leeuwen, Mary Stewart. *My Brother's Keeper: What the Social Sciences Do (and Don't) Tell Us About Masculinity*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002.

Van Leeuwen presents her findings and prescriptions for the contemporary ills facing males. While there is no doubt that men and boys are routinely facing the onslaught of an anti-masculine agenda, the resolution, contra Van Leeuwen, is not an egalitarianism that disallows male leadership. What is needed instead, is a return to seeing the beauty of God's created intention and an exhortation to young men—who have grown excessively comfortable in taking the back seat—to take on the leadership roles for which God has designed them.

Webb, Heather P. *Redeeming Eve: Finding Hope Beyond the Struggles of Life*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002.

Webb, herself an ordained minister in the PC-USA, wants to encourage women to be vessels of healing. Accordingly, she uses her chapters to suggest a variety of ways in which women, in different contexts, might overcome their various struggles by releasing the powers of God's redemptive healing.

Witherington, Ben and Laura M. Ice. *The Shadow of the Almighty: Father, Son, and Spirit in Biblical Perspective*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.

The authors examine the doctrine of the Trinity by successively exploring the biblical references to Father, Son, and Spirit. Perhaps the most notable finding for our purposes is their conclusion (correctly) to retain the gender marked terms "Father" and "Son" in naming and speaking about God.

Non-Evangelical Authors/Books

Anderson, Katherine, Don Browning, and Brian Boyer, eds. *Marriage: Just a Piece of Paper?* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.

This book is the companion volume to the PBS documentary of the same name that originally aired on Valentine's Day 2002. It is basically composed of interviews with a range of people (from the unknown to

Senators Lieberman and Brownback) who offer their reflections on different elements of marriage and family. Not surprisingly, there is plenty of diversity of opinion.

Bendroth, Margaret Lamberts and Virginia Lieson Brereton, eds. *Women and Twentieth Century Protestantism*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002.

The contributors to this volume attempt to provide snapshots of various dimensions of women's interaction with the theology, institutions, and movements of Protestantism in the twentieth century. Of particular note are chapters evaluating the Southern Baptist Convention and James Dobson's Focus on the Family.

Coakley, Sarah. *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender*. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2002.

Remaining within the context of feminism, Coakley wants to argue that much of feminism has allowed a disconnect in its thinking by requiring that power and vulnerability are antithetical. In response, she lays out her proposal for connecting the two poles.

Culbertson, Philip L., ed. *The Spirituality of Men: Sixteen Christians Write about Their Faith*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002.

Sometimes we come across books and wish we had another classification category (like "subversive" or "disgusting") because the potential damage that they might bring if given a wide hearing is very high. This is one of those books. But we will stay with the categories provided, and undeniably conclude that the vision of this volume easily exceeds the label "evangelical." In this volume sixteen men offer their reflections on reconstructed gender roles for men in an era of unsettled masculinity. At the outset, the editor posits that "these essays are very much about dying to old masculine gender roles and rising again into new ways of being men. To die to the old and rise to the new is to respond to the call of Christ" (xii). When you consider that the book includes chapters like "The Integration of Sexuality and Spirituality: Gay Sexual Prophets within the UFMCC," it becomes quite clear that their call to revise manhood is nothing short of unbiblical.

Gavora, Jessica. *Tilting the Playing Field: Schools, Sports, Sex, and Title IX*. San Francisco: Encounter, 2002.

Gavora argues that Title IX has been hi-jacked from an originally noble intent to the point that it now serves as the most explicit quota system in the country. And all of this social engineering comes at the expense of males and their opportunities in the classroom and on

the playing field. Having been derailed from its original intent, Gavora believes that Title IX is now (and will continue to be) increasingly used by feminists and others to enforce an egalitarian view of gender equity; witness, for example, the Title IX suit that brought about changes in the PSAT because not enough women were National Merit Scholars (17).

Gebara, Ivone. *Out of the Depths: Women's Experience of Evil and Salvation*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002.

The presupposition of Gebara's book is that evil and suffering have been chiefly reflected upon by men. Therefore she concludes a feminist perspective on evil and suffering is needed. Following that, she turns to an exposition of the unique feminist perspective on salvation.

Hewlett, Sylvia Ann. *Creating a Life: Professional Women and the Quest for Children*. New York: Talk Miramax, 2002.

Hewlett provides a fascinating glimpse at the rates of childlessness among professional women. Her study documents that it is not the case that professional women have opted out of childbearing. Rather, it is largely the case that they desperately want to have children, but get caught up in corporate culture and find themselves seduced by the promises of the fertility industry. Interestingly, after documenting all of this, Hewlett's council is not for wives to make family and children their primary area of focus. Rather, she concludes her book with some suggestions that she believes really will help women "have it all."

Malone, Mary T. *Women and Christianity: From 1000 to the Reformation*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2002.

Malone, who identifies herself as a Catholic feminist, picks up the second volume of her trilogy where the first left off. Herein she evaluates the lives of the Christian women over a five hundred year span, from the year 1000 to just before the Protestant Reformation.

Mitchem, Stephanie Y. *Introducing Womanist Theology*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2002.

Mitchem seeks to outline the distinctive contributions of "womanist" theology, where "womanist" theology, is seen to be related to feminist and liberationist theologies and yet also distinct from them, because "womanists" have the distinctive feature of being African American women. She proposes that the life experiences of black women offer vast resources to provide a new and needed theological perspective.

Parsons, Susan Frank, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

This volume simply seeks to sketch the history and major distinctives of feminist theology, from feminist hermeneutics to God and gender language and everything in between.

Robert, Dana L., ed. *Gospel Bearers, Gender Barriers*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2002.

The diverse contributions to this volume center around a tension perceived to have plagued female missionaries in the twentieth century. The authors understand this tension to swirl around the thrill of obeying the Great Commission on the one hand and having to deal with the imposition of certain ministry limitations because of their gender on the other. The danger with such a mindset, of course, is that we may allow our subjective perceptions to run unchecked by the Scriptures.

Ruether, Rosemary Radford, ed. *Gender, Ethnicity, and Religion: Views from the Other Side*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002.

Here is yet another book by feminists and their co-belligerents arguing that their experience of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, etc. ought to be construed as a source of theology. Of course, to follow this methodology is to adopt as many “readings” and “theologies” of the Bible as there are interest groups and ideologies which wish to remake its truth in their own images. Evangelicals must remain committed to discerning the theology inherent in the text itself that instructs and corrects any and all human thought forms. Herein lies one of the major differences between our evangelicalism and their liberalism.

Shepherd, Loraine MacKenzie. *Feminist Theologies for a Postmodern Church*. New York: Peter Lang, 2002.

Shepherd centers her book on a consideration of feminist theological method. In the first portion, she evaluates four major feminist methodological proposals, before turning towards her own proposal (drawing on perceived strengths in each of the four proposals surveyed) in the second section.

Steyer, James P. *The Other Parent: The Inside Story of the Media's Effect on our Children*. New York: Atria, 2002.

Steyer sets out to expose the vast influence of the media (e.g. radio, internet, television, etc.) on children in largely negative ways. He suggests the increasingly negative side of this influence has grown in

proportion with the pursuit of the almighty dollar. In the course of his diagnosis, he suggests some practical measures that parents might take in guiding their children's exposure to the media.

Wilson, James Q. *The Marriage Problem: How Our Culture Has Weakened Families*. New York: HarperCollins, 2002.

Social scientist, James Q. Wilson points to the undeniable evidence that marriage is under attack in our culture, and he proceeds to show the severity of the consequences of the unraveling of this once culturally esteemed institution. Wilson documents a fascinating—if depressing—historical development that has led to society's present mentality towards marriage.

Yamaguchi, Satoko. *Mary and Martha: Women in the World of Jesus*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2002.

When, at the outset, Yamaguchi identifies Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza as one of her primary mentors, one is not left to wonder much as to the direction the book will take. Her charge is that the Bible has been given to us through male eyes. Consequently, she proposes to re-read the Johannine narrative of Mary and Martha from the perspective of a Japanese feminist, in a way that will challenge traditionally male-oriented readings.

Undeclared Authors/Books

Holmes, Wayne, ed. *The Heart of a Father*. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2002.

Holmes has compiled sixty reflections from a variety of authors (most of whom would identify with evangelicals) on the positive ways in which their respective fathers impacted them.

Lessin, Roy. *Spanking: A Loving Discipline*. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2002.

As the title clearly indicates, Lessin favors a model of parent-child discipline that includes spanking. This conclusion is rather simple since God's Word directs us to this course of action. What is less clear to many parents, according to Lessin, is when and how to spank as a part of loving correction. These constitute the primary concerns of his book.

Nicolosi, Joseph and Linda Ames Nicolosi. *A Parent's Guide to Preventing Homosexuality*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002.

This is a very important book. The Nicolosis take on the psychological and politically correct establishment on the debate over homosexuality by stressing the

importance of creating healthy family contexts in which young boys and girls can develop healthy gender identities. Indeed, their study reveals that such prevention goes a long way to avoiding homosexuality. Parents of young children especially will want to absorb the counsel that is offered here, so that they may provide capable guidance to their children during developmental years.

Robertson, Brian C. *Forced Labor: What's Wrong With Balancing Work and Family*. Dallas: Spence, 2002.

Not surprisingly, the statistical evidence indicates that children are the big losers when mothers attempt to “balance” work and family. The societal trend toward a two-income family has been pretty clear in recent years. Robertson seeks to determine why this shift away from the home has occurred. In a fascinating historical analysis, Robertson concludes that the common understanding of the purpose of work has shifted from something done to support a family to an avenue primarily of self-fulfillment. Finally, he offers some political policy suggestions that he believes would be more friendly to one-income families. ■