

**MERE
COMPLEMENTARIANISM**

Denny Burk

**RECOVERING THE
COMMUNION OF PERSONS**

Katie McCoy

**GENDER, INTERSECTIONALITY,
AND CRITICAL THEORY**

Pat Sawyer + Neil Shenvi

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A Journal for Biblical Anthropology





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ANDREW T. WALKER

Fall 2019 Issue Introduction

Eikon is now into its second issue, and I continue to be grateful for what the beginnings of this journal have offered. Our first issue was greeted with success. In particular, Joe Rigney's essay on the relationship between general revelation and special revelation put down an important marker for what *Eikon* is seeking to establish, namely, an evangelical account of anthropology that is firmly rooted in both general revelation and special revelation and a proper account of how the two relate to one another.

The Fall 2019 issue of *Eikon* is our most substantive to date. That may seem insignificant considering this is only our second issue, but nonetheless, the question of a journal's success is often determined by the volume and quality of its content, and this second issue surpasses the first in terms of volume.

At a time where complementarian thought is deeply misunderstood and often purposefully maligned, CBMW

president Denny Burk has written what I hope will be an important signpost for complementarianism's future. With much uncertainty as to what defines complementarianism *qua* complementarianism, Burk has sought to clarify what the school of complementarianism consists of, what it should debate "in house," and what should be considered outside the pale of complementarianism.

We are pleased to announce that professor Michael Haykin of Southern Seminary will offer a column for each subsequent issue of *Eikon* titled "Ancient Paths." His introductory column appears in this issue.

Southwestern Seminary professor Katie McCoy has put together an incredibly thoughtful essay on how complementarianism should be understood more through Hebraic understandings, and less through Aristotelian lenses.



Australian scholar Robert Smith has written a very thorough essay on what discipleship means for a transgender convert. Josh Wester and I engage an important debate among religious conservatives — how to respond to the preponderance of "Drag Queen Story Hour" and what, if anything, the government can do to offset this immoral conduct aimed at children. CBMW Executive Director Colin Smothers has written an essay on what "discrimination" means in the context of sex difference, in terms of how we judge and assess the designed differences between males and females. Smothers's essay helps us understand that sex difference is not discriminatory, in the contemporary sense of that term, but that natural difference is tied to what it means to be male or female.

Lastly, we have an important interview with Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr., one of today's most important complementarian voices. Please pay particular attention to this interview, as Dr. Mohler's comments on the state and future of complementarianism need

broad purchase. In our reviews section, Steven Wedgeworth has written an in-depth review of a noteworthy book that is seeking to challenge complementarianism by appealing to complementarianism's foundations. On a parting note, in this issue is CBMW's formal statement against the United States military's consideration on whether to conscript women into military service. ✕

Andrew T. Walker is the Executive Editor of Eikon and Associate Professor of Christian Ethics and Apologetics at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

This Anthropological Moment

The early Christian theologian Gregory of Nyssa (c.335–c.395) once complained that it was nigh on impossible to buy bread at the market or even go to the baths without finding oneself asked whether or not God the Son is equal to or less than God the Father. His was a day when Trinitarian questions dominated the public discourse of the churches. Twelve hundred years later, during the Reformation, the major questions had to do with how one is saved and the marks of the true church. In fact, in certain contexts, refusal to confess the doctrine of transubstantiation was enough to get one killed. But these questions of Trinitarian theology or soteriology or the doctrine of the church are not the most burning issues of our day. That place is reserved for anthropological concerns: what it means to be human and questions of human sexuality. Ours is an anthropological moment.

It would be easy to think that the church has never been in such a place before — but such a thought would be wrong. The earliest heresy which consumed much of the church’s energy, Gnosticism, was first and foremost concerned with anthropological matters. Gnostics, who first appeared in the era of the New Testament (see 1 John 4 and 2 John, for example), denied the goodness of the material realm, leading them to deny the goodness of the human body and thus the possibility of the incarnation and bodily resurrection. Their affirmation of salvation by knowledge was intimately tied to a fascination with answering the question of personal identity — all of which sounds so current. Some of the authoritative writings of the Gnostics, such as the so-called Gospel of Philip, argued that the fall of humanity took place when there was the separation of male and female from what

was originally an androgynous person. The goal of salvation was overcoming this sexual differentiation. The response of Christian authors like Irenaeus was to affirm the goodness of the original creation of male and female and thus the goodness of sexual differentiation, and by implication, the goodness of sexuality.

Again, during the time of the Reformation, the Reformers had major concerns about what had been central to the medieval ideal of spirituality, namely, celibacy. The Reformers asserted that the married state could be as holy a context in which to live out Christian discipleship as celibacy, and thus marriage was a hot issue during the sixteenth century. The Reformers’ marriages — such as those of Martin Bucer, Martin Luther, and John Calvin — were regarded as scandalous by the Roman Church and forced the Reformers to

defend the propriety of the married estate for pastors. Divorce also became a major issue of the era, and Calvin in particular crafted an enormous amount of church legislation about divorce and remarriage.

In other words, our anthropological moment is not without precedent. And wise words from the Christian past about what it means to be truly human are thus of ongoing value and help. Such are the “ancient paths” (Jer. 6:16) that this column will explore in coming issues.

Michael A.G. Haykin is chair and professor of church history at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and Director of the Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies at Southern.



COLIN J. SMOTHERS

Creation and Discrimination:

Why the Male-Female Distinction Makes a Difference

World-renowned historian William Manchester could write in 1993 that “the erasure of the distinctions between the sexes is not only the most striking issue of our time, it may be the most profound the race has ever confronted.”¹ Twenty-six years later, it is difficult to overstate just how prescient Manchester’s statement was. The attempt to erase the distinctions between the sexes has not only accelerated apace in the ensuing decades, it has evolved and eked into nearly every realm of contemporary life. How should we think about the inevitable confrontation before us? The task at hand is proper discrimination, the drawing of distinctions, and this according to God’s original design.

¹William Manchester, “A World Lit Only By Change,” *U.S. News & World Report* (October 25, 1993), 6.

CREATIONAL NORMATIVITY

Written into the creation account is a self-understanding that the depiction of God's creative acts in Genesis 1 and 2 is not merely an accountant's schedule — as if supplying a rote list of things God created is the primary aim. Instead, the creation account communicates a morally normative narrative whose aim is to illustrate God's revealed will for the world — not only in the *what* of creation and its order, but also in the *how*. The norming nature of this narrative can be seen most clearly when the author of Genesis breaks the fourth wall and looks into the camera, as it were, to prescribe a normative definition of marriage: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). In saying "therefore," the author grounds his "Thou shalt" for marriage in the foregoing narrative of God's creation of man and woman.

The New Testament everywhere confirms the morally normative nature of Genesis 1 and 2; for instance, when Jesus counters the teaching of the Pharisees on divorce, he appeals — seemingly against Moses and the Law — to these initial chapters in Genesis. In so doing, he articulates a normative hermeneutical principle: "from the beginning it was not so" (Matt. 19:3–9). In other words, God's original creation presents what ought — and by implication what ought not — to be "so." Paul, a true disciple of his Master, likewise invokes what seem to be minutiae in the creation narrative — that woman was created from man and for man, and that man was created before woman — in order to ground his exhortations to the churches on male headship (cf. 1 Cor. 11:8–9; 1 Tim. 2:12–13; Eph. 5:22–33).

CREATION'S CATECHESIS IN DISTINCTION

Perhaps more fundamentally, it could be argued that the opening chapters of the book of Genesis lay the groundwork necessary for an epistemological framework for everything there is to know about God and about his creation. Revealed in these chapters is nothing short of a Christian metaphysical accounting of the world and everything in it, as well as the one who made it all.

In the first words of Genesis we encounter a fathomless well of theological declaration. The book opens, "In the beginning, God . . ." These words proclaim a God who is before all things, who is eternal. He is in the beginning; in the beginning is God and nothing else. From these four words we can deduce that God is *a se*, which simply means he owes his existence to none other than himself. A corollary aids our understanding: all that is not God owes its existence to him.

Verse 1 in Genesis stands as a summary statement over the rest of God's creative acts, wherein he makes something out of nothing, *ex nihilo*, by the Word of his power. This God "created the heavens and the earth" — that is, everything. In this verse is a fundamental theological affirmation known as the Creator-creature distinction. The world can be divided into two kinds of beings: created and uncreated. God is uncreated, and as such is *sui generis*, unique in the universe in his God-ness. Everything that is not God is created by God, and thus is essentially — in its very essence — different from him.



From the beginning, the Scriptures catechize in distinction. Discrimination is the act of recognizing or drawing distinctions. To attempt to know anything whatsoever is first to be able to discriminate between it and that which it is not. And the fundamental distinction is between what is caused and what is uncaused, what is dependent and what is independent, what is derivative and what is original; namely between the creation and its Creator.

This fundamental Creator-creature distinction, which must also be understood as the fundamental metaphysical distinction, informs the proceeding distinctions in the creation account. These creational distinctions are real and grounded in God's creative acts; but they are metaphysically relative compared to the difference between the created and the uncreated Creator. It is little wonder that pantheists, and to a lesser but no less erroneous degree the panentheists, fail to uphold meaningful distinctions in creation. The collapse of the Creator-creature distinction leads to the collapse of

all discriminations. If there is no difference between the Creator and his creation, then in what way are any distinctions said to be meaningful?

As God creates in Genesis, he gives form through exhortation, boundary, and fashioning contradistinction. His creative Word commands by calling things into being and then prescribing their existence, which entails setting their bounds and also calling forth their contradistinction. God creates heaven by also creating earth; we know heaven through its juxtaposition to earth. He creates light and defines it in opposition to darkness. The waters above are separated, distinguished, and thus made distinct, from the waters below. God creates dry land, a form that is only meaningfully known through knowledge of its antithesis, the seas. The sun is not the moon nor the moon the sun, because day is not night and its boundary is not to be transgressed.

In the beginning, God created a universe full of distinction.

CREATED DISTINCT FOR COMMUNION

As the creation narrative progresses in Genesis 1, God forms and then fills. Alastair Roberts remarks on the logic of the creation account:

“Days one to three (verses 1-13) are days of structuring, division, taming, and naming. . . Days four to six (verses 14-31) are days of generating, establishing succession, filling, glorifying, and establishing communion.”²

The creational divisions underwrite the creational communions. Without distinction, there can be no communion. It could be said that form begets forms.

But as the creation narrative in Genesis 1 arrives at day six, it slows down and is taken with communion predicated on distinction. God proposes to make *adam*, a creature who shares a commonality with creation through his origination from the *adamah*, the ground, but enjoys a unique communion with God as he is created in the divine image. Yet the *adam* is also to be distinct from creation, having dominion over it, while remaining distinct from the Creator. An image is, after all, not coterminous with what it images. Even so, the commonalities and distinctions of day six are not complete: this image-bearing *adam* is created “male and female” (Gen. 1:27). The very words used to describe the creation of the *adam* in Genesis 1:27 as male and female point to a social-sexual complementarity — another word loaded with unity in diversity — which

is further explored in Genesis 2. *Adam* is “male,” a Hebrew word that etymologically hints at outwardness and prominence as a definitional aspect of this creature, and “female,” a Hebrew word that etymologically hints at inwardness and receptivity.

In Genesis 2, the narrative returns to scrutinize God’s creation of *adam* on the sixth day. Here the dramatic details to describe this extraordinary creature begin to multiply. The *adam* is initially created alone. This is the only privation of good mentioned in all of God’s original creation (God declares in Genesis 2:18, “It is not good that the man should be alone.”). But the *adam* is to be made aware of his aloneness, and God parades the animals before him in order for them to be named. These animals would have presented in their paired, dimorphic differentiation.

Imagine two creatures strolling past the *adam*, similar in appearance, one slightly larger with a grand mane, the other smaller, yet glorious and sleek, corresponding closely to her mate in form, and the *adam* says, “Lion.” Two by complementary two they file past. One wonders how long this procession went on before something awakened within him. All around him, the *adam* observes distinction and correspondence, melody and rhythm, woven through every detail of creation.³ And upon this realization, God puts the *adam* to sleep to form from his side *his* corresponding distinction. Awakening, the *adam* sees

his complementary other, and he gives her a name which points to their unity and diversity: woman (*isha*), “because she was taken from man” (*ish*, Gen. 2:23). God designed his perfect complement to be his “helper” — distinction — “fit for him” — correspondence (Gen. 2:18, 20).

Embedded in God’s creation of male and female, man and woman (there is no strict bifurcation between sex and gender in the biblical witness) is a simple but profound theological truth grounded in God’s creative distinctions and necessary for biblical anthropology: mankind is created to be male and female. That is, mankind is dimorphic — existing in two forms, male and female — not dipolar. Just as the land and the seas, the light and the dark, the sun and the moon have contradistinct forms that are not merely two extreme poles that exist to define a fluid middle, mankind is not a spectrum of variegated difference. Male and female He created them.

THE MEANING OF MANKIND’S DIMORPHISM

Mankind’s dimorphism as male and female is fundamental to understanding God’s purpose for human sexuality and gender. As Oliver O’Donovan writes, “Human beings come into existence with a dimorphically differentiated sexuality, clearly ordered at the biological level towards heterosexual union as the human mode of procreation.”⁴

Mankind’s sexual dimorphism addresses three presenting anthropological errors in our day, which the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood stands resolutely against in its confessional statements. These anthropological errors are feminism, homosexuality, and transgenderism.

Firstly, feminism downplays male-female difference and militates against both male and female form in pursuit of male-female egalitarianism. Feminism starts, according to O’Donovan, “from the personalist position that the opposition of the sexes should have no implications for social interaction.” With this starting point, feminism “is left asking what the point of biological dimorphism is.”⁵ Instead of asking the purpose of maleness and femaleness, feminists too often view men’s superior physical strength and stature as inconsequential, and women’s wombs a liability. But in their mathematical calculation that a wo(mb)man minus a womb equals a man, they fail to see how deep the grooves run. The feminist argument begins with desired outcomes instead of God’s creational design and reasons in the opposite direction observed in the Christian Scriptures.

Homosexuality similarly ignores the dimorphic nature of male and female in its rebellion against the created order. This explains why Paul’s treatment of the sin of homosexuality stands at the apex of his jeremiad on mankind’s rebellion against

²Alistair Roberts, “The Music and the Meaning of Male and Female,” *Primer* 03 (2018), 3. Accessed on October 2, 2019 (<https://primerhq.files.wordpress.com/2018/08/primer-03-the-music-and-the-meaning-of-male-and-female.pdf>).
³I am borrowing the imagery of “melody” and “rhythm” to describe natural complementarity from the end *Perelandra*, the second book of C. S. Lewis’s *Space Trilogy*.

⁴Oliver O’Donovan, “Transsexualism and Christian Marriage,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 11, no. 1 (Spring 1983), 141. This fundamentally teleological understanding of creation persists even where the telos is materially absent: “Within the framework of the Christian understanding of marriage, however, femaleness and maleness have a meaning which, since it is generic to humankind, is significant also for those in whom the teleological meaning of their sex is not, or cannot be, individually instantiated; that is, for the unmarried and the sexually handicapped.” *Ibid.*, 142.
⁵*Ibid.*, 142.

his Creator in Romans 1. At each step along the way, the divine distinctions baked into creation are cast aside in favor of manmade edifices which stand against the laws of nature — an ultimately untenable position. In their willful ignorance of the Creator, mankind turns to worship the creature, thus obliterating the God-given dominion that distinguishes them from creation. This worship flows in the opposite direction of God’s purposed order. Mankind’s failure to acknowledge the distinction between Creator and creature begets a derivative failure, as they relinquish dominion to their subordinates, the “birds and animals and creeping things” (Rom. 1:33). This culminates in a rebellion against the fundamental distinction in mankind as male and female. Using women as men and men as women, they trade distinction for interchangeability and spurn divine distinctions, an act that resembles self-worship, which is the ultimate inability to discriminate. The homosexual rebellion is not just rebellion against God, nature, and its crown, it is also a rebellion against the self. It is related to what O’Donovan calls a “false self-knowledge,” which fails “to recognize in our bodies, not only a vehicle for the free expression of our spirits, but also a given structure and meaning which limits that freedom.”⁶ Homosexuality is a failure to recognize the given-ness of one’s body — which asks, given for what?

It is no accident that the letter “T” is wed to “L,” “G,” and “B” in the progressive mind. Transgenderism is the same project in self-definition by another name. Transgenderism obliterates male-female distinction — at best trading out forms, at worst treating sexuality as a fluid dipolarity

— and treats the human body as a plastic that exists for self-actualization, not as a given form. In transgenderism’s animating spirit, O’Donovan rightly detects not one but two ancient heresies:

“It is the first and decisive step in contemporary manifestations of the Manichaeian spirit to regard nature, not as a gracious gift of the Creator, but as a problem to be overcome.”⁷

“If I claim to have a ‘real sex,’ which may be at war with the sex of my body and is at least in a rather uncertain relationship to it, I am shrinking from the glad acceptance of myself as a physical as well as a spiritual being, and seeking self-knowledge in a kind of Gnostic withdrawal from material creation.”⁸

The Manichean roots for a god against the natural world; the Gnostic seeks a god liberated from the natural world; but the Christian confesses a God who fathers the natural world and then enters into it as the incarnate Son.

Though the rebellions against God and His will are manifold — rebellions that include but are certainly not limited to these anthropological errors — they have a common root: the failure to rightly discriminate in God’s creation. From the woman who desires manly rank, to the effeminate man who looks to another man for what only a woman is designed, to the one who thinks gender is incidental and not fundamentally bound to sexual form, perhaps even going so far as to attempt a surgical creation *ex nihilo* to confirm a fiction — these are all various degrees of the same rebellion. But from the beginning it was not so; therefore it must not be so.

TRANSGRESSING GOD’S CREATIONAL DISTINCTIONS

By creating what he has created in the way he created it, God has meticulously laid down in all of creation distinct, form-norming grooves that by their very existence warn against transgression. God summons these distinctions as witness against his people in the midst of their sinful rebellion during the prophetic ministry of Jeremiah:

“Do you not fear me? declares the Lord. Do you not tremble before me? I placed the sand as the boundary for the sea, a perpetual barrier that it cannot pass; though the waves toss, they cannot prevail; though they roar, they cannot pass over (עבר) it.” (Jer. 5:22)

This perpetual “barrier” against the sea is, literally translated, a statute, a prescription of the divine will. The prescriptive boundary between land and sea in Scripture represents God’s prescriptive authority, which is grounded in his creative power. God’s authority is bound up with God’s ordination of distinctions. In the book of Job, God asks the beleaguered man, “[W]ho shut in the sea with doors . . . and prescribed limits for it and set bars and doors, and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no farther?’” (Job 38:11). The book of Proverbs has Wisdom recalling, “When [God] established the heavens, I was there; when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command” (Prov. 8:28–29). But unlike the seas, which are obedient to

God’s ordinances, the people of Jeremiah’s day were failing to heed God’s righteous discriminations. God indicts them in language that recalls his perpetual statue for the seas: “They know no bounds (עבר) in deeds of evil; they judge not with justice” (Jer. 5:28). Their base error is an act of indiscrimination, which has led them into deeds of evil against God’s created order.

If we are to be found faithful, we will seek to uphold proper creational discrimination. This must include both proper worship of God — and not his creation — as well as a right apprehension of dimorphic sexual distinction that participates in a purposefully stratified world. It is no coincidence that the constituent doctrine of the church — the union of Christ and his church — trades in marital imagery that is predicated upon God’s creation of man as male and female. And thus neither is it mere happenstance that we find ourselves defending this very confession against the powers and principalities of this age. ✕

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⁶Ibid., 151.
⁷Ibid., 142.
⁸Ibid., 147.

Transgenderism and the Supreme Court

Since 1964, federal law has prohibited discrimination on the basis of sex. At the time, no one argued that “sex” included sexual orientation or transgender identity. Congress has repeatedly rejected attempts to add specific references to sexual orientation and gender identity.

But some new theories of sexuality and gender treat “sex” as a set of stereotypes about human bodies, and they treat gender as subjective. Under these theories, if a person believes they are a woman, it is irrational and discriminatory to suggest the physical evidence shows anything else. In three cases to be decided this term, the United States Supreme Court will ask whether the non-discrimination laws should be read today as if Congress had protected sexual orientation or transgender status all along. Especially in the case concerning transgender status, the Supreme Court is being asked to accept that “sex” is a set of stereotypes.

In one of the cases before the court, the United States Court of Appeals for the 6th Circuit adopted this reasoning. Harris Funeral Home had a dress code for male

and female employees, which prior cases have allowed. But when a male employee announced his intention to “transition,” the court said an employee could not be fired for refusing to wear a male uniform. It suggested that “sex” lacks any “fixed external referent.”

Suddenly, the non-discrimination law meant to protect the sexes from bias threatens to make any claim to be a man or woman vague and unintelligible.

My firm filed a “friend of the court” brief in *Harris Funeral Home* on behalf of more than two dozen groups concerned about the potential impact of this decision on the rights of parents. The cases at the court do not involve children. But the definition of male and female, and ideas like “boy” and “girl,” are important to the relationships between children, their mothers, and their fathers. In one fell swoop, “mother,” “father,” “son,” and “daughter” would lose their legal meanings. Laws that are supposed to help and guide mothers and fathers would turn into Kafkaesque traps.

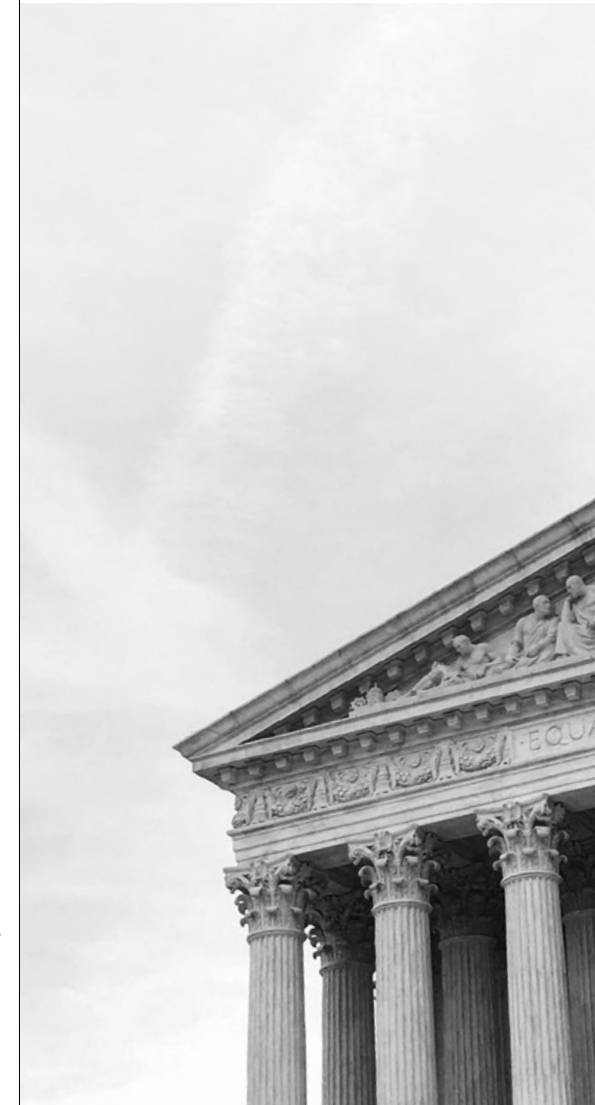
This kind of change in the law would influence parental choice in education. For example, the law currently says schools can make some distinctions based on (birth) sex. These include:

- Human sexuality classes
- Toilets
- Locker rooms
- Showers
- Living/sleeping accommodations (dormitories)
- Social fraternities or sororities
- Men’s and Women’s athletics
- Father-son or mother-daughter activities, and more

The law protects these legitimate interests of male and female students and parents.

If sex has no external referent in biology, however, a mother could not reliably choose an all-girl or all-boys educational experience for their child. Yes, that choice is supposedly protected. But it would be an illusory choice. No parent could agree with other parents about what it means to be an all-girl experience. They could only agree to mutually accept certain children as girls. Any child claiming to be a girl must be accepted as a girl, because all objective definitions of “girl” would be based on stereotypes.

Even “father” and “mother” would lose their objective meaning. *Black’s Law Dictionary* says a “mother” is a “woman who has given birth to, provided the egg for, or legally adopted a child” — a term from before the twelfth century. A “father” is a “male parent.” But if “woman” and “man,” “female” and “male” are unfixed and stereotypical, one can only ever be sure that one is a parent.



Beyond educational experiences, if sex lacks an objective meaning, it undermines parents' role in directing their children's care.

In 2015, Professors Eric Vilain and J. Michael Bailey published an op-ed in the *Los Angeles Times*, asking “[w]hat should you do if your son says he’s a girl?” They hypothesized a five-year old boy who wants to be a girl and concluded, “As scientists who study gender and sexuality, we can tell you confidently: at this point no one knows what is better for your son ... we don’t yet know whether it’s better to encourage adjustment or persistence.”

According to the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH), most dysphoria in young children “desists,” rather than persists. In a study of young boys referred to gender dysphoria clinics, more than 77% reported little or no dysphoria in adulthood; the rates among young girls are similar. WPATH says persistence is higher for adolescents, but no formal, prospective studies exist. The claims are based on a single study of just seventy children.

However, activist groups demand sex and gender identity be treated as immutable. Nineteen states now ban so-called “conversion therapy.” In many cases, the bans include therapy targeted at *acceptance* of male or female sex. Maryland’s law prohibits “any effort to ... change gender expression.” Even “coping” therapy cannot try to change gender identity.

As Villain and Bailey say, a young girl who says she is a boy might desist. Most children do desist. But professionals in these states could be punished for suggesting the little girl might come to accept her female body and identity.

Assistant professor Lisa Littman, of Brown University’s School of Public Health, recently published a descriptive study proposing a clinical phenomenon she termed “Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria” (ROGD).¹ The study asked whether some gender dysphoria has roots in social influences.

Littman collected parent reports, which often described traumatized youth and overeager healthcare providers. One said their twelve-year-old daughter was bullied and, “as a result she said she felt fat and hated her breasts.” Another parent said her child’s peers were “constantly putting down straight, white people for being privileged, dumb and boring...”

When asked what sources influenced their children, 63.6% identified “YouTube transition videos.” One parent said some materials offered a philosophy of “if you are even questioning your gender — you are probably transgender.”

Further, most of the parents believed their child used online information to misrepresent parts of their history.

Littman’s paper is a proposal about some dysphoria, not a description of all dysphoria. “It is unlikely,” she notes, “that

friends and the internet can make people transgender.” But it is plausible that beliefs about gender can start and spread socially, such as the belief that non-specific symptoms are dysphoria, or that happiness requires a transition.

Finally, theories of unmoored gender can even be used to deprive parents of the fundamental rights of custody and conscience.

In Ohio, “JNS” contacted a crisis hotline and said his parents had told him to “kill himself.” Ohio Family Services petitioned to remove JNS from his parents. The court found the parents had sought appropriate medical treatment, but were reluctant to support the clinic’s recommended transition. The court was skeptical of the clinic’s cookie-cutter pattern of clinical diagnoses. The transgender clinic’s director testified that “100% of the patients seen by Children’s Hospital Clinic who present for care are considered to be appropriate candidates for continued gender treatment.” Still, JNS’s parents agreed to give up custody, under pressure from doctors and advocates.

Other state governments suggest that “nonaffirming” parents threaten child well-being. Vermont says workers must “affirm the ... identity of all children to create a supportive environment,” and that “division staff shall not attempt to persuade a [transgender] individual to reject or modify their ... gender identity...”

Instead, the division suggests supportive families always “support children’s identities even if it feels uncomfortable.” Children who “cannot safely remain in their homes” will be placed in an “affirming” environment.

LGBTQ advocates now ask that parents affirm even *hypothetical* dysphoria. The Human Rights Campaign’s “All Children – All Families” project certifies foster and adoption groups. One requirement for certification is telling foster parents that they may not even be aware of their child’s sexual orientation or gender identity at the time of placement. Foster parents are expected to affirm any future identity.

In other countries, this kind of policy has led to religious parents being blocked from fostering or adopting. An evangelical couple in Canada was denied an adoption because their beliefs were “contrary to the ‘official position of the Alberta government.’” A United Kingdom agency blocked an evangelical couple’s adoption after they said their foster children would benefit from a “mummy and daddy.”

And in a case in Canada, a parent’s opposition to his child’s transition was deemed “family violence.” The parent was gagged by court order. While the First Amendment protects speech in the United States, LGBTQ advocacy groups are pushing to define non-affirmation as a kind of unprotected violence.

The Supreme Court has long said that “the child is not the mere creature of the state.” Part of the maturity that accrues to parents is the hard-earned wisdom that the human internal compass does not reliably point to a true north. But as we’ve seen, changing the definition of “sex” may undermine parental rights of choice, care, custody, and conscience. As the court considers these disputes between adults, it should consider how those same words protect parents’ important work in helping the next generation accept and embrace the gift of manhood and womanhood. ✕

¹Lisa Littman (2018) *Parent reports of adolescents and young adults perceived to show signs of a rapid onset of gender dysphoria*. PLoS ONE 13(8): e0202330. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0202330>; PLoS ONE conducted an editorial review, and issued more detailed information about the processes, but left the Results section unchanged. See Lisa Littman, *Correction: Parent reports of adolescents and young adults perceived to show signs of a rapid onset of gender dysphoria*. PLoS ONE 14(3): e0214157. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0214157> (Last accessed August 10, 2019).

Alike, but Different:

EPISTEMOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF MEN AND WOMEN



Through the ages, similarities and differences in the intellectual and ethical development of men and women have been examined and debated. Author and educator Elizabeth Hayes writes:

Women's potentially distinctive characteristics as learners have been a topic of interest to scholars, educators, and women themselves for centuries. Noted Western (male) philosophers, ranging from Plato to Rousseau, questioned whether women could learn at all, or could at least engage in the kind of rational thought typically associated with "higher" learning.¹

In the last seventy years, this debate has continued as empirical studies have assessed epistemological development. Many of these foundational studies have either ignored gender or presupposed men and women to be completely different in their epistemological development. Despite this divide in approach, research actually demonstrates what one might expect from a biblical perspective.

Biblically, similarity between the sexes with different patterns and perspectives is expected. In Scripture, there are not two separate views of knowledge — one for men and one for women. Men and women are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). Both are fallen (Rom. 3:10–12, 23). Both are redeemed in the same way, by the same Savior, believing the same gospel and the same truths (John 14:6; Rom. 10:9; Acts 16:31; Col. 1:13–14; Eph. 1:7; 1 Tim. 2:6; Heb. 9:12; Rom. 3:23–25). In Scripture, men and women are addressed separately in certain passages with some distinctions (1 Tim. 2; Col. 3; Eph. 5; 1 Cor. 14), but the vast majority of scriptural commands apply to both men and women.

Empirical research has shown similarity in male and female epistemological development, while also acknowledging differences. This is seen through an examination of the foundational studies in the field, the similarities in their overarching patterns of development, and the different patterns and perspectives revealed between men and women.

¹Elizabeth R. Hayes, "A New Look at Women's Learning," *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 2001, no. 89 (2001), 35.

WHY SPEND TIME ON THIS ISSUE?

These patterns are important for understanding both female and male learners and their growth and experiences as such. Hayes has also written, “It can be tempting to simply ignore gender, perhaps in the name of treating each person as a unique individual. Ignoring gender can make us blind to the significant impact that it can have on our learners.”²

As believers, our need to consider this topic goes further. Knowing is ethical, so considering the epistemological growth of both sexes is worth consideration because it values all humans and is a study of God’s creative work. Though men and women have the same ethical, moral, and spiritual responsibilities before God in the use of their minds, that God created women differently than men means it is appropriate to explore these differences.

FOUNDATIONAL STUDIES IN EPISTEMOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

While many studies in the field could be used to demonstrate this similarity with different patterns and perspectives, three foundational studies will be used.

William Perry. In 1970, William Perry laid out a scheme of epistemological development in his book, *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years*. This work resulted from the qualitative, longitudinal study Perry did at Harvard in the 1950s and 60s on undergraduate males. His scheme shows a progression of nine positions grouped into four stages: dualism, multiplicity, contextual relativism, and commitment within relativism. Perry’s scheme has continued to be verified and used to measure epistemological development.

Belenky et al. Shortly after Perry’s work was published, Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule raised the issue of women’s epistemological development being assessed according to male development patterns. Their findings from their study, conducted by women on women, were published in their book *Women’s Ways of Knowing*.

Their study included females who were college students, recent graduates, or students in “the invisible college,” which they defined as institutions that helped women in need. Despite varying greatly from Perry’s pool of Ivy League men, their research did not reveal a new structure. They observed different patterns and perspectives that were attributed to gender, but the categories, though differently named, demonstrated the same progression of development. Their findings had five major categories: silence, received knowledge, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge, and constructed knowledge.

Baxter Magolda. Marcia Baxter Magolda also contributed to the research on epistemological gender differences with a study that followed students from their first year of college through their first year after graduation. This study compared both men and women in one study, whereas the studies by Belenky et al. and Perry were decades apart and studied different populations. Baxter Magolda’s findings were published in her book, *Knowing and Reasoning in College: Gender-Related Patterns in Students’ Intellectual Development*. She recognized there were different patterns that men and women tended to fall into, but one main scheme of development for both. Her stages of knowing were absolute knowing, transitional knowing, independent knowing, and contextual knowing.

STUDY SIMILARITIES

While the different studies had slight variations, overall the arc of knowledge development is the same. This arc moves from the learner believing that every question has a black and white answer with authorities knowing everything, to understanding that authorities can disagree. This leads to a cacophony of possible truth, where the learner believes all answers are equal and each individual can make a personal decision. As the learner continues to develop, however, he or she realizes that some assertions are better supported than others. Possible answers must be examined and understood in context. Finally, the learner progresses to understand that knowing goes beyond a list of facts and examination, but there is a personal responsibility to affirm values. Knowing is ethical, and the knower bears a responsibility. These parallels can be seen in the chart below with descriptions of each of their stages.

²Elisabeth R. Hayes, “A New Look at Women’s Learning,” *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 89 (2001), 40.

<i>William Perry</i>	<i>Belenky et al.</i>	<i>Baxter Magolda</i>
	SILENCE: Mindless, voiceless reliance on external authority. Often associated with trauma.	
DUALISM: Bifurcation of right and wrong with authorities holding the answers.	RECEIVED KNOWLEDGE: All-knowing external authority that teaches students material they can learn and reproduce. No ambiguity.	ABSOLUTE KNOWING: Knowledge is certain, absolute, and received from the instructor.
		TRANSITIONAL KNOWING: Goes beyond acquiring knowledge and focuses on understanding. Knowledge is seen as partially certain and uncertain.
MULTIPLICITY: Plurality of answers with all opinions being equal. Everyone has a right to their opinion.	SUBJECTIVE KNOWLEDGE: Knowledge is personal, private, intuitive, and varied.	INDEPENDENT KNOWING: Knowledge uncertain with each person having their own beliefs. No criteria for ideas is better or worse. Everything is equal.
RELATIVISM: Multiple answers must be understood in context, using various forms of comparison and analysis.	PROCEDURAL KNOWLEDGE: Personal investment in learning. Knowledge is through objective means.	
COMMITMENT: A personal affirmation of values that involves choice in the midst of relativism.	CONSTRUCTED KNOWLEDGE: Knowledge is contextual and created by knowers. Unified outlook that listens to others, but doesn't silence oneself. There is a level of personal responsibility involved.	CONTEXTUAL KNOWING: Compares perspectives, thinks through the contextual realities of the problem and evidence, and applies knowledge and solutions in context.

The three studies categorized their findings differently, but overall the same arc of knowledge development remains. Men and women bring different patterns and perspectives, but are not altogether different in their ethical and intellectual development.

STUDY DIFFERENCES

Baxter Magolda’s study is helpful in viewing some of these patterns and perspectives as she examined men and women from the same context in the same study. Her study resulted in four different ways of knowing, with corresponding gender-related patterns in the first three. While women and men did not always fall into their gender-related pattern, the following patterns were observed:

	<i>Male Pattern</i>	<i>Female Pattern</i>
<i>Absolute Knowing</i>	MASTERING: Public acquisition of knowledge, focus on achievement, includes interaction and sparring with teachers and peers.	RECEIVED: Private acquisition of knowledge, receive information from instructors, receive encouragement from peers.
<i>Transitional Knowing</i>	IMPERSONAL: Thinks for oneself through debate with others.	INTERPERSONAL: Collects the ideas of others, relationships are central.
<i>Independent Knowing</i>	INDIVIDUAL: Focuses on one's own view while still making room for peers and instructors. Focus on separation.	INTERINDIVIDUAL: Others' perspectives help to clarify one's own. Focus on connection.
<i>Contextual Knowing</i>	No gender-related patterns were able to be identified at this level due to the infrequency of participants reaching this level during their college years.	

While there were not enough data to establish gender patterns for contextual knowing, Baxter Magolda speculated at the possibility of gender patterns converging in contextual knowing:

Because contextual knowers integrated thinking for themselves with genuine consideration of others’ views, it is possible that the gender-related patterns of earlier ways of knowing converged in contextual knowing. For example, receiving-, interpersonal-, and interindividual pattern knowers’ focus on connection to others is a central feature of contextual knowing when integrating other valid views. Mastery-, impersonal-, and individual-pattern students’ individual approach is also a basic feature of contextual knowing, because students are ultimately responsible for their own judgments and constructed perspectives.³

As an example of this convergence, Baxter Magolda describes one of her male students demonstrating more empathy over the years and one of her female students enjoying more debate over the years.

³Marcia Baxter Magolda, *Knowing and Reasoning in College: Gender-Related Patterns in Students’ Intellectual Development* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992), 189. Baxter Magolda is not the only one to speculate that gender-related patterns start to converge at more advanced levels of knowing. Both Gilligan and Belenky et al. hint at this as well. Gilligan writes, “Thus, starting from very different points, from the different ideologies of justice and care, the men and women in the study come, in the course of becoming adult, to a greater understanding of both points of view and thus to a greater convergence in judgment. Recognizing the dual contexts of justice and care, they realize that judgment depends on the way in which the problem is framed.” Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 167.

In Baxter Magolda’s gender-related patterns, Belenky et al.’s work, and in other studies related to women’s development, several themes emerged, including voice, relationship, and connectedness, with an overarching tenor of care.

Voice. Women in the studies were less likely than men to speak up, but voice in the studies represented an increased movement from echoing the voices of others to engaging ideas and developing one’s own voice. Baxter Magolda relates this hesitancy to speak to women’s tendency toward relationship, saying, “Women’s interest in getting to know others and supporting each other matches earlier research suggesting women see themselves as connected to others. The men expressed more interest in active involvement in looking for answers, argument and quizzing each other.”⁴ She suggests that men state their opinions, while women refrain from doing so out of a desire not to separate themselves from those around them. When women do share their opinion, “it is with qualification of the limits of the opinion to personal experience.”⁵

Relationship. Baxter Magolda’s gender-related patterns show the added importance of relationship for women when it comes to knowing. In transitional knowing, the pattern more characteristic of women relies on peers more than the pattern characteristic of men, which is individually focused. In independent knowing, both males and females value their own opinions and those of others, but women tend toward more collaboration in that process. One of the male participants in the study recognized this propensity, saying, “You need that other gender’s input. I feel more comfortable talking with women sometimes because of that building-towards-community attitude You can tell they’re listening and care.”⁶ Relationships were a part of men’s development as well, but “for women, confirmation and community are prerequisites rather than consequences of development.”⁷

Connectedness. Connectedness is the idea that the knower and what is known are in relationship. Connectedness does not consider something from an independent viewpoint, but is empathetic, trying to understand. Separate knowing considers things in a disassociated manner, excluding emotion, and starting from a vantage point of doubt as an

adversary. Connected knowing sees personality and affect as adding to a perception. It is more reluctant to play the doubting game. Connected knowing still examines and thinks objectively, but as an ally, not an adversary.

Care. These themes of voice, relationship, and connectedness all have aspects of care displayed. There is thoughtfulness and understanding. This theme of care in women’s epistemological development — and the term “care” — is common throughout the literature in the field. Care was absent from epistemological studies that exclusively included men, but it is very present when women are included.

ALIKE, BUT DIFFERENT

While foundational studies in epistemological development have often either overlooked or highly emphasized gender, setting up an alternate scheme for development, the studies in the end reveal the similarities between men’s and women’s epistemological development. Yes, there are different patterns and perspectives that are important to explore — there are different elements that emerge when women are included — but overall epistemological development is not bifurcated, but unified. This should lead us all the more to explore created differences and similarities to better understand intellectual and ethical maturity, to better understand learners, and to better understand humans made in the image of God. ✕

⁴Marcia B. Baxter Magolda, “Gender Differences in Cognitive Development” (paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, Washington, DC, April 22, 1987), 19.
⁵Baxter Magolda, “Gender Differences in Cognitive Development,” 11.
⁶Baxter Magolda, *Knowing and Reasoning in College*, 65.
⁷Mary Field Belenky, et al., *Women’s Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York: Basic, 1997), 194.

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Mere Complementarianism

I have noticed of late a growing chorus of what we might call “ex-complementarians” entering the fray of the evangelical gender debate. These folks are not identifying as egalitarians, but neither are they identifying as complementarians. They wish to embrace the Bible’s teaching about eldership being available only to qualified men, and some even wish to acknowledge a notion of headship in marriage. Nevertheless, they do *not* wish to be identified as complementarians because they believe that the complementarian position has fallen short in some way. A recent example of this perspective appears in Rachel Green Miller’s book *Beyond Authority and Submission* (which is reviewed in the current issue of *Eikon*). Miller explains:

The complementarian movement has done good things: affirming the complementarity and equality of men and women, affirming that husbands are to lead their wives sacrificially and that wives are to submit to the

leadership of their husbands, and affirming the ordination of qualified men. But extrabiblical and unbiblical ideas have been incorporated into the movement’s teaching as well. These ideas have more in common with Greek, Roman, and Victorian beliefs than with the Bible.

Not all who call themselves complementarians share these beliefs. However, because complementarianism as a movement has embraced these ideas, I’m not comfortable with calling myself a complementarian.¹

What are these “extrabiblical and unbiblical ideas” that have compelled Green to distance herself from the complementarian label? She points to teaching about the eternal functional subordination (EFS) of the Son to the Father in the Trinity, Susan Foh’s interpretation of Genesis 3:16, and the prohibition of women teaching men in informal settings.² Miller is not alone in

her concerns, as Aimee Byrd makes clear in her foreword to the book. Indeed, Byrd herself will advance similar themes in her forthcoming book titled *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*.³

While it is true that some individual complementarians have taught a combination of all three of the items identified above, it is a category mistake to identify these items as complementarianism. Allow me to illustrate. While it is true that many college football fans drink alcohol and yell insults at the opposing team, it would be a fallacy to define college football fandom *as* drinking alcohol and yelling insults at people. Neither of those two things are the essence of fandom, although some fans do them. Likewise, none of the items that Green identifies as pushing her away from complementarianism have anything to do with the essence of

complementarianism (except for perhaps teaching, more on that below). They are teachings that some complementarians have advanced, but they are not the essence of the complementarian view. In fact, one can hold to the essence of the complementarian view while disagreeing with the three items that drove Green away from complementarianism. Are ex-complementarians objecting to the actual teaching of complementarianism or to something else?

All of this raises the question of what complementarianism actually is. Can complementarianism be described as a discrete theological proposition, or is it just an ethos or an undefined subculture within evangelicalism? My argument in this essay is that the former is the case, not the latter. But to see this, we are going to have to define what we mean by complementarianism.

¹Rachel Green Miller, *Beyond Authority and Submission: Women and Men in Marriage, Church, and Society* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2019), 16.

²Miller, 114–18.

³Aimee Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: How the Church Needs to Rediscover Her Purpose* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020) [forthcoming].

THE ORIGIN OF A NEOLOGISM

While it was common for older commentators to point out that Adam and Eve were a *complement* to one another,⁴ the exact term *complementarian* did not appear in theological discourse until the late 1980s. Some writers have therefore given the impression that the entrance of the term into the lexicon marked out a theological innovation — a peculiar expression of baby boomer theology that is soon to peter out when the baby boomers are no more. In his now defunct newsletter, Aaron Renn made this case at length earlier this year, saying:

The future of complementarianism looks grim, because it was developed as a response to a specific set of cultural circumstances in the late 1980s that no longer exist, and because it's a theology of the Baby Boomers, especially the early half of that generation, that seems likely to fade away along with them.⁵

In Renn's essay, the term "complementarianism" reduces to a sociological descriptor rather than a theological one.

I think this kind of analysis misses the mark. Complementarianism is not first and foremost a sociological descriptor or movement. Nor is it describing an ethos or a set of extrabiblical stereotypes. Rather, the term emerged specifically as a shorthand to describe the theological vision of the Danvers Statement. It is true that individual complementarians have extrapolated this theology in various directions. This or that complementarian might have espoused views not explicitly set forth in Danvers — me included. But that does not nullify the simple

historical observation that the term came into the lexicon as a shorthand for an explicit theological proposition — that of the Danvers Statement. If we want to understand complementarianism, the starting point is Danvers. So what, then, is the Danvers Statement?

On January 19–20, 1987, John Piper, Wayne Grudem, S. Lewis Johnson, Susan Foh, Wayne House, and a handful of others met at Dallas Theological Seminary and then at the home of Wayne and Leta House to strategize a biblical response to a rising tide of feminism that they perceived within evangelicalism.⁶ They aimed to draft a theological statement of principles for a new organization that they wished to found. On the plane from Chicago to Dallas, Grudem had outlined an initial set of points to be included. Echoes of what would become the Danvers Statement can be heard in this excerpt from Grudem's handwritten notes:

- (1) Adam & Eve equally in God's image.
- (2) Adam's headship in family & human race: established by God before the fall, not a result of sin.
- (3) The fall introduced strain in relationships — sin — tendency for women to try to usurp authority over men, tendency for men to rule harshly and selfishly.⁷

Grudem explains that his outline comprised the "bare bones of the Danvers Statement," and that John Piper eventually penned an initial draft based on it.⁸ The group modified and added to it as well. Nearly a year later on December 2-3, 1987, they met again, this time with several other participants (now including Bill Mounce, Lane Dennis, Kent Hughes, Gleason Archer, Tom Edgar, and Ken Sarles), in

Danvers, Massachusetts to finalize the statement. Again, Piper served as the primary drafter of the document at this second meeting. Their work eventually became known as the Danvers Statement, which summarizes the Bible's teaching about male and female roles within the church and the home.

In 1988, a year after the Danvers Statement was published to the world, the group coined the term *complementarian* as a label for their position. Wayne Grudem explains:

For those first two years [1987–88] we were still a very secret, by-invitation-only group. But by December, 1988, at the ETS meeting at Wheaton College, we were ready to go public. We announced the formation of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) and handed out brochures. We even had a press conference (Christianity Today showed up, but nobody else). We coined the term "complementarian" as a one-word representation of our viewpoint.⁹

Grudem says that the group coined the term *complementarian* at a breakfast meeting of the CBMW council in the main dining room of Lisle Hilton on the morning of the press conference. John Piper, Wayne Grudem, Bruce Waltke, Wayne House, Kent Hughes, and a handful of others were all there for the 1988 meeting where the term emerged.¹⁰

Because the group specifically coined "complementarian" to refer to the theological position summarized in Danvers, the statement has been the touchstone of complementarian conviction ever since. Why did they choose such a strange neologism to describe their position? It's not because the theological position was new. It was quite ancient actually. They settled on this word because there simply wasn't another one that adequately described their view. The term has a profound exegetical and linguistic root in the Hebrew of Genesis 2:18 (*kenegdo*), which the lexicons define as "corresponding to."¹¹ In their introduction to *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood*, Piper and Grudem explain why they chose this term:

⁴E.g., Derek Kidner's commentary on Genesis: "Companionship is presented in Eden as a primary human need, which God proceeded to meet by creating not Adam's duplicate but his opposite and complement, and by uniting the two, male and female, in perfect personal harmony." Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 1 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1967), 38.

⁵Aaron Renn, "Complementarianism Is a Baby Boomer Theology That Will Die with the Baby Boomers," *The Masculinist* (New York, NY, February 14, 2019), <http://www.aaronrenn.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/The-Masculinist-30-Complementarianism-Is-a-Baby-Boomer-Theology.pdf>. See also Jake Meador, "Will Complementarianism Die with the Baby Boomers?" *Mere Orthodoxy*, March 5, 2019, <https://mereorthodoxy.com/complementarianism/>.

⁶Wayne Grudem described some of these details to me in a private email dated October 19, 2019. Also, see his remarks in Wayne Grudem, "Personal Reflections on the History of CBMW and the State of the Gender Debate," 13–14. John Piper was also kind to share with me his journal entries that he wrote within days of the events recorded in this paragraph. Piper mentions in his journal that James Boice was also invited to the initial meeting. Boice was supportive of the group but unable to attend.

⁷Wayne Grudem, "Personal Reflections on the History of CBMW and the State of the Gender Debate," *The Journal for Biblical Manhood & Womanhood* 14.1 (2009): 13.

⁸In a journal entry dated January 21, 1987, Piper says that he was the "key craftsman" of the initial draft of the Danvers Statement. In another journal about the second meeting later that year (December 4, 1987), Piper says that he was the main drafter of the document, even though he and Grudem worked closely together on it. While others made contributions to the document, it is clear that Piper and Grudem were the driving force behind the Danvers Statement.

⁹Wayne Grudem, "Personal Reflections on the History of CBMW and the State of the Gender Debate," 14.

¹⁰Wayne Grudem described these details to me in a private email dated June 17, 2019.

¹¹John Piper pointed this out in a private correspondence about this point. Piper elaborates: "What thrilled Adam when he woke up to this new creature was that she was gloriously the same and gloriously different and complementary" (private email dated June 19, 2019).

If one word must be used to describe our position, we prefer the term complementarian, since it suggests both equality and beneficial differences between men and women. We are uncomfortable with the term “traditionalist” because it implies an unwillingness to let Scripture challenge traditional patterns of behavior, and we certainly reject the term “hierarchicalist” because it overemphasizes structured authority while giving no suggestion of equality or the beauty of mutual interdependence.¹²

Discussions about the best name for the position did not end in the late 1980’s. In 2005 Russell Moore suggested that “biblical patriarchy” might be a better term to describe the complementarian view.¹³ In a subsequent interview, he added, “I hate the word complementarianism. I prefer patriarchy . . .”¹⁴ This particular suggestion emerged in the wake of Bradford Wilcox’s important sociological study of soft patriarchs.¹⁵ But “patriarchy” was ultimately deemed no less problematic than “traditionalist” or “hierarchicalist.” In a 2006 faculty lecture, Andreas Köstenberger argued that “patriarchy” simply has too many negative connotations owing to decades of feminist propaganda.¹⁶ Three years earlier, Dan Block had suggested “patricentrism” as an alternative, but that never caught on either.¹⁷

To date, there really hasn’t been a better term than *complementarianism* to describe the position outlined in Danvers. Danvers envisions an equality between male and female that cannot be reduced to undifferentiated

sameness. It celebrates *complementary* differences between male and female image-bearers. As Danvers states, “Both Adam and Eve were created in God’s image, equal before God as persons and distinct in their manhood and womanhood 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.” That is complementarity. That is why the authors of the Danvers Statement chose that word to designate their view, and it is why we still use the term today.

WHAT IS MERE COMPLEMENTARIANISM?

The key thing for us to understand is that the term complementarian was coined to refer to the teaching of the Danvers Statement, which itself was drafted to reflect the teaching of scripture. While complementarianism emerged in a particular sociological context, it cannot be reduced to sociological categorization. Complementarianism is first and foremost a theological position that is rooted in a long history of exegesis of biblical texts such as Genesis 1–3, 1 Timothy 2:12, 1 Corinthians 11:2–16, etc. Complementarianism also has deep roots in natural law as it reflects a “created order” that “should find an echo in every human heart” (Danvers Statement, Affirmation 2). In this sense, Danvers complementarianism is *mere* complementarianism.

Here I employ the term *mere* complementarianism in the same way that C. S. Lewis spoke of *mere* Christianity. In his famous book, Lewis explains, “Ever since I became a

Christian I have thought that the best, perhaps the only, service I could do for my unbelieving neighbours was to explain and defend the belief that has been common to nearly all Christians at all times.”¹⁸ Lewis does not aim to adjudicate theological differences that divide Christians into denominations. Rather, he aims to explain the core that all Christians everywhere have always confessed. For Lewis, that common core of belief is *mere* Christianity.

Likewise, my aim in the rest of this essay is to explain and defend *mere* complementarianism — that is, what has been common to all complementarians at all times. There is a need for this today because critics of the teaching often confuse the essence with the accidents and as a consequence cause a loosening of commitment to the essence of the teaching. If we could distinguish the essence of the teaching from that which is only incidental to it, we would be in a much better place to examine the teaching in light of the criticism that is sometimes levelled against it. Or to use our football metaphor again, if one can oppose drinking and yelling at people without opposing football, then he may also oppose EFS (for example) without abandoning complementarianism altogether.

So what is common to all complementarians at all times? If complementarianism refers to the Danvers Statement, then Danvers itself is *mere complementarianism*. The mere complementarianism of Danvers is simply a recognition that there is a discernible theological core to the complementarian position. Mere complementarianism does not deny that the teaching has been developed in different directions — some helpful and perhaps others not so helpful. Nevertheless, there have always been differences among complementarians over issues not covered in Danvers — differences which do not define complementarianism but which are nevertheless important. If you are looking to Danvers for help understanding the so-called “eternal functional subordination of the Son,” philosophy of Bible translation, Susan Foh’s interpretation of Genesis 3:16, or which Sunday school classes a woman can teach, then you are going to be greatly disappointed with Danvers. It does not directly address any of those issues. One should not conclude from this omission that these questions are unimportant. Nor should one conclude that I myself have no opinion on these matters. Rather, we simply need to understand that the drafters of Danvers produced a confessional basis without including certain controversial matters that they knew might otherwise divide complementarians. In other words, they were aiming at a *mere* complementarianism.

¹²John Piper and Wayne Grudem (eds.), *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), xv.

¹³Moore initially made this suggestions in a paper at the 2005 annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society. A version of that presentation was subsequently published in JETS. See Russell D. Moore, “After Patriarchy, What? Why Egalitarians Are Winning the Gender Debate,” *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49, no. 3 (2006): 569–76.

¹⁴This statement occurs at 30:07 in “Feminism in Your Church and Home with Russell Moore, Randy Stinson, and C.J. Mahaney,” interview by Mark Dever, MP3, April 30, 2007, <https://www.9marks.org/interview/feminism-your-church-and-home-russell-moore-randy-stinson-and-cj-mahaney/>.

¹⁵W. Bradford Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs, New Men: How Christianity Shapes Fathers and Husbands* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

¹⁶Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Of Professors and Madmen: Currents in Contemporary New Testament Scholarship,” *Faith & Mission* 23, no. 2 (2006): 14. I was initially sympathetic to Moore’s suggestion, but I became convinced that “patriarchy” had connotations beyond its etymology that undermine what complementarians try to teach.

¹⁷Daniel I. Block, “Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel,” in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, ed. Ken M. Campbell (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 41.

¹⁸C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 6.

EQUALITY IN NATURE AND REDEMPTION

Mere complementarianism suggests “both equality and beneficial differences” between men and women without the differences cancelling the equality.¹⁹ In what sense does *mere complementarianism* teach that women and men are equal? They each individually possess the full *imago dei* and, accordingly, possess equal value and dignity as divine image-bearers. Danvers says it this way, “Both Adam and Eve were created in God’s image, equal before God as persons . . .” This follows the scriptural teaching that, “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27). This image-bearing distinguishes human beings from every

other creature. Some writers locate the *imago dei* in male and female relationship, but *mere complementarianism* holds that “both” male and female are each individually created in God’s image. The man is no more an image bearer than the woman. The woman is no more an image bearer than the man. God assigns this dignity to both of them irrespective of their sexual difference or marital status. They share in this status *equally*. Because of this, they each individually have an inestimable value and worth. No person — neither male nor female — can claim that some people are “more equal than others.”²⁰ Male and female have equal value and dignity because they share equally in the divine image. This biblical doctrine of the *imago dei* is why *mere complementarianism*

eschews any notion of male superiority or female inferiority. As Danvers states, “The Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, manifests the equally high value and dignity which God attached to the roles of both men and women.”

This equality also has implications for God’s redemptive work among his people. In the incarnation, that which Jesus assumes he also redeems.²¹ As the author of Hebrews writes, “Therefore he had to be made like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he could become a merciful and faithful high priest in things relating to God, to make atonement for the sins of the people” (Heb. 2:17 NET). Because Jesus assumed a human nature, he shares with both men and women that very same human nature. And there is no part of that human nature that is left unredeemed through faith in Christ. That is why the apostle Peter is able to say that men and women are co-heirs of the grace of life (1 Pet. 3:7). Or as Paul says it in Galatians 3:28, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” As Danvers affirms, “Redemption in Christ gives men and women an equal share in the blessings of salvation” (Affirmation 6.2). This means that there is no distinction between men

and women with respect to the benefits of salvation. According to God’s grace, they share equally in the grace of regeneration, justification, sanctification, indwelling, and every other benefit purchased for us through Christ. There are no second class citizens in the kingdom of God.

Male and female also share equally in the assignment to rule over God’s creation. God commands male *and* female to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it” (Gen. 1:28). In essence, God appoints male and female as his vice-regents on earth — the ones who would extend God’s dominion over creation by extending their own dominion over the whole earth. God addresses this command not only to the man but to the woman as well. That means that the mandate to rule over creation extends to men and women equally. This is not to say that they have no differences whatsoever in extending God’s dominion, but it is to say that God gives the command to *both* of them. The reason for this is clear. Mankind’s rule will extend *by means of* multiplying and filling the earth. Thus man and woman both have a necessary share in the procreation of the human race and in the fulfillment of the dominion mandate. Man and woman are each vice-regents in the rule of God over creation.²²

*"Male and female
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¹⁹John Piper and Wayne Grudem (eds.), *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), xv.

²⁰George Orwell, *Animal Farm* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1944), 118.

²¹Gregory of Nazianzus, "Letter 101: The First Letter to Cledonius the Presbyter," in *On God and Christ: The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius*, trans. Frederick Williams and Lionel R. Wickham, Popular Patristics Series (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), 158.

²²Much of the foregoing derives from Denny Burk, *What Is the Meaning of Sex?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 160-62.

DIFFERENCES IN DESIGN AND CALLING

God assigns deep and abiding equality between men and women as image-bearers, as co-heirs of the grace of life, and as vice-regents in the creation mandate. Mere complementarianism insists, however, that this equality does not rule out the differences in design that God gives to both male and female. That is why Danvers says that male and female are “equal before God as persons and distinct in their manhood and womanhood (Gen. 1:26-27, 2:18)” (Affirmation 1). Scripture and nature reveal that these differences between male and female are biological, social, and good.

BIOLOGICAL DIFFERENCE

The foundational biological distinction between male and female is the body’s organization for reproduction. We know this not only from the obvious differences between male and female bodies and how those differences enable procreation, but also from how these basic biological realities are confirmed in Scripture. In Genesis 1:26–28, “male and female” are not social constructs but designate biological realities. We know this because God commands the

man and woman to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (Gen. 1:28). Procreation depends on the biologically different but complementary bodies of the man and the woman. God designs a procreative system that requires two bodies to become one, and he designs for the system of complementary differences to be united only within the covenant of marriage. As Alastair Roberts observes,

The difference between the sexes is a central and constitutive truth about humanity, related to our being created in the image of God. Humanity has two distinct kinds: a male kind and a female kind. Sexual dimorphism, the fact that we come in these two distinct kinds, is a fundamental fact about humanity.²³

If this is true, then there are massive implications for our understanding of the differences between male and female identity. Our bodies are not lying to us.²⁴ A person’s maleness or femaleness isn’t socially constructed or self-constructed, but God-constructed. Sex is not something that is *assigned* at birth. It is something that is revealed by God in his special distinct design of male and female bodies.²⁵

²³Alastair Roberts, “The Music and Meaning of Male & Female,” *Primer*, no. 3 (2016): 36.

²⁴Sometimes people ask if intersex persons have bodies that are “lying” to them. I address this question at length in one chapter of my book *What Is the Meaning of Sex?*. I argue that for many intersex persons there still remains an underlying chromosomal binary based on the presence or absence of at least one Y chromosome. Intersex conditions result from living in a fallen world east of Eden. In other words, the Fall has obscured in some people what would otherwise be clear about biological sex. This doesn’t disprove a sexual binary. It shows that the Fall is pervasive in the human condition, even sometimes obscuring the binary norm. Nevertheless, the sexual binary norm remains and will be renewed in the new creation. See Denny Burk, *What Is the Meaning of Sex?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 169–82. For a view on intersex contrary to my own, see Megan K. DeFranza, *Sex Difference in Christian Theology: Male, Female, and Intersex in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015).

²⁵On the foregoing, see Denny Burk, “Transgenderism and Three Biblical Axioms,” in *God’s Glory Revealed in Christ: Essays on Biblical Theology in Honor of Thomas R. Schreiner*, ed. Denny Burk, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Brian Vickers (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2019), 214–17.



SOCIAL DIFFERENCE²⁶

While the basic biological differences between male and female may be clear, such is often not the case with social roles that stem from biological differences. In mere complementarianism those social differences relate most explicitly to the home and the church. Danvers addresses those two spheres explicitly in Affirmation 6.1–2:

In the family, husbands should forsake harsh or selfish leadership and grow in love and care for their wives; wives should forsake resistance to their husbands' authority and grow in willing, joyful submission to their husbands' leadership (Eph. 5:21–33; Col. 3:18–19; Titus 2:3–5; 1 Pet. 3:1–7).

In the church, redemption in Christ gives men and women an equal share in the blessings of salvation; nevertheless, some governing and teaching roles within the church are restricted to men (Gal. 3:28; 1 Cor. 11:2–16; 1 Tim. 2:11–15).

In the home, the husband is to be a loving and sacrificial head and the wife is to affirm and support that leadership. In the church, only biblically qualified men are called to fill certain leadership and teaching roles, and the whole congregation is called to recognize and respect that leadership. While the wider cultural implications of these social differences are not developed at length, Danvers does say that “a denial or neglect of these principles will lead to increasingly destructive consequences in our families, our churches, and the *culture at large*” (Affirmation 10, emphasis added). Without spelling out the wider cultural implications, Danvers nevertheless

says that there are implications of this teaching that reach beyond the church and the home.

In the modern secular West, this teaching about the social differences between male and female has been fiercely contested. And yet, scriptural revelation clearly teaches that God himself has woven these differences into his distinct design of male and female. The foundational text on this point is Genesis 2:18–25:

¹⁸ Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” . . . ²¹ So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. ²² And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³ Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” ²⁴ Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. ²⁵ And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

In verse 18, the word “helper” corresponding to Adam designates a *social role* for Eve within her marriage to Adam — a role that is inextricably linked to her biological sex. Adam’s creation before Eve designates a *social role* within his marriage to Eve — a role that is inextricably linked to his biological sex. He is to be the leader, protector, and provider within this marriage covenant. And these social roles within the covenant of marriage are not only creational realities, they are also commanded in Scripture.

Tom Schreiner has written at length arguing that Genesis 2 establishes headship and helper-ship as roles that are a part of God’s good creation design. God’s appointment of Adam as leader and Eve as follower comes out in at least five ways in Genesis 2.²⁷ First, God creates Adam before He creates the woman.²⁸ This order of creation establishes a primogeniture relation that would have been apparent to first-century readers of the Old Testament (e.g., 1 Tim. 2:13; 1 Cor. 8–9).²⁹ Second, God holds Adam accountable first for breaking God’s word, even though Eve was the one who sinned after being deceived by the serpent. Third, God designates the woman to be a “helper”³⁰ to Adam. In Genesis 2:18, Adam and Eve’s roles cannot be exchanged. Eve’s helping is oriented toward Adam’s leadership.³¹ Fourth, Adam names Eve (cf. Gen. 2:19–20). When Adam “called” her name to be “Woman” (Gen. 2:23; and later “Eve,” 3:20), he was exerting a leadership role that God gave to him alone.³² Fifth, the serpent’s attack represented a subversion of God’s pattern of leadership. The apostle Paul confirms that it was indeed the undoing of the order of creation that was

the basis for the fall of humanity into sin (1 Tim. 2:13–14).³³ In all of these ways, the text of Genesis 2 establishes the distinct, complementary social roles of male and female in marriage. The text sets this first man and woman forth as the paradigm for all marriages that follow. And it is important to recognize that Adam’s headship existed before the Fall as a part of God’s original good design. His headship is not a consequence of the Fall. As Danvers also affirms, “Adam’s headship in marriage was established by God before the Fall, and was not a result of sin” (Affirmation 3).

Some readers will object to this construal of social roles by observing that Adam’s headship and Eve’s helper-ship are covenantal obligations that apply to marriage, not creational distinctions that apply to every male and every female regardless of marital status. That objection is partially correct and partially incorrect. Yes, *headship* and *helper-ship* are covenantal obligations that apply primarily to marriage. No, it is not correct to deny creational distinctions that make male and female fitted for such covenantal roles. As Bobby Jamieson has argued,

²⁶Much of this section is taken directly from my essay “Transgenderism and Three Biblical Axioms,” 217–21.
²⁷The arguments enumerated below are an adaptation from Thomas R. Schreiner, “Women in Ministry: Another Complementarian Perspective,” in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, ed. James R. Beck, revised, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 289–97. These six arguments could be expanded; e.g., Wayne Grudem identifies ten arguments showing male headship before the Fall. See Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than 100 Disputed Questions* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 2004), 30–42.
²⁸So Schreiner, “Women in Ministry: Another Complementarian Perspective,” 291. Contra Richard S. Hess, “Equality with and Without Innocence: Genesis 1–3,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce, Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, and Gordon D. Fee (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 84.
²⁹Thomas R. Schreiner, “An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9–15: A Dialogue with Scholarship,” in *Women in the Church: An Analysis and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9–15*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Schreiner, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 106. “The notion of the firstborn having authority would be easily understood by Paul’s readers” (ibid., 107). Contra William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 257–62.
³⁰HALOT, “אָנֶה,” 1: “that which corresponds.” So Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 68: “It seems to express the notion of complementarity rather than identity.”
³¹Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, NAC (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 221.
³²David J. A. Clines, “What Does Eve Do to Help? And Other Irredeemably Androcentric Orientations in Genesis 1–3,” in *What Does Eve Do To Help? And Other Readerly Questions to the Old Testament* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 37–40. Clines writes, “The name of the woman by the man, on both occasions, I conclude, signifies his authority over her” (ibid., 39).
³³Douglas Moo, “What Does It Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority Over Men?,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 190

The Bible's prescriptive teaching flows from a descriptive vision of the divinely created differences between men and women. The less attention we pay to the descriptive, the more arbitrary and constraining the prescriptive will appear. When Scripture instructs husbands to lead their families and wives to submit to their husbands, or limits pastoral leadership of the church to men, it formalizes, codifies, and extends what is already written into our nature.³⁴

There are creational differences of temperament and disposition that reflect the reproductive distinctions between male and female and that make male and female fitted for the covenantal obligations of marriage. In other words, the biological differences between male and female have social consequences. And those differences must be celebrated, not denigrated or ignored or dismissed as a social construct.

Genesis 2:18–25 reveals that there is both *sexual* complementarity and *gender* complementarity embedded in God's good creation. To understand the difference between these two, we must understand the conventional distinction between sex and gender. Sex refers to one's biological organization for reproduction. Gender refers to the social manifestation of one's biological sex.³⁵ Sex is a physical, bodily reality. Gender is a socio-cultural reality. The spirit of the age says that the relationship between gender and sex is purely conventional and in no way essential. It claims that gender is a social-construct — that is, a set of customs and behaviors that one learns but which have no essential, intrinsic relation to biological sex. And that is why, they argue, it is possible for someone's gender identity to mismatch their bodily identity.

The spirit of the age, therefore, involves a direct conflict with Scripture on this point. In a variety of ways, Scripture reveals that God has so made the world that there is a normative, holy connection between biological sex and gender. Notice that the social roles of the first man and woman in Genesis 2 are inextricably connected to their biological sex, and later scriptural revelation reaffirms that connection. Later scriptural revelation cites these roles not merely as descriptive of the first marriage but as normative for every subsequent marriage (1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:21–33).

It is important to point out that this social order within the first family forms the foundation for leadership norms within the Christian church. In more than one biblical text, Paul appeals to a marriage to establish a point about leadership and teaching within the church (e.g., 1 Cor. 11:3–16; 1 Tim. 2:12–13). I do not think this is an accident. The pattern for leadership in marriage is the basis for an all-male eldership. The gender norms for eldership derive from the gender norms for marriage. If this were not the case, the church's leadership structure would be at odds with the leadership structure God has established for marriages within the church. That is why God has designed an expression of the headship principle for both the home and the church.³⁶

If a mere complementarian reading of Scripture is correct, then God intends for a principle of male headship to exist not only in the home but also in the leadership and teaching ministry of the church. It means that qualified men are called to step up to the plate and to lead the congregation. It means that qualified men are supposed to be stepping forward, not hanging

back passively. It means that women — and indeed the entire congregation — should affirm that leadership joyfully and willingly for the glory of God.

As a mere complementarian, I would wish to highlight one other item in particular that appears in Danvers: “some governing and teaching roles within the church are restricted to men (Gal. 3:28; 1 Cor. 11:2–16; 1 Tim. 2:11–15).” The Danvers Statement is admittedly relatively general as far as complementarian statements go. It allows for differences of opinion about who does teaching in Sunday school and other contexts. Nevertheless, Danvers does say that *some* teaching roles are restricted to men, and it makes this assertion in connection with 1 Timothy 2:12. This perspective seems at odds with Kathy Keller's view that says, “anything that an unordained man is allowed to do, a woman is also allowed to do.”³⁷ Keller contends that there are virtually *no* restrictions on the teaching ministry of unordained women, but Danvers says that there are at least *some*. Keller understands 1 Timothy 2:12 to prohibit women from holding the office of pastor. Danvers complementarianism agrees with the prohibition in 1 Timothy 2:12, which prohibits women from *both* the office of the pastor and from assuming the functions of a pastor (teaching and exercising authority).³⁸

GOOD DIFFERENCE

The apostle Paul writes: “For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer” (1 Tim. 4:1–5). Where does Paul get the idea that everything created by God is good? When Paul says that God's creation is good, he is simply taking his cues from the creation narratives in Genesis where it says that throughout the six days of creation, God looked at what he had made and said that it was “good” (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). When God made the first male and female bodies, he said it was “very good” (Gen. 1:31). In 1 Timothy 4:4, therefore, Paul affirms that what was true about male and female design before the Fall is still true after the Fall. This means that even though God's good design in creation may be *marred* by the Fall and by sin, God's good design is not *erased* by the Fall and by sin. Adam and Eve are indeed paradigms of difference even after the Fall, and those complementary differences have been pronounced “good” by God, and they are still good today. If this is true, then our appraisal of male and female distinction in this fallen world must be the same as God's appraisal of male and female distinction. If God says it is good, we must not say that it is otherwise.

³⁴Bobby Jamieson, “Book Review: On the Meaning of Sex, by J. Budziszewski,” 9Marks, July 30, 2018, https://www.9marks.org/review/book-review-on-the-meaning-of-sex-by-j-budziszewski/#_ftnref1.

³⁵Ryan T. Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally: Responding to the Transgender Moment* (New York: Encounter Books, 2018), 2.

³⁶Much of the foregoing come from Denny Burk, “1–2 Timothy and Titus,” in *ESV Expository Commentary: Ephesians–Philemon*, 400–401.

³⁷Kathy Keller, *Jesus, Justice, & Gender Roles: A Case for Gender Roles in Ministry*, Fresh Perspectives on Women in Ministry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 21.

³⁸This interpretation of the Danvers Statement is reinforced by Piper's journals about the initial meetings of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. In a journal entry dated December 12, 1986, Piper discusses how they decided who to invite to the meeting in Dallas where the initial draft of the Danvers Statement was created. Piper writes, “The question they are asking people to determine common ground is: Do you agree that women should not serve as ordained pastors of churches or as elders or in capacities with roughly equivalent duties in parachurch groups?” This seems to indicate that they were not merely addressing office or ordination but any role that might approximate the functions of a pastor.

Paul wishes to emphasize that his teaching about male-female difference is not something that is good for some people but not for others. It is not merely a cultural construct. No, it is a part of God's creation design, and it is the pattern that must prevail in the life of every individual and of every church. If that is true, then we ought to honor the headship norm just as all other faithful churches do. And we ought to beware of any attempt to denigrate this teaching as a mere cultural construct that can be set aside. No, this is the word of God, and as Christians we are duty bound not only to uphold but also to cherish this teaching.

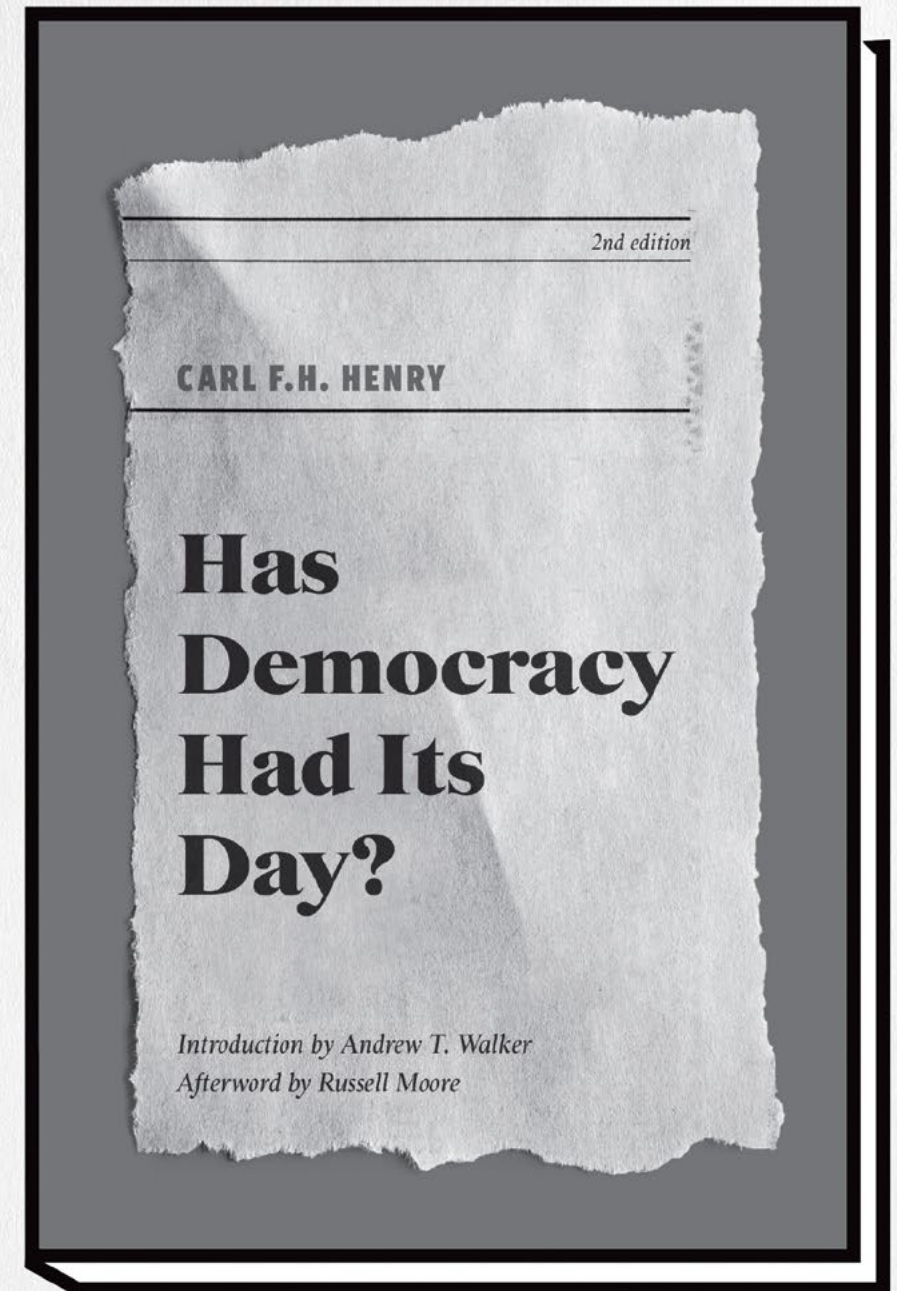
CONCLUSION

Aaron Renn and others have warned of complementarianism's impending demise and have argued that complementarianism is more of a sociological phenomenon owing to boomer evangelicals who wish to resurrect 1950's gender stereotypes.³⁹ The reports of complementarianism's demise have been vastly overstated. In my view, this analysis fails to take into account the *theological* claims of complementarianism — claims which are either true or not true, quite apart from their particular social location. In other words, if someone wants to make the case that *complementarianism* is failing, then they need to show in what ways the vision of the Danvers Statement fails as a theological proposition. They also need to show the extent to which churches and Christian ministries may be turning away from the actual essence of the teaching. Anything short of that is an evasion that fails to deal theologically with what is in essence a theological question.

God created human beings for his glory, and his good purposes for us include our personal and physical design as male and female. Being made in God's image as male and female is not a matter of one's own autonomous preferences. Rather, it is a part of God's beautiful design and plan (see preamble to "The Nashville Statement"). Mere complementarianism teaches that God has designed male and female as equal and different. They are equal bearers of the divine image, equal partakers in the grace of life, and equal partners in the creation mandate. None of this precious equality diminishes at all the biological and social differences that God has woven into his design of male and female. These beautiful differences are not contradictions but complements. They are a part of God's magnificent plan to make his glory cover the earth as the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14). For this reason, these differences are not a bane to us but are good for us. Embracing and living into these differences are the pathway that God has designed for our full and lasting joy. ✕

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³⁹Renn, "Complementarianism Is a Baby Boomer Theology That Will Die with the Baby Boomers."



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HOW HEBREW ANTHROPOLOGY COUNTERS ARISTOTELIAN
THOUGHT CONCERNING MALE AND FEMALE ROLES



I.

When Elizabeth Cady Stanton first published *The Woman's Bible* in 1895, she attempted to remedy what she perceived to be a religiously justified inequity: the inferior role of women. The first-wave feminist matriarch lamented that, despite woman's equal position and glory in Genesis 1, she was a mere "afterthought" in Genesis 2.¹ Stanton pronounced her verdict: "[T]he Bible in its teachings degrades Women from Genesis to Revelation."² Thus began the effort to elevate women in society by unfettering them from religious — specifically biblical — constraints. Succeeding generations followed Stanton's lead. They blamed the Bible (or at least how the Bible was interpreted and applied) for imprisoning women in a voiceless, powerless role. The emancipation of women was but a doctrinal novelty away.

Like their forebears, contemporary critics of the church's historic interpretation of male headship in the family and the church claim that Scripture does not consign women to a lesser role. They're right...to a point.

We need not speak at length of the contrived ceilings placed over women in the name of doctrine, of the Mary Astells who were forbidden to study theology³, or the Lucy Stones who were barred from academic debate because "St. Paul was invoked."⁴ But we do need to inspect the foundation on which these ceilings depend.

The belief that Scripture relegates women to a lesser role is not a mere misunderstanding of its teachings. Rather, it expresses a false equivalence, one that hinges on a categorically incongruent philosophy and misrepresents Scripture's intent. An anthropology espousing that women are unequal and, consequently, relegated to an inferior position relates more directly to an Aristotelian conception of women than a Hebrew one. In what follows, I propose that our Christian discourse on gender recover its Hebrew roots, and that we examine the philosophical influences that have, at least to some degree, intermingled with our understanding of male and female as image-bearers of the divine.

But first, we must go back to the beginning.

¹Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Woman's Bible: Part I. Comments on Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Part II. Comments on the Old and New Testaments from Joshua to Revelation* (iBooks: The Project Gutenberg, 2003), 45.

²Ibid., 443.

³Mary Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2002).

⁴Alice Stone Blackwell, *Lucy Stone: Pioneer of Woman's Rights* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001), 58-61.

II.

The creation story in Genesis 1–2 grounds human identity and personhood in terms of relationship. Prior to all other social or political structures, humanity knew each other in face-to-face community, or what has been called an “I-Thou” way of relating.⁵ Scripture’s first chapter describes humanity as male and female in a union of essential equality and distinct personhood. In Genesis 1:26–28, both male and female receive undifferentiated commands: to rule and reign over creation and to multiply and fill the earth. In its first words about humanity, Scripture depicts male and female as equal manifestations of the *imago Dei*: concerning activity, they are equal recipients of the divinely-given mission; concerning community, they are equal participants in a divinely created relationship; concerning status, they are equal stewards of a divinely-delegated authority over creation.⁶

Genesis 1 reveals humanity’s relationship to the creator, while Genesis 2 reveals humanity’s relationship to each other. Just as man recognizes himself in the woman’s shared substance, he comprehends himself through the woman’s corresponding difference. The very event of naming the woman confirms this: woman is both of man, yet not man; man is both equal to and responsible for woman (Gen. 2:18–25).

The very mode of woman’s creation portrays her comprehensive equality to the man. The Lord created the woman to mitigate the man’s solitude, to provide community in relationship. Rather than creating her out of the dust of the earth as he did the man, the Lord fashions her out of the man’s side. In Hebrew thought, this signified the man’s rational powers; woman shared in man’s capacity for comprehension, reason, and agency.⁷ She is of the same substance as the man, in every way related and corresponding to him. Man could neither disparage her person nor dismiss her intellect without despising himself — and what man ever despised himself (Eph. 5:29)?

In his commentary on Genesis 1–3, Dietrich Bonhoeffer suggests that the human relationship expresses the substance of the *imago Dei*.⁸ Just as God is not alone in himself, human beings image God by an *analogia relationis* (analogy of relation).⁹ This relationship personified the *imago Dei* in a manner that individual man could not in isolation, what Karl Barth called, “being in encounter.”¹⁰ Bonhoeffer explains: “Human beings exist in duality, and it is in this *dependence on the other that their creatureliness exists*” (emphasis added).¹¹ The relational interdependence in which human beings exist is the *analogia relationis*. Thus, human beings cannot image God fully apart from an “in-dependence-upon-one-another” relationship.¹²

⁵Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/1*, translated by G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 185. “The analogy between God and man [*imago Dei*] is simply the existence of the I and the Thou in confrontation.” The I-Thou motif originates with Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1970).

⁶The manner in which male and female express their authority over creation is intrinsic to their relationship to each other. While the man and the woman had equal authority over creation in Genesis 1–2, this does not imply that they had identical relational authority over each other.

⁷Earle Bennett Cross, *The Hebrew Family: A Study in Historical Sociology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1927), 42). Within Hebrew thought, emotional affections were located in the bowels.

⁸The relational aspect of the *imago Dei* is one of several approaches to defining this doctrine. For the present discussion, I have limited my argument to the necessity of the relational approach in gender discourse. Just as each human being expresses the *imago Dei* autonomously, he/she expresses the *imago Dei* relationally. Perhaps the absence of one definition in Scripture underscores the nuanced and intricate nature of this doctrine.

⁹Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1–3*, John W. deGruchy, ed., Douglas Stephen Bax, trans. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 65. Bonhoeffer contrasts this with an *analogia entis* (analogy of being). The “freedom” of God that human beings image reflects God’s ability to be free *for* another: “The creature is free in that one creature exists in relation to another creature, in that one being is free for another human being” (66).

¹⁰“The analogy between God and man [*imago Dei*] is simply the existence of the I and the Thou in confrontation.” (Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/1*. Translated by G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 185. “Hence humanity is the determination of our being as a being in encounter with the other man.” Barth, CD III/2, 248. “The only real differentiation and relationship is that of man to man, and in its original and most concrete form of man to woman and woman to man. Man is no more solitary than God. But as God is One, and He alone is God, so man as man is one and alone, and two only in the duality of his kind, i.e., in the duality of man and woman. In this way he is a copy and imitation of God. In this way he repeats in his confrontation of God and himself the confrontation in God” (186). This is not to say that individual humanity does not fully image God. The image of God is not contingent upon relationship, but it is manifested in relationship.

¹¹Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*. Italics original.

¹²Ibid., 64.

This relationship occurs only in a duality in which “I” and “Thou” face each other as equals.¹³ The “I-Thou” connection — *analogia relationis* — is not mutually exclusive to what may be identified as “roles;” on the contrary, the I-Thou finds its expression in ways of relating that are particular to one’s personhood as male or female.¹⁴

The *analogia relationis* presupposes relational freedom. Because we are free to relate to God, we are free to relate to others.¹⁵ We are not free *from* others, but rather free *for* others: “Freedom is a relation between two persons. Being free means ‘being-free-for-the-other,’ because I am bound to the other. Only by being in relation with the other I am free.”¹⁶ Freedom and dependence — the paradox finds its resolution in relationship.

The relational character of Hebrew anthropology pervades the Old Testament. In the Pentateuch, the Lord elects Israel to be his children, relating to them in the indissoluble bond of Fatherhood (Gen. 12:1–3; Ex. 4:22–23). In the Prophets, marriage is a relational metaphor portraying Israel and Yahweh (Jer. 3:14; Hos. 2:16); like the union between the Lord and his people, the marital union held a place of privilege among other family and social relationships. While fathers were the head of the home,¹⁷ mothers were the foundation of home, creating and molding a body and soul who would fulfill God’s mandate for perfecting the world.¹⁸

*"Freedom and
dependence —
the paradox finds
its resolution in
relationship."*

¹³Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics, Vol. III: Doctrine of Creation, Part 2*, ed. G.W. Bromily and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960), 250. This relationship is the “root formation” for all humanity, and “can only take place in duality as I and Thou look one another in the eye,” (252).

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 297, 310–11. Within this mutuality, Barth explains the analogical relationship between God and Israel, Christ and the church: “This basic order of the human established by God’s creation is not accidental or contingent.”

¹⁵Bonhoeffer, 63.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷Quoted in The Biala Rebbe, *Mevasser Tov: The Merit of the Righteous Woman*, trans. Daniel Worenklein and Reuven Mathieson (Jerusalem: Megamah Publishing, Adar 5763 [2002]), 90.

¹⁸Lisa Aiken, *To Be a Jewish Woman* (Northvale: Jason Aronson Inc., 1992), 31. As Aiken explains, the task of maternity does not entail merely biological birth. Rather, it involves the personal and spiritual formation of one’s children for the continuance of the Jewish way of life: “From a Jewish perspective, should a woman choose to take on the challenge of having children, her job is not simply to be a ‘baby machine.’ Rather, it is to create and mold a Jewish body and soul who will carry on the mandate of perfecting the world in accordance with God’s will.”

It is noteworthy that the Hellenization of Jewish culture inflected Hebrew theology with Greek categories of male and female.¹⁹ Among Hellenized Jews,²⁰ marriage centered on establishing a household and privileged the relationship between parents and child rather than husband and wife.²¹ For Rabbinic interpreters, this shift made the relationship between God and Israel reflecting the intimacy of the marital union awkward, if not indecent.²² Further, during the period of Hellenization, Jewish interpreters integrated the Greek view of women's work into Hebrew marriage. The woman of Proverbs 31 had economic agency, while the Rabbinic woman required her husband's management over her income-generating tasks. The Proverbs 31 woman created value from raw materials to sell for a profit (v. 24), and invested her earnings (v. 16); these tasks were among the ways she prioritized and cared for her family. The woman of Rabbinic Judaism, however, worked according to her husband's instruction; the product of her labors was the property of her husband.²³

The Hebrew community, and later the early Christian church, grounded a person's value in how one related to God — particularly, as one reconciled through Christ; and universally, as one made in his image — as well as in how one related to other persons. The Hebrew emphasis on family identity extended to the New Testament community: Christians were spiritually related members of one family with one Father. They collectively comprised a household. They were members of one body.²⁴ This distinction is among the many reasons early Christianity attracted a disproportionate number of female converts.²⁵ Amidst the debauchery and exploitation of the Greco-Roman world, the church upheld the sacredness of a woman's sexuality and defended her dignity. Further, women found a place of significant contribution in the church, despite their inferior social status and political exclusion.²⁶ In other words, the early church regarded women as persons.

Within this foundation, we may consider the creation-established pattern of male headship in terms of this face-to-face, "I-Thou" relationship. That the Lord created man first signifies his relationship to woman. The Western interpreter may miss the significance of this for a Hebrew audience. Whereas to the Western reader, being first typically implies superiority, either in nature or

ability, to the Hebrew reader, being first entails relational accountability.²⁷ That man was made before woman indicates his greater obligation before the Lord. This principle neither reflects nor ascribes greater competence or worth.²⁸ Rather, "first" signifies relational responsibility.

The relational character of Hebrew personhood requires man and woman to know one another primarily as relational persons (Thou), not as static positions (It). This being-in-encounter relationship is distinct from, although not necessarily mutually exclusive to, the inhabiting of a role. This observation is not to dismiss the different ways of relating or relational responsibilities between male and female; Scripture's pattern of male headship in nuclear and spiritual families is clear. Rather, this point considers the idea of male-female roles primarily in terms of personal relationship, not the other way around.

¹⁹Eric M. Meyers, "The Challenge of Hellenism for Early Judaism and Christianity," *Biblical Archeologist*, vol. 55, no. 2 (June 1992): 91. Meyers notes that Christianity has, throughout history, identified more with its Hellenic roots than its Semitic ones.

²⁰George Holley Gilbert, "The Hellenization of Jews Between 334 BC and 70 AD," *The American Journal of Theology*, vol. 13, no. 4 (Oct 1909): 540.

²¹Michael Satlow, "The Metaphor of Marriage in Early Judaism," in *Families and Family Relations as Represented in Early Judaism and Early Christianities: Texts and Fictions*, eds. Jan Willem van Henten and Athalya Brenner (Leiden: Deo Publishing, 2000), 22.

²²*Ibid.*, 23.

²³Miriam Peskowitz, "Domesticity and the Spindle," in *Families and Family Relations as Represented in Early Judaism and Early Christianities: Texts and Fictions*, eds. Jan Willem van Henten and Athalya Brenner (Leiden: Deo Publishing, 2000).

²⁴John 1:12; Rom. 12:4–5; 1 Cor. 8:6, 12:12–27; Eph. 2:19; Heb. 2:11–12; 1 John 3:1–2.

²⁵Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Public Man, Private Woman* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 61. In early Christianity, women found that their tasks and activities were celebrated, including "giving birth to and sustaining new life; an ethic of responsibility toward the helpless, the vulnerable, the weak, gentleness, mercy, and compassion."

²⁶Michael Kruger, "Was Christianity Hostile to Women?" *Canon Fodder*, April 18, 2016, available at <https://michaeljkruger.com/was-early-christianity-hostile-to-women/>. See also Rodney Stark, "The Role of Woman in Christian Growth," in *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) and Kyle Harper, *From Shame to Sin: The Christian Transformation of Sexual Morality in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 15–16.

²⁷E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture With Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Barriers to Better Understand the Bible* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2012), 13–14. This principle illuminates the Apostle Paul's stipulation concerning leadership in the church. By invoking the principle of "first" (i.e. primogeniture), he connected the order of man's creation with his greater responsibility incumbent upon men in the church to teach and exercise authority. Richards and O'Brien explain: "the firstborn child received a larger inheritance, and with it greater responsibility, than all other children — not because he or she was preferred or more deserving or better qualified in any way, but merely because she or he was firstborn In other words, Paul's original readers may have understood him as saying that men should be pastors not because they are innately better qualified or more deserving but simply because they are the 'firstborn.'"

²⁸Contemporary egalitarian scholarship demonstrates this, with monographs centering on the ability or worthiness of a woman in the pastoral role. See Richard Clark Kroeger and Catherine Clark Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman: Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:9–15 In Light of Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1992); Rebecca Groothuis, *Good News for Women: A Biblical Picture of Gender Equality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997); Alan F. Johnson, ed. *How I Changed My Mind About Women in Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010).

III.

This relational character of Hebrew anthropology contrasts Aristotelian thought and its subsequent influence in theology. One cannot overstate the contribution of Aristotle's philosophy to the Western world, particularly in academia. One must note, however, the influence of his fallacious theories which distorted the concept of woman for subsequent thinkers and theologians, an influence Prudence Allen calls a "wound in the academic body."²⁹

According to Aristotle, woman inhabited a socially inferior role because she was the product of an ontologically inferior nature.³⁰ Woman was a "mutilated" male, a defect, an aberration.³¹ Her existence was the result of a comparatively cold womb which was unable to produce the intended offspring: a male.³² The differences between male and female did not form a complementary harmony, but rather a polaric hostility: the birth of a girl signified that the father's sperm was weak; a stronger male would have overpowered the female's reproductive issue.³³ She is a failure of nature, a non-male.

Within Aristotelian anthropology, woman suffers from a two-fold, cyclical disadvantage. Socially, she was ineligible from the public life of the *polis*, and instead was confined to the relative deficiency of private domesticity. Since man is inherently rational, however, he is fit for the *polis*. According to Aristotle, man is primarily a political animal; thus, the private life of the *oikos* serves the public life of the *polis*.³⁴ That the private woman is ruled by the public man is itself an indictment against her capacity. Aristotle reasons that her lack of power implied her lack of goodness; were she capable of man's reason and goodness, man would not rule over her.³⁵

As a "deformed male," woman lacked the capacity for true knowledge and, consequently, wisdom. Unlike man, she could not rule over her own irrational thought. Although capable of expressing opinions, she was incapable of speaking with rational authority.³⁶ Since she was incapable of rational authority, she was disqualified from participating in philosophy, which to the Greek was among humanity's highest glories. Man's input was inherently

wise and valuable; woman's input was vacuous and of little value. Man's intellect inclined him toward every good; woman's emotion, toward every evil.³⁷ Her limited judgment necessitated her limited influence. While she could teach individuals or small groups, teaching a universal audience was beyond her ontological depth.³⁸ Men could speak publicly, women were to remain silent.³⁹

Even woman's contribution in reproduction was inferior to man's. Reflecting Greek philosophy's body/soul dualism, Aristotle denied that male sperm contributed any physical component in reproduction.⁴⁰ The father provided the substance, endowing the fetus with a soul as well as reason, i.e. humanity's higher properties. The mother provided merely the physical matter, i.e. humanity's lower properties. While the mother was necessary for the offspring's maturation, she contributed only the raw materials with which the father could implant and create a human being.⁴¹ She was a vessel, an incubator who gave nothing essential to, or determinative of, human life.⁴²

²⁹Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman, Volume 2: The Early Humanist Reformation, 1250–1500, Part 1* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 65.

³⁰Aristotle, *Generation of Animals* (Aeterna Press, 2015), II.1.732a.

³¹Ibid., II.3.725–29.

³²Ibid., IV.1.715–26; IV.3. 715–24. The birth of a girl meant that the father's sperm was too weak to overcome the woman's *catemenia*, an embarrassment to a Greek man. This concept extended to whether a child looked like the mother. See also I.19.726b30–727a2. See also Devin Henry, "How Sexist is Aristotle's Developmental Biology?" *Phronesis*, 52 (2007): 6.

³³Ibid., I.19.726b30–727a2. and IV.3. 715–24.

³⁴Aristotle, *Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2013), I.2.99, 102, 103. "Man is by nature a political animal The city is thus prior by nature to the household and to each of us. For the whole must of necessity be prior to the part." Ibid., I.5.96–7; I.1. 99–10. That one had the capacity for power over another automatically inferred greater goodness. "the superior in goodness ought to rule over...inferiors." "A man could not become the slave of another were he not 'capable' of becoming another's property and of 'apprehending' the full reason and goodness in his master which he himself lacked.

³⁵Ibid., I.5.96–7; I.1. 99–10. That one had the capacity for power over another automatically inferred greater goodness. "the superior in goodness ought to rule over...inferiors." "A man could not become the slave of another were he not 'capable' of becoming another's property and of 'apprehending' the full reason and goodness in his master which he himself lacked.

³⁶Ibid., I.13.7.

³⁷Allen, *The Concept of Woman, Volume 2*, 177.

³⁸Ibid., 176.

³⁹Aristotle, *Politics*, I.13.11. See also Allen, *The Concept of Woman, Volume 2*, 104, 176.

⁴⁰Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*. I, 20.729a, § 6–11.

⁴¹Ibid., I.21.729b, §12–21; I.22.

⁴²Elshtain, *Public Man, Private Woman*, 44.

Marriage was an aristocracy in Aristotelian thought.⁴³ Within this aristocracy, woman's inferiority inferred that marriage could never be a union of equals. Of the three types of friendship Aristotle describes, a woman could provide the friendship of utility (to produce offspring) or the friendship of pleasure (companionship, sexual satisfaction), but was powerless to offer a friendship of virtue.⁴⁴ This is because a friendship of virtue — in which two people value one another's character and seek what is good — could occur only between equals. This aristocratic nature of marriage framed the marital relationship as a balance of power. As the politically inferior being, the wife could offer more love to her husband to offset her deficiency; the husband — a politically superior being — was not compelled to offer the same degree of love to his ontologically lesser wife.⁴⁵

Despite these inequalities, marriage was indispensable to woman's wellbeing. Apart from a husband's rule, she could not quell the effects of her deficiencies: "Marital rule... enables a woman's virtue not by supplementing any rational defect on her part, but by inhibiting the non-rational obstacles to the effective employment of her deliberative capabilities."⁴⁶ For Aristotle, woman was incapable of personal or moral agency; her inferiority limited her ability to make productive decisions. Woman needed man's higher moral agency to form her decisions.⁴⁷ She needed a man to manage her. She required rule. There was one marital concession Aristotle commended, however. Although a wife had no natural authority, a husband could delegate to his wife a measure of authority under his supervision, a domain that she could manage under his rule: the home.⁴⁸ Within Aristotelean thought, domestic life was the only appropriate sphere for a woman's weakness; like woman herself, domesticity is necessary for continuing political life. Hers is a utilitarian existence, a "functional prerequisite for the realm of freedom [for men]."⁴⁹

Within this aristocracy, the function of its members prescribed the virtue of its members. As a lesser being, woman attained virtue by following a man, whose higher power of rationality made him the greater being. Due to her weakness, woman could not achieve the same level of excellence as man.⁵⁰ Further, the specific virtues she

ought to acquire mirrored her ontological subordination. As one excluded from the *polis*, she required virtues that reflected her societal sphere and her inferior nature.⁵¹ Since a woman would never rule, she had little need for courage.⁵² However, she would need the silence and modesty befitting one who obeys a superior being.⁵³ This division of virtue was integral to the aristocratic rule within marriage: a wife could enjoy the practical wisdom belonging to her husband, but she could not possess such wisdom without threatening the government and virtue of marriage altogether.⁵⁴

Within Aristotelian anthropology, a woman's social and familial role mirrored her functional utility and ontological status as a deformed male. Her political function and social role was prior to, even determinative of, her person. Her identity was not as a "Thou," but rather an "It," a level on a hierarchical chain of command.

⁴³"For the man's rule in the area where it is right accords with the worth [of each], and he commits to the woman what is fitting for her." Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2nd ed., trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999): VIII.10.5. See also David J. Riesbeck, "Aristotle on the Politics of Marriage: 'Marital Rule' in the *Politics*," *The Classical Quarterly*, Vol 65, no. 1 (May 2015): 148. "Though she rules in her own sphere, her husband retains a superior position: every household, Aristotle has it, is a monarchy, and the wife's virtues are, after all, merely 'Assisting' virtues." See also Aristotle, *Politics*, 1.7, 1.13.

⁴⁴Aristotle, *Politics*, 1.2.52.

⁴⁵Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VIII.7.52: "In all the friendship that rest on superiority, the loving must also be proportional; for instance, the better person. . . must be loved more than he loves; for when the loving accords with the comparative worth of the friends, equality is achieved. . ."

⁴⁶Aristotle, *Politics*, 1.7.51 and 1.13.57. Riesbeck, "Aristotle on the Politics of Marriage," 145.

⁴⁷Maryanne Cline Horowitz, "Aristotle and Woman," *Journal of the History of Biology* vol 9, no. 2 (Fall 1976): 206.

⁴⁸Sister Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman, Volume 1: The Aristotelian Revolution, 750 B.C.-A.D.1250* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1997), 15.

⁴⁹Elshtain, *Public Man, Private Woman*, 47.

⁵⁰Aristotle, *Politics*, III.4.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 1.13.59–13.

⁵²Riesbeck, *The Classical Quarterly*, 138. "While citizens mark their temporary differences of authority by conventional means, males, Aristotle thinks, are always marked out as by nature more suited for rule than females."

⁵³Aristotle, *Politics*, 1.13.11; III.4. "The separate spheres of man and woman necessitate difference virtues. Man needs the courage of a ruler; woman needs the modesty and silence of one who obeys."

⁵⁴Maryanne Cline Horowitz, "Aristotle and Woman," *Journal of the History of Biology*, volume 9, no. 2 (Fall 1976): 209. Although practical wisdom could not belong to the wife, but she could enjoy it in the higher rationality of her husband. This disparity protected the aristocratic balance within marriage: "If the wife also had practical wisdom, the hierarchy of the marital government and marital virtue would be overthrown."

IV.

Claims that Christianity suppresses women and confines them to a lesser role misapply the Hebrew Scriptures and relate more directly to Aristotle and his influence. Aristotelian anthropology established roles to justify an inequitable relationship between male and female; the philosophy systematized roles to impose a social structure. In other words, Aristotelean thought legislated behaviors and assigned spheres to create a male-female relationship that supported its ideal society. Further, whereas Aristotelian anthropology establishes one's identity according to one's relationship to the *polis*, the Bible establishes one's identity in one's relationship both to God, as one created in his image, and to humanity, as one created for fellowship. Jean Elshtain explains that Christianity "cheapened politics" by regarding every life as sacred and all human labor — no matter where the sphere — as dignified.⁵⁵

Christianity is a distinctly relational faith. These relationships both inform and find their expression in one's respective manner of relating. One's relationship demands certain expectations, yet these are according to the law of love; the husband who responsibly leads in self-giving service and the wife who voluntarily submits in self-yielding service both fulfill the command to "submit to one another."⁵⁶ As in all other aspects of one's redeemed identity, however, the Christian does not look to imposed laws to produce a desired result. Rather, the Christian, compelled by the law of love, fulfills his relational responsibility in self-giving service to God and others.

In *Theology of the Body*, John Paul II describes the male-female relationship as the "nuptial meaning of the body." To fulfill the body's nuptial meaning, both mutually give themselves to comprise the "communion of persons."⁵⁷ This communion is a dynamic relationship in which both male and female mutually realize the significance of their gendered bodies by becoming embodied gifts to each other. Man cannot comprehend his identity as a man apart from woman, and vice versa; both masculinity and femininity find their meaning in contradistinction to one another.⁵⁸ One cannot know the meaning of one's gendered

self apart from relationship: "Femininity is found in relation to masculinity and masculinity is confirmed in femininity. They depend on each other." This "communion of persons" relates to the other as a living "Thou," rather than a static "It." Thus, within the male-female relationship, failure to relate to one another in a communion of persons produces a failure to comprehend fully the nature of one's identity as male or female.

Considering this, an evangelical discourse preoccupied with prescribing specific roles may, however unwittingly, neglect the relational emphasis within Christian anthropology. A "role" is an extrinsic property; one may adopt or suspend a role like a task or a function. A relationship, however, is an identity. While we may describe the various roles we fulfill in terms of what we do, we comprehend our relationships in terms of who we are. To condense the relationship to terms of roles only reduces the complexity and comprehensiveness of the male-female relationship to fulfilling a function — to relating the other as a depersonalized "It." But, to emphasize gender distinctions as respective ways of relating safeguards our theological discourse from devolving into a preoccupation with specific tasks, functions, or cultural expressions. By amplifying the communion of confrontation with a "Thou," we represent the fellowship of Hebrew marriage described in Genesis 1–2.

To reiterate, this in no way eschews the biblically established pattern of male headship in the family and the church. Nor does this approach intend to dismiss the relationship of man as spiritual authority and woman as corresponding helper in marriage (Gen. 2:18; Eph. 5:22–33). Rather, this distinction proposes that we present and discuss this pattern to reflect the relational nature of man as male and female prior to stipulating gendered expressions.

⁵⁵Elshtain, *Public Man, Private Woman*, 56.

⁵⁶Eph. 5:22; See John Piper and Wayne Grudem, *50 Crucial Questions: An Overview of Central Concerns about Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1992), 17–18.

⁵⁷Pope John Paul II, *Theology of the Body in Simple Language* (Philokalia Books, 2008), 19. John Paul II discusses at length how the celibate person also fulfills the nuptial meaning of the body by being "married" to God (168, 173).

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 16.

Grounding gender differences in relationship prior to roles also frees us from associating certain virtues with gender. A virtuous man will be meek, tender-hearted, and gentle. A virtuous woman will be resolute, bold, and steadfast. While the virtues themselves are not gendered characteristics, the expression of these virtues may correlate to the gender of the person who possesses them.⁵⁹ This point also frees us from assessing one's manliness or womanliness by the degree to which they possess specific virtues relative to other persons⁶⁰ and, instead, relates all virtue as an expression of one's relationship to God (2 Pet. 1:3–11).

Finally, grounding gender differences in relationship prior to roles allows us to maintain male headship as a relational responsibility by which one bears greater accountability, rather than a superior role with which one wields greater control. This permits the possibility of a marriage that both fulfills Scripture's relational pattern and varies in social roles.⁶¹ In contrast, to ascribe approval or disapproval of a marital relationship according to whether it conforms to culturally dominant norms of gender expression reflects a paradigm in which male and female fulfill a role rather than express a relationship.

Recovering the Hebrew roots in our theology of the male-female relationship shifts theological discourse from discussing points on the spectrum of specific functions and toward expressing dynamic and holistic relationships of responsibility, both to God and to others. This emphasis would transpose our assessment of one's masculinity or femininity. Rather than measuring the degree to which one quantitatively inhabits a role, we would note the way one qualitatively relates to other persons according to one's maleness or femaleness. Therefore, establishing the communion of persons as the defining property of the male-female relationship represents the relational nature of Genesis 1–2. Moreover, this emphasis guards our theological method from amalgamating Aristotelian categories into our understanding of differentiation within unity between male and female.



Within this framework, both male and female express a way of relating according to their responsibility, whether one is responsible to lead or to align voluntarily with the one who leads. This requires our gender discourse to consider ways of relating as the foundation for defining personhood and consequent ways of relating. To the degree that we neglect to describe the male-female relationship as a communion of persons that is prior or disproportionate to gender roles, we perpetuate the misconception that Scripture confines women to an inferior status. ✕

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⁵⁹A woman is no less feminine because she is brave; she does suspend her femininity in displaying bravery. In the same way, a man does not suspend his masculinity by displaying kindness or nurture.

⁶⁰More research and work is needed on the difference between complementarity and gender essentialism. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss, but I hope a curious mind will take on the philosophical question. Edith Stein describes the biblical paradigm between the male/female relationship as complementarity without polarity; the way of relating does not consist of opposite traits and characteristics to be divided and maintained. Rather, in relationship, both man and woman integrate character traits of the other gender, and in so doing, guard themselves from hyper-femininity or hyper-masculinity. In other words, in self-giving, self-revealing relationship, both male and female fulfill the meaning of their respective gender identities. See Edith Stein, *Edith Stein Essays on Women* (*The Collected Works of Edith Stein*, vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies Publications, 1996), 36–40.

⁶¹For instance, perhaps a couple chooses to invest in their children's education through homeschooling. Both parents are vocationally capable of earning the income the family needs. But the father, a professional educator, is more qualified to direct his children's education. So, both parents agree that the mother will work full-time so the father can invest in their children's future academic success. Is the father abdicating his role to provide and lead, or is this mother failing to make her family a priority by working outside the home? Perhaps the answer will depend on whether one understands headship as a relationship or a function.

Discipleship and the Transgender Convert: Issues and Proposals

Jesus' call to "make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19) necessarily involves taking the good news to those who identify as transgender. Because the gospel is God's power to save, we have every reason to expect that some of those to whom we witness will put their trust in Christ and set foot on the path of Christian discipleship. The purpose of this essay is to think through what this may look like and how the issues of baptism, membership, service, leadership, and communion might best be approached.



UNDERSTANDING TRANSGENDER PEOPLE

Defining Transgender

The term “transgender” has been variously understood over the last fifty years — sometimes more expansively, sometimes more restrictively. Today it is usually regarded as an umbrella term for anyone whose gender identity, expression, or behavior differs from that which is usually associated with their biological sex.¹

As a way of encompassing all who come under the transgender umbrella, Rogers Brubaker has distinguished between three broad categories: (1) the trans of migration, which involves moving from one of the two gender categories to the other; (2) the trans of between, which involves defining oneself with reference to the two gender categories, but without belonging to either; and (3) the trans of beyond, which involves positioning oneself without reference to the two gender categories.²

These distinctions are helpful as they underline the fact that different people claim the label “transgender” in different ways, to different degrees, and for different reasons. The common saying is therefore true: if you’ve met one trans person, you’ve met...one trans person. Pastorally, it is vital not to make unwarranted assumptions about what someone who identifies as

transgender means by the term. It is better to allow them to explain their experience, understanding, and choices.

Gender Dysphoria and Gender Deconstruction

It is also conceptually helpful, even if not always practically possible, to distinguish between gender dysphoria (a distressing psychological affliction) and gender deconstruction (a form of social rebellion).

Gender dysphoria is a clinical term that appears in the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-V, 2013), published by the American Psychiatric Association. It describes the distress normally experienced by those whose psychological or emotional gender identity differs from their biological sex.³ Most sufferers of gender dysphoria have a binary understanding of gender but either seek to identify with the gender opposed to their sex (the trans of migration) or don’t see themselves as fitting into either gender category (some expressions of the trans of between).

Others, however, wish to banish binary categories altogether, proliferating the number of genders (other expressions of the trans of between), or jettison the whole notion of gender altogether (the trans of beyond). These are the gender deconstructors.

The pastoral relevance of distinguishing between sufferers of gender dysphoria and those engaged in deliberate gender deconstruction should be clear: there is a major ethical difference between an unwanted affliction and active rebellion. However, the line between the two is not always clear and, in many cases, there may be overlap. Furthermore, the same underlying triggers (e.g., sexual trauma or rigid gender stereotypes) can sometimes produce either effect or a combination of both.⁴

Pursuing Psychosomatic Wholeness

Those who identify as transgender often seek to address their gender non-conformity in one or more ways. For some, the transition is purely psychological (i.e., they adopt an internal gender identity that differs from their biology). For others, it is also social (i.e., changes of name, pronouns, dress, and behavior). For others still, it takes a medical form (i.e., cross-sex hormone therapy and sex-reassignment surgery).

For reasons I have elaborated elsewhere,⁵ this essay argues from the conviction that God continues to create humankind as male and female, and calls each of us to live in congruence with our embodied sexed identity. That is, God desires my

subjective gender identity and social gender expression to align with the objective fact of my biological sex.⁶ Importantly, however, this is not God’s first word to those who experience gender dysphoria or identify as transgender. Indeed, his first word to them is the same as his first word to all: to repent of sin, trust in Christ, and to find our rest and identity in him.

Once a person who identifies as transgender comes to Jesus, following him will mean recognizing and receiving their embodied sexed identity as a good gift of God and learning to live in conformity with it. Depending on the type of transgender experience the new believer has had (or continues to have), this may be relatively straightforward or extremely complicated. Likewise, depending on what steps they have taken down the path of gender transitioning, some simple changes may be made, whereas others may be extremely difficult, if not impossible — particularly if irreversible surgical steps have been taken.⁷ Nevertheless, because God has designed biological sex to reveal gender, inform gender identity, and guide gender expression, embracing and enacting a gender that accords with one’s sex is the God-ordained path to true psychosomatic wholeness.

¹This definition is adapted from that of the American Psychological Association. My reason for not using the APA’s precise wording is because it employs the language of “sex assigned at birth.” In my view, it is preferable to speak of sex being “recognized” or “identified” at birth. This is the case even for children born with intersex conditions. Even though more difficult, the doctor’s task remains the same: to discover or clarify the child’s sex, not to create or impose it.
²Rogers Brubaker, *Trans: Gender and Race in an Age of Unsettled Identities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 10.
³It replaces “gender identity disorder” in DSM-IV (1994), which saw the incongruence itself as a psychiatric disorder. According to DSM-V, gender dysphoria “is more descriptive than the previous DSM-IV term *gender identity disorder* and focuses on dysphoria as the clinical problem, not identity per se” (451).

⁴It is also important to realize that those who experience gender dysphoria for inscrutable reasons still have moral choices to make and are responsible for how they manage their affliction.
⁵See Robert S. Smith, “Responding to the Transgender Revolution.” *TGC: U.S. Edition* (October 12, 2017): <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/responding-to-the-transgender-revolution>.
⁶This does not mean conforming to rigid or narrow gender stereotypes — for example, that all men must have beards and love football, or that all women wear dresses and love baking. Provided the distinctions between the sexes are not blurred, the Bible allows (indeed, endorses) a range of different ways of being male or female.
⁷Tragically, there is nothing that can be done for a woman who has undergone a hysterectomy (i.e., removal of the uterus) and little if she has had a double mastectomy (i.e., removal of the breasts), other than receiving silicone implants. Similarly, the only thing that can be done for a man who has undergone a penectomy (i.e., removal of the penis) or an orchiectomy (i.e., removal of the testes) is to receive an artificial phallus or fake testes. While some may choose such cosmetic steps, in my view, no one should feel pressured to do so. Living faithfully has to do with aligning gender identity, expression, and behavior with biological sex — even if a person’s body cannot now be restored to what it once was.

TRANSGENDER PEOPLE AND BAPTISM

What Is Baptism?

According to the *Westminster Larger Catechism*, “Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, wherein Christ hath ordained the washing with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, to be a sign and seal of ingrafting into himself, of remission of sins by his blood, and regeneration by his Spirit; of adoption, and resurrection unto everlasting life; and whereby the parties baptized are solemnly admitted into the visible church, and enter into an open and professed engagement to be wholly and only the Lord’s.”⁸

While different traditions rely on different confessions and catechisms (and disagree over the mode and subjects of baptism, and whether the term “sacrament” or “ordinance” is to be preferred), there is a striking evangelical unanimity in regard to the nature of baptism.⁹ As the New Testament reveals, a two-fold symbolism is involved. The baptismal water signifies the forgiveness of sins and the gift of new birth, and the baptizand’s submission signifies repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus.

Who Should Be Baptized and When?

Leaving to one side the question of whether a case can be made for baptizing the children of believers, given that the

act of baptism is a sign of repentance and faith, it would be contradictory to baptize any adult who was evidently unrepentant and unbelieving. This does not mean that a total reformation of life is required before baptism can take place. But it does mean that those who are baptized should declare their allegiance to Christ, commit themselves to “fight under his banner against sin, the world, and the devil,”¹⁰ and, with the help of the Holy Spirit, do all they can to “bear fruits in keeping with repentance” (Luke 3:8).

It is not the New Testament’s teaching, nor was it normal apostolic practice, that baptism be delayed until converts had undergone a lengthy period of instruction (see Acts 2:38–41; 8:35–38; 10:44–48) or reached a certain point along the path of sanctification. As the Ethiopian eunuch said to Philip only moments after hearing the gospel: “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?” (Acts 8:36). In his case, the answer was, “nothing whatsoever.” Nevertheless, things may not always be so straightforward. Pastoral wisdom is needed to discern if and when a person is ready to make “an appeal to God for a good conscience” (1 Pet. 3:21) and so receive baptism.

Baptizing Transgender Converts

How does all this help us think about the baptism of those who might be described as “transgender converts”? First, it would

be utterly unreasonable to delay the baptism until they had resolved all of their identity issues — particularly as this may not fully happen in this life. But what if a person has previously sought to transition genders? To what extent do they need to have reidentified with their biological sex before they are baptized? For instance, is it biblically faithful and pastorally helpful to baptize someone who identifies as a woman but is biologically male, and to use this person’s preferred female name and pronouns during the baptism?

For some, provided a person has made a genuine profession of Christian faith, the fact that they have not yet returned to living congruently with their biological sex should not prevent them from being baptized. Martin Davie, for example, suggests that while “a transgender person who is a baptised believer” ought to be “willing to accept and live out their true, God given, sexual identity,”¹¹ “it would be inappropriate to refuse to baptise someone because they have not yet reverted to their true identity.”¹² His reasoning is that this would “demand sanctification as pre-condition for spiritual re-generation rather than look for it as the fruit of such re-generation.”¹³

While Davie’s theological points — that regeneration precedes sanctification and that baptism is a sign of the former, not the latter — are important, they

are not decisive. Should we baptize a newly converted adulterer who, while professing Christ, was not yet ready to end his affair, or an embezzler who was unwilling to turn from his life of thievery? These analogies are not perfect, but the point of commonality is this: for repentance to be meaningful and baptism appropriate, some changes need to begin immediately, even if their full outworking takes time.¹⁴

God, of course, is marvelously merciful and often covers our personal and pastoral follies. In fact, I know two people who identified as a gender contrary to their biology when they were baptized and only later, as part of their Christian growth, returned to living congruently with their embodied sex. Nevertheless, in my view, it is better to resolve such matters from the outset. This reduces the likelihood of the scenario that Davie is forced to contemplate: how to discipline a baptized believer who is “unwilling to contemplate reverting to their true sexual identity.”¹⁵ It also avoids the confusion of someone undergoing public baptism with an identity contrary to their biology, replete with an incongruous name and incompatible pronouns.

For these reasons, I believe it is essential that a transgender convert be fully aware of the way of life into which they are being baptized, and ready to embark on that way. If they are not, I would advise waiting until they are.

⁸The *Westminster Larger Catechism* (1648), answer to Question 165.
⁹For example, the *Baptist Confession of Faith* (1689) speaks of it as “an ordinance of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, to be unto the party baptized, a sign of his fellowship with him, in his death and resurrection; of his being engrafted into him (Rom. 6:3–5; Col. 2:12; Gal. 3:27); of remission of sins (Mark 1:4; Acts 22:16); and of giving up into God, through Jesus Christ, to live and walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4)” (Chapter 29, paragraph 1).
¹⁰This language is drawn from “The Ministration of Publick Baptism to Such as are of Riper Years,” *Book of Common Prayer* (1662).
¹¹Martin Davie, *Transgender Liturgies: Should the Church of England develop liturgical materials to mark gender transition?* (London: The Latimer Trust, 2017), 79.
¹²*Ibid.*, 81.
¹³*Ibid.*
¹⁴The example of Zacchaeus’s repentance (Luke 19:8) is surely instructive here.
¹⁵Davie, *Transgender Liturgies*, 81–82.

TRANSGENDER PEOPLE AND MEMBERSHIP

Different Approaches to Membership

The subject of baptism leads naturally to the issue of membership. It is noteworthy that the early Christians “didn’t have explicit membership policies because membership was simply synonymous with being part of a church — grafted as a member into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12).”¹⁶ In short, Christian baptism was all that was required for church membership.

This is still the case in many churches today. Others, however, conceive of membership a little differently — some more broadly, others more narrowly. These contrasting approaches may usefully be described as “high-buffer” and “low-buffer.”¹⁷ The essential difference is that “high-buffer” churches tend to place *believing before belonging* whereas “low-buffer” churches tend to place *belonging before believing*. Furthermore, at the top end of “high-buffer” churches, becoming a member usually involves attending membership classes and signing a membership covenant, while at the bottom end of “low-buffer” churches, any regular attender is considered a member.

There are several risks with the “low-buffer” approach. First, it can easily blur the distinction between believers and unbelievers — particularly if it theologically prioritizes belonging over believing. Second, it can make the discipline of erring believers difficult, as expectations for believers are

often not clearly communicated. Third, it can sometimes leave new believers feeling like victims of a “bait-and-switch” — having been given the impression that people can not only come to Christ “as they are” (which they can), but also “stay as they are” (which they can’t).

There are also potential dangers with the “high-buffer” approach. Theologically, it can sometimes convey (if not fall prey to) a kind of quasi-legalism or semi-Pelagianism, as if we “get in by grace but stay in by works.”¹⁸ Practically, it can run the risk of drawing lines in the wrong places: suggesting a spiritual divide between members and non-members, when the real differences lie between believers and unbelievers, and obedient believer and disobedient believers.

Membership Requires Genuine Conversion

However membership is approached, two things are required for it to be meaningful. The first is that members must have undergone a genuine conversion. This means that anyone who previously identified as transgender but has now come to place their trust in Christ and has been baptized in his name is a suitable candidate for church membership (Gal. 3:27). The fact that they may continue to battle with gender dysphoria or may still be in the process of reidentifying with their biological sex does not change this one iota. All of God’s people battle with ongoing afflictions and temptations, and all of us are perpetual works in progress.

Membership Involves Informed Commitment

For many churches, membership involves not just a general commitment to Christian discipleship, but a particular commitment to a specific community of God’s people: to encourage, pray for, and gather regularly with other members of the body, to give to the ministry of the church, and to submit to its leadership. This is the second requirement for meaningful membership: informed commitment. Assuming such a commitment is clearly understood and freely accepted, there is no reason why a believer who battles ongoing gender dysphoria should be refused church membership, and every reason why they should be fully welcomed as a valued member of Christ’s body.



¹⁶Josh Butler, “Guidance for Churches on Membership, Baptism, Communion, Leadership, and Service for Gay and Lesbian People,” *The Center for Faith, Sexuality & Gender* (2018): <https://www.centerforfaith.com/resources/pastoral-papers/guidance-for-churches-on-membership-baptism-communion-leadership-and>, 8.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 7–9.

¹⁸This, according to E. P. Sanders, was the pattern of religion in Palestinian Judaism (*Paul and Palestinian Judaism* [London: SCM, 1977]). It has rightly been seen as semi-Pelagian.

TRANSGENDER PEOPLE AND SERVICE

Service and Membership

The issue of membership guides the question of service, particularly as involvement in some kind of ministry is often an entailment of church membership and is a normal and healthy part of Christian maturation. Consequently, church members who experience gender dysphoria should, as part of their discipleship, be encouraged to serve the Lord and helped to find ways to build his church.

For those who are not yet members (and perhaps not yet believers), the options will be limited. Still, most churches enlist the assistance of non-members in a variety of ways, such as fixing lights, helping with events, and vacuuming floors. In fact, it's not uncommon for some who serve in more practical ways (e.g., by mowing lawns) to be unbelievers, especially if they are paid for their work. Along these lines, it may not be impossible for a not-yet-converted transgender-identified person to serve in some appropriate way.¹⁹

Wherever your church sits on the high-buffer/low-buffer spectrum, my recommendation is that it consistently implement its membership/service policy. That is, churches should not be high-buffer toward transgender people and low-buffer toward all others, or vice versa. As will be explained more fully in the following section, I also recommend that churches have a higher-buffer approach to leadership roles (pastor, elder, teacher, etc.), even if they have a lower-buffer membership and service policy.

Finding Ministry That Fits

In thinking strategically about service, the key question is this: what makes a certain type of ministry a good fit? Assuming growth in maturity and a Christlike attitude, the first consideration is gifting. What abilities are required to fulfill a particular ministry? Does the person who desires to serve in a certain way have the skill to do so effectively? If so, then the way ahead is clear: "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Pet. 4:10).

As to what ministry is most suitable for a person who battles gender dysphoria or who has previously rejected the gender identity matching their biological sex, the answer may depend in part on the current state of their identity struggles and where they are in the process of reidentifying with their biological sex. It may also depend on the particular challenges involved in the ministry under consideration and whether the person is ready to take them on. Careful and prayerful thought should be given to discern whether a particular role is helpful both for them and for others.

Sanctification Before Service

Things can get complicated when we get our priorities back-to-front — for example, when we privilege pragmatics over ethics or the demands of the moment over the deeper issues of pastoral care and long-term good. Let me illustrate.

A pastor recently called me to discuss what he should say to a trans woman (that is, a biological male who identifies and dresses as a woman) who had been attending his church for several months and now was wanting to help with the music ministry. After talking through the issues, we agreed that having this person participate in the music ministry would be putting the proverbial cart before the horse. Assuming this person really was a Christian (as they claimed), they first needed to address a major area of confusion and disobedience in their life: their desire to deny and disguise their true sex. This was where the person's energies (and the church's pastoral care) needed to be concentrated. Serving on the music team was some way down the track. The other thing we discussed was the effect

that undertaking such public ministry would likely have both on the person and on others in the church. Again, we agreed that it would simultaneously affirm the person's decision to reject their biological sex and confuse others as to the good that God wills for his people.

The point of this pastoral anecdote should be clear: there are times when, for the spiritual health of a member of Christ's body and the good of the body as a whole, sanctification needs to be prioritized over serving. If a brother or sister is seriously struggling with (or perhaps resisting) some aspect of the call to sanctification, then having them in a public ministry role will most likely be unhelpful. While sanctification and service happily go and grow together, if the latter is getting in the way of the former, then sanctification must take precedence over service.

TRANSGENDER PEOPLE AND LEADERSHIP

Leadership Essentials

Our discussion of service leads naturally to the issue of leadership, for leadership is a form of service (Luke 22:26–27). Because leaders are entrusted with authority to teach and keep watch over God's flock (Heb. 13:7, 17), a person's fitness for leadership needs to be carefully assessed. This is why the Pastoral Epistles highlight the necessity of gospel convictions (1 Tim. 3:9; Tit. 1:9), godly character (1 Tim. 3:2–3, 7; Tit. 1:6–8), and ministry competence (1 Tim. 3:2, 4–5; Titus 1:9). Not all believers fulfill these requirements. But if a believer who faithfully battles gender dysphoria does, then there is no reason why they should not hold the "highest" of church leadership offices.

¹⁹Of course, our first concern for every seeker is that they be saved. If being involved in some form of service hinders that or, worse, confuses them (for example, by causing them to think their service is contributing to their salvation), then it is better to have them refrain from serving until they are saved.

Different Levels of Leadership

There are, of course, different levels of leadership. There is a difference, for instance, between a small group Bible study leader and a senior pastor. It would, therefore, be inappropriate and unnecessary to insist that the former must have the same degree of maturity and ability as the latter. The basic principle is this: the greater the responsibility entrusted to a person, the greater the care that is needed in assessing their fitness for leadership.

For this reason, Paul insists that a leader “must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil” (1 Tim. 3:6). His reason is that maturity develops slowly, and readiness for leadership takes time to show itself. This is why he says, “Let them also be tested first” (1 Tim. 3:10). This applies to all “who aspire to be overseers,” not just to those who are struggling with identity questions. Nevertheless, the immediate need of someone who is only in the beginning stages of returning to live in harmony with their embodied sex is for God’s people to help them bear their burden (Gal. 6:2), not for them to be burdened with leadership responsibilities.

All Christian leaders struggle daily with sin, the flesh, and the devil and much else besides! Nevertheless, the New Testament requires them to be farther down the road of discipleship than those they are seeking to lead (1 Tim. 4:15–16). They need to have demonstrated progress in life and doctrine, and the kind of personal and spiritual maturity necessary for wise and godly leadership.

Managing ongoing struggles

What I am *not* saying is that, in order to be ready for leadership, a believer who previously identified as transgender needs to have completely resolved all their identity struggles and completely reversed all transition steps previously taken. As we’ve already acknowledged, some decisions (e.g., surgical ones) cannot be undone. Therefore, the better questions to ask are these: is the person faithfully expressing their God-given sex? And are they responsibly managing whatever gender dysphoria may remain — e.g., in prayerful dependence on God, with the help of his people, and with the assistance of appropriate health professionals?

Many great Christian leaders have battled mental health issues and a host of other moral, spiritual, and physical problems. I personally know a number of very fine pastors who continue to struggle with depression, and several others whose battlefield is same-sex attraction. While relief from such afflictions is granted to some, for many the Lord allows these “thorns in the flesh” to remain, so that his power might be made perfect in our weakness (2 Cor. 12:9).

The point is this: ongoing gender dysphoria does not exclude a person from Christian leadership. Everything hinges on how debilitating its effects are and how well it is being managed. Importantly, no Christian (and especially no leader) should seek to fight such a battle alone. We all need encouragement, assistance, and accountability.

TRANSGENDER PEOPLE AND COMMUNION

What Is Communion?

We come, finally, to the meal that Jesus instructed his disciples to share in remembrance of his death until his return (Luke 22:14–20; 1 Cor. 11:23–26). While it goes by many names — Holy Communion, the Lord’s Supper, the Eucharist, the Breaking of Bread, the Agape Feast — evangelicals are generally agreed that it is a symbolic event, “wherein, by giving and receiving bread and wine, according to [Christ’s] appointment, his death is shown forth (1 Cor. 11:23–26), and the worthy receivers are, not after a corporeal and carnal manner, but by faith, made partakers of his body and blood, with all his benefits, to their spiritual nourishment, and growth in grace (1 Cor. 10:16).”²⁰

Importantly, communion involves not only looking back (in faith) and looking forward (in hope) but also looking around (in love). This is why the Apostle Paul warns that “anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body [that is, the church] eats and drinks

judgment on himself” (1 Cor. 11:29).²¹ As a corporate act of participation in the body and blood of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16), communion is not to be approached in an individualistic (let alone selfish) manner (1 Cor. 10:17).

Who Can Participate?

Christians have differed over who should participate in communion. John Wesley, for example, saw it as a “converting ordinance” and so invited unbelievers to partake just as an evangelist might call people forward to receive Christ.²² Most, however, see it as a meal that is for those who are already believers, provided they “do truly and earnestly repent [of their] sins, and are in love and charity with [their] neighbours, and intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in his holy ways.”²³

Consequently, any gender dysphoric Christian (like any other Christian) who meets these conditions should be joyfully welcomed to the Lord’s table and warmly encouraged to express their faith and fellowship in Christ by eating and drinking in “memory of that his precious death, until his coming again.”²⁴

²⁰A *Puritan Catechism* (1855), answer to Question 80: “What is the Lord’s Supper?”
²¹For understanding “the body” here as “the church,” see Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 554–555.
²²See Ole E. Borgen, *John Wesley on the Sacraments: A Theological Study* (Zurich: United Methodist Church, 1972), 197–98.
²³“The Order of the Administration of the Lord’s Supper, or Holy Communion,” *Book of Common Prayer* (1662).
²⁴*Ibid.*

"We must never underestimate the healing power of prayer and love in the hands of the Lord. We must never give up hope."

Faithfully Shepherding the Sheep

Difficulties would only arise if a gender dysphoric believer adopts or returns to a gender identity contrary to their sex. How might this affect participation in communion and how should such a situation be approached? Again, let me illustrate.

Another pastor called me some time ago to discuss a married, male church member who had started cross-sex hormone therapy and wished to come to church dressed as a woman. We talked through the issues and, over subsequent weeks, a number of delicate conversations took place between the pastor and this member of the flock. After spending many hours listening, sympathizing, praying, and looking at the Scriptures with him, the pastor felt he needed to make clear that his brother was not honoring God, his marriage, or his body. He needed to repent. If not, he would be unable to share with the Lord's people at the Lord's table. Mercifully, this was just the jolt he needed. By God's grace, and with the support of his family and church, repent he did.

CONCLUSION

In our current climate, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that the gospel of Jesus Christ is good news for all who have struggled or continue to struggle with their gender identity, as it is for all whose bodies have been irreparably damaged by surgery. Jesus alone can make us new (2 Cor. 5:17), and Jesus alone will make us whole (Phil. 3:21).

For all Christians, conversion normally settles the issues of baptism, membership, and communion, even though additional wisdom is required to determine the best forms of service and a person's suitability for leadership. Complications only arise when a believer starts (or returns to) living inconsistently with their profession. This is so for *anyone* who strays from the path of discipleship. Whether a believer is giving in to lust or anger, the desire to reject their biological sex, or "is caught in any transgression" (Gal. 6:1a), the remedy is the same: "You who are spiritual should restore him [or her] in a spirit of gentleness" (Gal. 6:1b).

In seeking to minister to those who struggle with their gender identity, great pastoral sensitivity is often needed — particularly in seeking to discern the degree to which someone is gender dysphoric as opposed to gender defiant. Nonetheless, the Lord's will is clear: we are to welcome our biological sex as his good gift and align our gender conception and expression with that sex. This will not be easy for some and may be a lifelong battle for others, but it is the path to wholeness.

However, it is also important to realize that our heavenly Father does not require us to conform to narrow gender stereotypes — stereotypes that are often more cultural than biblical and, for some, may contribute to their gender confusion. What he does require is that, with the light of his Word, the liberating help of his Spirit, and the loving support of his church, we each embrace and celebrate the good gift of our body and learn to live in harmony with it to the glory of Jesus and for the good of others.

Above all, we must never forget that God is totally committed to patiently working with his children in order to transform each of us into the glorious image of his Son, our brother, the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3:18a). Yes, change is slow and gradual, "from one degree of glory to another" (2 Cor. 3:18b). But this ought to make us patient too — both with ourselves and with each other. As Walt Heyer reminds us, "we must never give up on people, no matter how many times they fail or how long recovery takes. We must never underestimate the healing power of prayer and love in the hands of the Lord. We must never give up hope."²⁵ ✕

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²⁵Walt Heyer, *A Transgender's Faith* (2015), 141.

Gender, Intersectionality, and Critical Theory

In the last few years, the #MeToo movement, revelations of sexual abuse and cover-up within the Southern Baptist Convention, and controversy surrounding the appropriateness of women preaching in Lord's Day worship have reopened discussions of gender within evangelicalism. While there has been little development within the evangelical church in the underlying theological and exegetical arguments regarding gender roles, there has been a significant shift in how these issues are understood within the broader culture. Ideologies once

confined to the rarefied atmosphere of academia now fill the newsfeeds of social media users. For this reason, it's crucial for Christians to understand these ideas, recognizing that conversations about gender don't happen in a vacuum but are informed by cultural trends and popular discourse. One example is the growing use of the term "intersectionality" in discussions about gender. In this article, we'll attempt to present an accessible overview of intersectionality that aids the church in taking every thought captive for the glory of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).

WHAT IS INTERSECTIONALITY?

Intersectionality has been explicated in a number of ways, including: an established theory,¹ an analytical societal paradigm², a theoretical conceptual framework³, a public policy heuristic,⁴ and a comprehensive research method.⁵ Despite its complexity and multiple usages, we can offer the following definition: intersectionality is the claim that different facets of our identity interact in distinct and complex ways based upon the particular intersection of social categories we occupy, yielding a life and existence that can be generally characterized by either privilege, oppression, or both.

Critical race theorist and feminist scholar, Kimberlé Crenshaw, coined the term “intersectionality” in her analysis of how a black woman’s experience of discrimination cannot be characterized in terms of racism alone or sexism alone. Narrowly understood, the concept of intersectionality is a neutral tool that rightly recognizes that individual aspects of our identity are not held in isolation from one another but interact with one another. Such understanding helps us see why a “single mothers ministry” enables us to better meet the needs of single mothers than merely a “singles ministry” or “mothers ministry.”

However, the application of intersectionality that has captivated our national consciousness is less of a neutral tool and more of an ideological paradigm rooted in the larger enterprise of contemporary critical theory. Intersectionality is manifested in a number of critical social theories, with its most robust expression articulated in feminist theory. This understanding of intersectionality makes far broader claims, claims that attempt to establish strong connections between privilege, oppression, identity, and social existence. “Intersectionality recognizes that power, privilege, disadvantage, and discrimination are functions of interlocking spectrums of identity.”⁶ “In feminist theory, intersectionality has become the predominant way of conceptualizing the relation between systems of oppression...it has become commonplace within feminist theory to claim that women’s lives are constructed by multiple, intersecting systems of oppression.”⁷ To properly situate these claims, we turn next to contemporary critical theory, from which intersectionality emerged.

¹Govind Dhaske, “The Complexity of Heuristic Structure of Gender Intersectionality and Statutory Political Participation for Women in India: Exploring Structural Challenges,” *Intersectionalities: A Global Journal of Social Work Analysis, Research, Policy, and Practice*, 6, no. 1 (2018): 37–49.
²April L. Few-Demo, Aine M. Humble, Melissa A. Curran, and Sally A. Lloyd, “Queer Theory, Intersectionality, and LGBT-Parent Families: Transformative Critical Pedagogy in Family Theory,” *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 8, no. 1 (2016): 74–94.
³April L. Few-Demo, “Intersectionality as the ‘New’ Critical Approach in Feminist Family Studies: Evolving Racial/Ethnic Feminisms and Critical Race Theories,” *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 6, no. 2 (2014): 169–183.
⁴Devon W. Carbado, Kimberle Williams Crenshaw, Vickie, M. Mays, and Barbara Tomlinson, “Intersectionality: Mapping the Movements of a Theory,” *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race*, 10, no. 2 (2013): 303–312.
⁵Kathy Davis, “Intersectionality as Buzzword: A Sociology of Science Perspective on What Makes a Feminist Theory Successful,” *Feminist Theory*, 9, no. 1 (2008): 67–85.
⁶Angela Onwuachi-Willig, Jacob Willig-Onwuachi, “A House Divided,” in *Critical Race Theory*, eds. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2013), 418.
⁷Anna Carastathis, “The Concept of Intersectionality in Feminist Theory,” *Philosophy Compass*, 9, no. 5 (2014): 304.

Intersectionality and Critical Theory

Briefly stated, critical theory is “a complex theoretical perspective...that explores the historical, cultural, and ideological lines of authority that underlie social conditions.”⁸ Critical theory is a broad knowledge area which has developed significantly since its origins in the ideas of Karl Marx and the Frankfurt School. From its inception, “critical theory has been primarily concerned with the elimination of oppression and the promotion of justice,”⁹ with contemporary iterations of critical theory being “more sensitive to modes of domination that involve race and gender and to the complexity of lived experience than in the Frankfurt School’s original articulation of the notion.”¹⁰

Critical theory today finds its expression in a number of critical social theories such as critical race theory, feminist theory, critical pedagogy, etc. These theories analyze society through the lens of power, problematizing the social conditions that create and reify it, challenging and disrupting those who have it, and emancipating and empowering those who don’t. “Critical social theories are those conceptual accounts of the social world that attempt to understand and explain the causes of structural domination and inequality in order to facilitate human emancipation and equity.”¹¹

⁸Ozlem Sensoy and Robin DiAngelo, *Is Everyone Really Equal* (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2012), 1.
⁹Heather Davidson, Scot Evans, Cynthia Ganote, Jorie Henrickson, Lynette Jacobs-Priebe, Diana L. Jones, Isaac Prilleltensky, and Manuel Riemer, “Power and Action in Critical Theory Across Disciplines: Implications for Critical Community Psychology,” *American Journal of Community Psychology* 38, no. 1–2 (2006): 36.
¹⁰Shirley Steinberg and Joe Kincheloe, “Power, Emancipation, and Complexity: Employing Critical Theory,” *Power and Education* 2, no. 2 (2010): 140.
¹¹Bradley A. U. Levinson, “Exploring Critical Social Theories and Education,” in *Beyond Critique*, ed. Bradley A.U. Levinson (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2011), 2.
¹²Christian Chan and Adrienne Erby, “A Critical Analysis and Applied Intersectionality Framework with Intercultural Queer Couples,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 65, no. 2 (2017): 36.

Critical scholarship unpacks the ways in which subordinate groups such as women, people of color, the poor, the differently-abled, and LGBTQ+ individuals are oppressed by dominant groups such as men, whites, the rich, the abled, and heterosexuals through hegemonic structures and ideas. “Intersectionality theory has revolutionized critical scholarship to determine overlapping forms of oppression, decenter hegemonic structures of power relations and social contexts, and enact a social justice agenda.”¹²

Given what we’ve covered, what are some ways in which critical theory and intersectionality influence biblical discussions of gender?

POTENTIAL CONFLICTS

Gender as a Social Construct

Increasingly, in our culture, gender is being positioned and heralded as a social construct. As such, gender is merely the product of the reigning beliefs, traditions, and ideas of a given people in a given society at a given time, untethered to either a transcendent God or biological reality established at conception. Fundamental to this effort is intersectionality and the hard claims it makes regarding identity and oppression: “Critical to the social construction of gender is acknowledgement

of intersectionality of identities” with a view to “complicating constructions of gender” by “rejecting the traditional concept of viewing gender as a binary and provides new ways to think about gender.”¹³

While gender *expression* is culturally influenced (for good or ill), it is false to claim that gender is a social construct. Ironically, it is the *claim* that gender is a social construct that is the *actual* social construct, a social construct pushed by those who are opposed to the realities of male and female gender difference and the subsequent ontological and societal implications that follow. Under this paradigm, all things patriarchal (real or imagined) and all things that flow from and reify a heteronormative and cisgendered perspective are seen as oppressive, the abusive result of hegemonic power. This ideological commitment can be so pronounced that it leads to hostility not only to a biblical view of gender and gender roles, but to empirical, scientific evidence about biological sex differences.

Truth as Power

Following in the footsteps of post-structuralists like Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, contemporary critical theorists emphasize the ways in which truth claims can mask bids for power. This skepticism towards the neutrality or objectivity of truth claims will be a major obstacle to biblical discussions of gender. Rather than focusing on rational arguments, evidence, or exegesis of Scripture, those influenced by critical theory will attempt to “see through” truth claims to discern the hidden agendas and motivations of their interlocutor.

For example, if a man insists that gender is rooted in God’s creation of male and female and that men and women, though absolutely equal in intellect, value, and dignity, have some roles and responsibilities that are distinctive and not fully identical, he will be seen as protecting his own male interests. Yet if a woman makes the same claims, she will be seen as experiencing “internalized oppression,” because she has adopted the norms and values of the patriarchal society in which she is immersed and by which she is subjugated. In either case, their arguments can be ignored.

Here, Christians must gently insist that any idea or argument must be judged as true or false independent of the perceived motives of the one offering it.

Epistemology and the Role of Lived Experience

Intersectionality draws on standpoint theory’s contention that the “lived experience” of oppressor groups leads to unique cultural blindness, “a less complete view of the world,” and, alternatively, that the “lived experience” of oppressed groups leads to unique cultural understanding as they “not only understand their own experience, but also the experiences and knowledge of groups with more power.”¹⁴

Given this epistemic asymmetry, those sympathetic to this viewpoint often argue that dominant groups should defer to subordinate groups with regard to issues ostensibly related to oppression. Any challenge by the “oppressor” to the lived experience of oppressed people or to their beliefs regarding how oppression

“Christians must reaffirm Scripture as the ultimate authority.

Our lived experience is not an infallible guide; Scripture is.”

works in society can be seen as a mark of arrogance and privilege, an invalidation of the very humanity of the oppressed person, and an attempted reification of their oppressor status.

Once again, the exalted role of lived experience within contemporary critical theory will make biblical discussions of gender difficult. Not only does a biblical understanding of gender supposedly support the hegemonic structures of patriarchy and heteronormativity, it challenges the lived experience of women who “just know” that God has called them to be a pastor, or the lived experience of transgendered people who “just know” that their gender does not match their biological sex. While care and sensitivity should be prominent in these kinds of conversations, Christians must reaffirm Scripture as the ultimate authority. Our lived experience is not an infallible guide; Scripture is. Until we submit our lived experience (and the emotions that attend it) to the authority and wisdom of Scripture, our understanding will be incomplete and our way forward will be unclear (Ps. 119:105).

Gender and Justice

Critical and intersectional scholarship see an unbreakable connection between everything it labels as oppressive. Biological sex, race, class, and age are matters devoid of any intrinsic moral breach, while homosexuality and transgenderism are not. Yet to critical and intersectional epistemology, there are no moral distinctions among these categories; the only concern is that they are all part of an intersectional web of privilege and oppression.

Consequently, critical and intersectional scholars don’t divorce anti-racist activism from LGBTQ+ activism, or anti-poverty activism from pro-choice activism. All of these activities are considered legitimate and necessary forms of social justice praxis because they all represent efforts to overturn and dismantle systems of oppression: “Racism...Sexism...Ageism. Heterosexism. Elitism. Classism. It is a lifetime pursuit for each one of us to extract these distortions from our living.”¹⁵

¹⁴Kate Lockwood Harris, “Re-situating organizational knowledge: Violence, intersectionality and the privilege of partial perspective,” *Human Relations*, 70, no. 3 (2017): 264.

¹⁵Audre Lorde, “Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference,” in *Race, Class, and Gender: An Anthology*, eds. Margaret L. Andersen and Patricia Hill Collins (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1992), 496.

¹³Pamela Eddy, “Looking Forward - Strategies for Inclusivity,” *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 179 (2017): 104.



Given this ideological commitment, a defense of biblical gender roles will not be seen merely as a misinterpretation of Scripture, but as a commitment to injustice on par with racism or anti-Semitism. Therefore, Christians must address the questions at the heart of this ideological impasse: what is “justice”? What is “oppression”? Is justice grounded in secular ideals for a human utopia or in God’s revealed will? Does “equality” refer to equality of value and dignity, or in the lack of any distinctions in roles? Should “oppression” be defined in terms of actual cruelty and violence? Or merely in terms of hegemonic power?

Individualism Versus Collectivism

Finally, the greatest travesty of intersectionality is in the level of power it assigns to social categories in terms of privilege and oppression. Here it is significantly shortsighted and purblind. While it is true historically in our society black and brown people as a group, women as a group, and homosexuals as a group have faced pronounced, egregious oppression and disenfranchisement, it does not follow that oppressor qualities and characteristics are *intrinsic* to whites, men, and heterosexuals. Such a view is grossly unbiblical and defies fundamental

ontological and anthropological realities regarding humankind. There are no immutable or permanent attributes assigned to these social categories along the vector of privilege and oppression. In this regard intersectionality fails to properly acknowledge and account for the fact and persistence of individualism as it relates to trials and difficulties in phenomenological experience and as it relates to the agency and opportunity afforded individuals in contemporary society. It also fails to account for changing conditions in society and the ebb and flow of how privilege and oppression are manifested, ascribed, and realized. We must understand and embrace that human beings are unique moral agents who cannot be reduced to their membership in any set of social groups. This reality disrupts the view of intersectionality vis-à-vis identity and its relationship to privilege and oppression. Most critically, intersectionality is wholly blind to the supernatural power and life-changing impact of what it means to be “born again” and consequently have one’s highest, most pervasive, all encompassing aspect of one’s identity be God himself, the living Christ (1 Pet. 1:3; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 3:7–9).

HOW TO RESPOND

How should complementarians engage the challenges of critical theory and intersectionality?

First, reaching both non-Christians and Christians who have been influenced by these ideas will require that we have an accurate, charitable, and nuanced understanding of the issues involved.

Second, complementarians should be receptive to critique. Have we gone “beyond what is written” in our assessment

of gender roles? To what extent do we have a secular vision of leadership as dominance rather than as service? To what extent have we minimized the absolute equality, worth, dignity, and abilities of women?

Third, we need to recognize the role that worldview assumptions play in people’s understanding of gender. It may not be fruitful to immediately engage in a detailed exegesis of Ephesians 5:22–33 if someone rejects the authority of Scripture. In the same way, we may need to excavate basic assumptions surrounding the nature of power, authority, epistemology, justice, and oppression. If someone presupposes that all distinctions based on gender are oppressive, then we need to start there with our engagement.

Finally, a complementarian church filled with loving marriages, gracious leaders, and divinely empowered men and women serving together as co-laborers for Christ and his kingdom (1 Pet. 2:9; Eph. 4:12) is a powerful witness against the flawed rubric of intersectional epistemology. As complementarians, we believe not only that gender distinctions and roles are God’s design, but that they are good gifts for humanity. Let us live out this truth, adorning the gospel with the testimony of our lives. ✕

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Natural Law and Protecting the Innocent:

ON DRAG QUEEN STORY HOUR, LIBERAL DEMOCRACY, AND PUBLIC MORALITY

Recently, there has been no small amount of fervor and controversy over the subject of Drag Queen Story Hour (DQSH) among religious conservatives in the United States. Indeed, the preceding months have seen this controversy develop into something of a firestorm over the future of the conservative movement. It has become an avatar through which conservatives are refracting many issues related to public engagement; among them, determining to what extent the state can privilege certain viewpoints to the exclusion of others. And, ironically, at the center of this controversy lies a moral debate altogether unlikely to divide religious and social conservatives: drag queens reading to children in public libraries. No one engaged in the so-called “French-Ahmari” debates insists that such gross demonstration of personal liberty is actually praiseworthy.

At this point, there is little need to revisit the genesis of the French-Ahmari debate. Nor is there a compelling reason to consider in detail the various points and counterpoints that have been made along the way by both sides. Summaries of each are readily available. Instead, it is desirable to focus solely on the root issue of the debate precisely because the question at the center of this conflagration remains unresolved.

Social conservatives in America are hardly divided over the virtue of grown men dressed in drag reading to children in public libraries. To say the least, our contempt for such an activity is universal. But despite our unity at this juncture, there is an enormous divide over a related question: is it appropriate for government to prohibit such activities in public spaces?

BAPTISTS TAKE UP THE QUESTION

At a recent private convening of Baptist scholars, that question drew forth responses in both the negative and the affirmative. Moreover, it introduced no small amount of uncertainty for others in attendance who remained undecided. But even so, it would be wrong to conclude from this apparent lack of unity that these Baptists lack any consensus on the current debate.

The principle of religious freedom is a key distinctive of the Baptist tradition. Indeed, it might be the defining hallmark of Baptist identity in America. This means the integralist or semi-integralist position, or attempts to order society according to the highest good, represents a trajectory that Baptists simply cannot follow. As principled pluralists, we believe social uniformity or hegemony represents a sort of over-realized eschatology that runs the risk of paving over divergence in a secular age. We are wary of majorities, because majorities can easily squelch the views of minorities. Baptists firmly reject the notion that the state has any authority to prescribe religious belief. This does not mean, however, that this cordons off the question of morality from the state. Obviously, the state has to be committed to morality and justice — “to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good” (1 Pet. 2:14). While morality is inseparable from questions of religion, the formal jurisdiction of the state ought to concern itself only with moral outcomes. Because of the divine gift of conscience (Rom. 2:14–16), state actors can look on and determine whether an action comports with justice without determining whether and how religion is the underlying catalyst.

In exercising the just judgment given to it by divine decree, the state is determining whether the action aligns with that which is evil or good.

This does not mean, however, that Baptists are necessarily all-in for an ideological liberalism. But it does mean that despite their disdain for the practice, Baptists are unwilling to adopt any measures to counter even something as objectionable as DQSH if doing so requires placing undue burdens on religious freedom or rights of conscience.

As a people birthed amid intense persecution, Baptists cannot support using the power of the state to stifle the conscience rights of others. And they certainly cannot do so for the sake of privileging an alternate religious viewpoint. But this brings us to an important question: can something as morally reprehensible as DQSH be banned from public space without trampling the rights of conscience or equal access to public space? Or, to put it another way, is there any basis from which Baptists can consistently support the prohibition of DQSH without burdening other civil liberties?

DEFINING THE DEBATE

Before going any further, it is necessary to make a few clarifications. First, though it is deeply disturbing, the crux of the issue being debated here is not actually Drag Queen Story Hour. The scope of that particular issue is fairly limited (perhaps to several dozen communities), but it has become an effective and pointed form of shorthand to describe the moral decay and cultural rot taking place in the United States today, especially as it relates to

sexuality and gender. The concept of moral decadence is indeed a nebulous one, but mental images of drag queens parading themselves in front of impressionable children below the age of ten, however, strike one in a specific and visceral manner.

Second, as stated above, it is important to note that social conservatives in the United States are united in their diagnosis of these ills. Even in the most contentious moments of the recent debate between Sohrab Ahmari and David French on the campus of Catholic University, it remained clear that the men were of the same mind not only regarding the merits of DQSH, but of the regrettable moral and social decline taking place in American culture.

Finally, it must be understood that the real center of this debate is the appropriate response of government to this decline. In the face of these signs of decay, Ahmari and others are truly alarmed by what they perceive as a fundamental breakdown in the moral fabric of American culture. As such, they've prescribed various options for reordering both our common lives and political order to push back against this decay and promote a higher vision of the good. In response, French and others, while lamenting these societal ills, have doubled down on what French describes as procedural liberalism — insisting that in our secular and plural society, prohibiting something like DQSH would violate the principles of viewpoint neutrality, which are essential to liberal democracy.

PUSHING PAST THE BOUNDARIES

Speaking as two Baptists, we're not at all prepared to jettison the foundations of the liberal order in the name of combatting

this decline. At issue in this debate are the very principles of liberalism that were once used to bring an end to the persecution to which our Baptist forebears (and Catholic co-belligerents) were subjected. And because of our origins, Baptists often manifest a particular kind of sensitivity to discrimination and bigotry; the idea of prohibiting an activity or behavior simply because one finds it objectionable is something Baptists cannot abide.

But something rarely asked in the midst of this controversy is whether liberalism itself leaves us any recourse to prohibit something like Drag Queen Story Hour without forsaking its fundamental principles. One must not forget that liberalism is not a system without values or a vision of the good. As David French wrote in a recent essay for *National Review*, “the protection of individual and associational freedoms — as defined by the Bill of Rights and the Civil War Amendments — is . . . a powerful moral affirmation of the equal dignity and worth of citizens before the state.”¹

Far from being “value-neutral,” liberalism, since its inception, has been undergirded by natural law. The Constitution was operationalized by the Declaration's insistence of there being a divine Creator who is the ground of our rights. Liberalism's vision of individual self-rule and autonomy is derived from its conception of human dignity, which is fundamentally a natural law principle. Indeed, the notion of personhood and self-constitution are deeply Christian as well. Likewise, the primary freedoms issuing from liberalism (e.g. freedom of religion, speech, assembly), as well as the basic prohibitions stemming from liberalism (e.g. murder, theft),

can be traced directly to natural law. Ultimately, because liberalism via natural law recognizes the dignity of every individual, it endeavors to guarantee that every individual enjoys equal access in the public square to share, exercise, and advocate their beliefs.

APPROACHING AN ANSWER

As Baptists, we want to be careful to avoid introducing viewpoint discrimination into the public square. Yet when it comes to the question of whether or not the government should subsidize public space for moral perversion, we believe we are standing on solid ground in answering in the negative, and that it is possible to do so without presenting

an undue burden to the civil liberties of others or breaching the grounds of religious establishment.

To explain, we take for granted that everyone agrees that there is some kind of line to be drawn in moral decision-making. Consider this example: suppose the events in the library went beyond mere story time, and the drag queens began to strip down to the nude — a scenario which ironically nearly came to fruition recently.² In such a case, we would not struggle to find consensus to prohibit that activity. Clearly, exposure to such would not only be inappropriate, but harmful for the children in attendance. Public access does not negate the threat of prolonged exposure to the corrosive effects of obscenity.

¹David French, “Embracing Liberty in No Way Means Embracing Moral Relativism,” *National Review Online*, September 20, 2019, available at: <https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/embracing-liberty-does-not-mean-embracing-moral-relativism/>

²This refers to a scene at King County Library in Washington State. For more, see: <https://twitter.com/zyntrax/status/1179967775042867200?s=21>



*"There's a line crossed,
somewhere, and due diligence
requires establishing a consistent
principle for knowing where the
lines are and what constitutes
crossing them."*

In response to that scenario, some might argue that such an act would also be illegal and should be prohibited on those grounds. But that response draws out the very principle at issue here. If it is reasonable to prohibit adults from stripping nude in front of children because doing so causes actual harm, is it not also reasonable to prohibit DQSH on precisely the same grounds? There's a line crossed, somewhere, and due diligence requires establishing a consistent principle for knowing where the lines are and what constitutes crossing them.

In the same way that the government has a compelling interest to restrict religious

liberty using the least restrictive means if real public harm is being threatened, we believe that governing bodies are endowed with the deliberative ability to determine when a threat to the social order is present. Whether we deem this an "obscenity" test or "public health" test, we believe that a commitment to viewpoint neutrality does not mean that government is prohibited from stopping real threats to childhood innocence, especially when the targeted audience lacks the cognitive maturity to know the effects that sexual grooming can have on them.³ And to be clear, that's what makes DQSH so reprehensible and condemnable: whatever arguments its

³We have in mind here the obscenity test standards set forth in *Miller v. California* (1973). There, a three-pronged test was established to determine whether something met the criteria for being labeled "obscene." They were: "Whether the average person, applying contemporary community standards, would find that the work as a whole appeals to the prurient interest; whether the work depicts or describes sexual conduct or excretory functions, as defined by state law, in an offensive way; whether the work as a whole lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value."

apologists want to make, allowing children to be exposed to adult crossdressers who are cloaking their every action in sexual innuendo is utterly repugnant. It is sexual grooming of a particularly nefarious sort. No Bible verse is needed to surmise this. Our conscience tells us this due to the existence of natural law. Children are not sexual creatures, and to invite premature sexualization is to erode part of the essence of childhood. Crossdressing rightfully shocks the conscience, and placing children in the pathway of such perversion is a violation of their own dignity. It is moral rot, and parents who bring their children to such events are evading all responsibility to protect their children.

Though we are firmly on French's side of the debate concerning the pragmatic value of liberalism, we agree with Ahmari that Drag Queen Story Hour and similar atrocities are not to be passively accepted in the name of viewpoint neutrality. As Baptists, we favor an open and pluralistic public square where citizens enjoy robust freedom to exercise their civil liberties. We believe in checks and balances and due process. We believe in the power of representative government to make necessary distinctions in those situations that threaten children from those situations that see only adults abuse their liberty. But our belief in liberty is not without limits, and neither is our belief in the contours of liberalism. And in such cases where the victims of "liberty" are the most innocent and impressionable among us, we are convinced the state is right to use its coercive power to step in. Call this natural law or the Golden Rule, but if I were a child, I would want my neighbor to defend my dignity. And so, if I want my dignity protected, I must work to protect the dignity of others as well.

CONCLUSION

One can easily identify the problems with dressing in drag on the basis of natural law. It is a form of license, sexual grooming, and childhood predation. Still, the fact that something is problematic or immoral does not necessarily necessitate its prohibition. Other grounds must be satisfied, such as public health and public safety. Intentionally subjecting children to what surely are violations of both public health and public safety convinces us that limits can be rightly administered without spurious harms to civil liberty. For us, it is no betrayal of liberal principles to insist that government should prohibit any activity that poses such a direct threat to a child's sense of identity and understanding of sexuality. Indeed, it is perplexing that such is even a question.

We acknowledge that government taking such a step will require careful deliberation so as to not then turn around and misapply this principle in other scenarios. Such is the deliberative process that is entailed with the responsible use of liberty. ✕

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Statement Against Female Conscription

In 2016 the US Congress appointed a National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service to investigate the question of expanding Selective Service registration to all Americans, which would subject women to potential military conscription, and to report back to the President and Congress in March 2020. The following statement was submitted to this commission in protest of female conscription; it also formed the basis for a resolution adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention in Birmingham, AL in June of 2019.

The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood stands unequivocally against conscripting America's daughters into military service. Requiring women to register with the Selective Service alongside men to make them eligible for military conscription would be to treat men and women interchangeably and to deny male and female differences clearly revealed in nature and Christian Scripture.

THE TESTIMONY OF NATURE

The natural order, considered by plain reason, supports what the vast majority of civilized societies — ancient and modern — have recognized: men are better suited than women for warfare; thus, women are at a disadvantage against men in warfare. The inherent, distinct, physiological compositions of male and female point to differently-suited purposes that have implications in the realm of fighting. The average man is stronger and has a larger frame than the average woman, making him better equipped for aggression; the female body is naturally equipped to nurture the next generation, suiting the average woman better for care and not combat. Only a non-scientific assessment of male and female physiology overlooks these plain and natural differences.

Nature and plain reason also warn that a government that conscripts its female citizens in their reproductive prime is a government that fails to seek what is best for its future and the future of its citizens. A woman aged 18–25, the current range for military conscription, is in the midst of her prime reproductive years. Therefore, to conscript a generation of women — wives, mothers, and daughters — is to demographically doom the next. Drafting women into the military, where many could be involuntarily assigned combat roles, would set the nation up for demographic disaster as birth rates would be inevitably and drastically affected.

Moreover, not only could a woman, unbeknownst to her, be with child when conscripted, she could also become pregnant during her time of service, which would put her and her unborn baby in the path of great harm — not to mention the necessary leave during pregnancy and postpartum that would require additional resources to train her replacement.

Furthermore, should a woman become a prisoner of war, she could be subjected to rape and sexual abuse at the hands of enemy combatants that could lead to unwanted pregnancy. Especially in light of our current cultural moment, we should be seeking to protect America's daughters against such abuse, not making provision for it. This great evil would be aided and abetted by a nation that places women involuntarily on the front lines of warfare.

THE TESTIMONY OF CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURE

Christian Scripture affirms what is revealed in nature and provides further significance and clarification to this revelation. Scripture teaches that Adam was created first and given familial and covenantal headship. Eve was created second to be Adam's complementary helpmeet, corresponding to his likeness and complementing his nature with differing sexual, physical, and psycho-social characteristics that form the basis for their complementary roles (Gen. 1:27; 2:18–24; 1 Cor. 11:2–10; 1 Tim. 2:12–13). One divine purpose of the complementary differences between male and female is the fulfillment of the creation mandate to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth through the divine institution of the family (Gen. 1:28), which necessitates periods of vulnerability on the part of the woman and provision and protection on the part of the man while a woman is with child, both in utero and in the child's infancy.

Male headship in the family and the covenant community is patterned after the creational arrangement and is rooted in the very nature of God’s original design before sin entered the world (1 Cor. 11:2–10; 1 Tim. 2:12–13). The family, husband and wife in covenantal marriage and father and mother to their God-given offspring, is a pre-political institution that God-fearing nations must not subvert in law or custom. Conscripting wives, mothers, and daughters against their will and away from their own families would constitute just such a subversion and disrupt this fundamental unit of society, without which there is no society.

Christian Scripture also unequivocally teaches that God created men and women with differences for distinct purposes that must not be ignored. The biblical pattern is for men, as the physically stronger sex (1 Pet. 3:7), to lead and to protect their families and covenant communities, including, when necessary, in warfare apart from civil vocations for a time (Gen. 14:14; Num. 31:3, 21, 49; Deut. 20:5-9; 3:14; Josh. 1:14-18; 6:3, 7, 9; 8:3; 10:7; 1 Sam. 16:18; 18:5; 2 Sam. 11:1; 17:8; 23:8-39; Ps. 45:3-5; SoS. 3:7-8; Isa. 42:13). Accordingly, the Bible commands husbands — not wives — to lay down their lives for their spouses just as Christ did for the church (Eph. 5:25).

It is not a properly ordered society that sends its daughters to combat; instead, Scripture indicates it is a sign of shame and disorder for a society to do so (Jer. 50:37; Nah. 3:13). When Deborah went out with Barak to battle — Scripture does not indicate she fought, but that she accompanied him to the battlefield — it was to his and Israel’s shame (Judg. 4:9). Further, when Jael wielded the hammer and peg against Sisera, it was not as a soldier but as a citizen under invasion, and this to the shame of the men charged with Israel’s protection (Judg. 4:17–22). Moreover, when God commands his people not to confuse the garments of men and women, forbidding men to wear women’s clothes and women men’s clothes in Deuteronomy 22:5, it is literally the garb of warfare that is forbidden to women.

CONCLUSION

The biological differences between male and female evident in both nature and Christian Scripture necessitate that men and women not be treated indistinctly and interchangeably. While we respect the decision of women who wish to engage in military service as volunteers, the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, represented by the undersigned, vehemently opposes every effort to force women into military service by government coercion. With the strongest conviction, the Council urges the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service to reject any recommendation to require America’s daughters to register with the Selective Service to make them eligible for conscription. ✕

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R. Albert Mohler Jr. on the State of Complementarianism

The following is an interview with Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr., president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. In the interview, CBMW asks Dr. Mohler about the state of complementarianism and the hermeneutical issues at stake in today's debates on gender and sexuality.

CBMW: During the conservative resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention, the issue of women in ministry was a kind of proxy battle in the larger war over inerrancy. In recent years, however, the Southern Baptist Convention has seen the issue of women in ministry crop up again, but this time among inerrantists. What is this larger conflict about? Hermeneutics? Natural revelation?

RAM: Evangelicalism in the 1970s and Southern Baptists in the same era were presented with multiple fronts of theological challenge. Egalitarianism, as a product of second wave feminism, arrived just at the moment when evangelicals were also confronting real challenges to the inspiration and authority of Scripture. For many Southern Baptists, the issue of inerrancy was at first rather abstract. It came down to the fact that seminary professors and others could say that they rejected the word “inerrancy” but still affirmed the truthfulness of Scripture. It was a way of playing with words that left many lay people and some pastors frankly confused.

But when it came to the question of whether women should serve as the pastor of a church, that was so tangible that all evangelicals and Southern Baptists could understand what was at stake. So it was a hermeneutical issue, yes, but behind the hermeneutical challenge is the fact that the basic issue is the authority of Scripture. Those who disagreed over the question of women serving as pastors (and that is how the question was framed in the 1970s) were operating not only from different hermeneutics, but also from radically different understandings of the inspiration and authority of Scripture. That became more clear over time, and in the crisis and controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention, that was one of the major flash points. It was, frankly, beyond the imagination of Southern Baptists that many of the issues now related to the entire LGBTQ spectrum could even be questions.

What was also unforeseen was the challenge we face now of defining some of the questions of complementarianism in a new context and for a new generation. To affirm inerrancy is to accept certain hermeneutical boundaries, but it's clear that to affirm inerrancy does not in itself settle all questions the church now faces over what it means to be male and female in Christ, in the family, and in the church. This is a new challenge, but we do need to recognize that once you affirm the inerrancy of Scripture, you are limited to certain plausible hermeneutical questions. So, the issue of the inspiration and authority of Scripture and the right reading of Scripture are always close at hand with these questions.

CBMW: When complementarianism arises as a topic, it is often caricatured with a defensiveness on what women cannot do, rather than what they can do. What must complementarians do to better project a robust, joyful complementarianism that is not defined (rightly or wrongly) by negation?

RAM: I think we have to recognize the historical context that produced negation. This is the perpetual predicament of those who defend biblical orthodoxy: we're often in the position of having to say, “The Bible doesn't teach that.” The reality is that any coherent position includes both affirmation and negation, and we should just be honest about that.

An affirmation of biblical truth, which would include the affirmation of complementarianism, has to be rooted in a joyful biblical theology that is grounded in God's purpose in creating human beings in His image, His purpose in making us male and female, instituting marriage, and the gift of sexuality. We must also remember that men and women are to be partners, according to Genesis, in the great work of bringing order and human flourishing; the Bible could not begin more clearly with a positive affirmation.

The Bible also deals with negation, but all of this has to be set within a joyful biblical theology. Neither complementarianism nor trinitarianism or any other theological truth can be presented without the necessity of being clear about what the Bible teaches and what's incompatible with biblical revelation. And if complementarians have failed to demonstrate a joyful biblical theology that begins with the celebration of the goodness of what God has created and the rightness of that order and the beauty of humanity as made in God's image and the glory of the assignments given to men and women, then shame on us. But this is also a reminder that our theology has to show up not only in arguments, but in a comprehensive affirmation of biblical truth joyfully presented to the people of God.

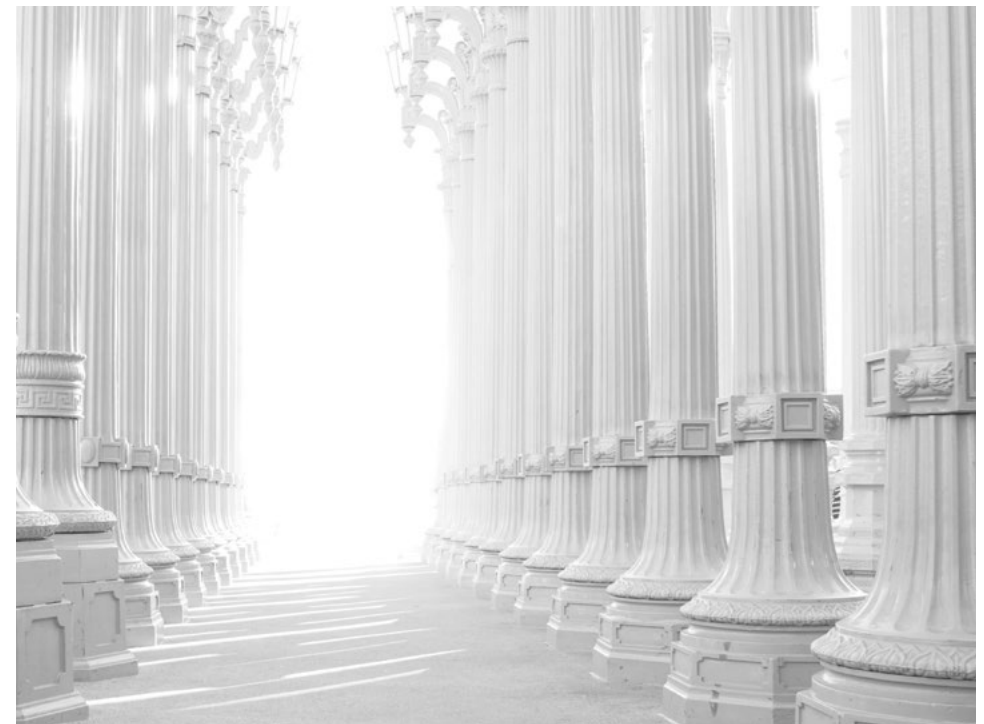
CBMW: On your ranking of pressing needs within confessional evangelicalism, how important is the recovery of natural revelation? Does this mean an embrace of natural law?

RAM: This has been a long debate in Protestant circles and one that I entered formally in the 1980s, largely through involvement with Dr. Carl F. H. Henry. Dr. Henry and I presented papers on this very issue at an academic conference even as the LGBT revolution was appearing on the horizon. In a determination to be biblically and theologically consistent, I have to argue that our theology can never be based upon natural revelation.

Given the effects of human sin, natural revelation and natural law turn out to be far less convincing than they ought to be. Political and moral debates in the United States over the last 30 years have underlined this truth clearly, if

disappointingly. For example, in debates over the sanctity of human life and the integrity of marriage, arguments from natural law alone should have been convincing to Americans based upon what God has revealed in the natural order. But clearly, they were not. And I have failed to uncover a single example in which someone has been genuinely convicted or convinced by natural revelation or by natural law alone on any matter of major controversy.

Evangelicals solidly grounded in the Protestant Reformation understand the truthfulness of the natural law, and we also understand its cogency and convincing power once one is committed to a biblical view of life and the world. The problem is that those who most often operate from a different worldview refuse, as Romans 1 makes clear, to see what is truthfully and authoritatively revealed in natural revelation and through the natural law. Evangelicals, by the way, can make full use of natural law reasoning as a structure of argument, but the argument still has to be based ultimately on biblical authority and drawn from biblical sources. Natural law becomes illustrative and demonstrative — not foundational.



CBMW: In recent years, CBMW has broadened its mission to include the Nashville Statement alongside the Danvers Statement. It did so in order to equip evangelicals on issues related to sexuality, especially in the aftermath of the LGBT revolution. What is your understanding of the relationship between Danvers and Nashville, and how important are the issues addressed in these confessional statements to evangelical faithfulness?

RAM: The Danvers Statement appeared at the very time that some were making the argument that evangelicals should embrace an egalitarian worldview and a hermeneutic required in order to justify an egalitarian argument, period. Put simply, explicit biblical teachings have to be relativized and enormous hermetical obstacles have to be overcome in order to get to the point where one can argue that a woman should serve as a pastor of a church.

As a young Southern Baptist, I began to look very closely at how these arguments for egalitarianism were being made, and I discovered that long before they appeared in some evangelical circles, far less among Southern Baptists, they were very common in mainline Protestantism. In particular, I started looking at the arguments being made within American Episcopal circles, and what I discovered is that, already by the mid and late 1980s, the same people who had been arguing in the 1970s for egalitarianism were already arguing for what was then styled “gay rights” or “gay liberation.” And I noticed it was the same hermeneutic, it was the very same approach to Scripture. These were entirely parallel arguments, and sometimes they were even the same argument. So it didn’t take much detective work to recognize that the LGBT revolution would follow very fast on the heels of second wave feminism, and that calls for evangelicals to join the gay rights revolution, as it was called, would follow fast on the heels of egalitarianism.

Now, I want to be careful. This is not to say that all who affirm egalitarianism are logically required to affirm the positions advocated by the LGBT movement. It is to say — and I’m glad to go on the record on this and have for many years — that the hermeneutic is essentially the same. So, egalitarians who do not go on to affirm the sexual revolution, I think they do so as an act of will, not as a requirement of their hermeneutic.

The last part of your question comes down to the fact that much of what has happened in the evangelical world since the early 1980s would have been inexplicable without the specific affirmations and denials of the Danvers Statement. And I think, over time, the same will be true of the Nashville Statement. Part of our responsibility is to do exactly what those two statements do, following the example of other confessional statements and doctrinal statements such as the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.

" We have to be clear about what we affirm and then what that simultaneously denies, and written statements are absolutely necessary if there’s going to be mutual accountability."

CBMW: The Danvers Statement was written to address challenges from feminism. Thirty years later, the Nashville Statement was written to address other challenges, like those surrounding identity, orientation, and transgenderism. The pace at which these challenges evolve isn’t slowing — what do you see in the next wave of challenges that complementarianism will need to address? Where does the revolt from reason and natural revelation ultimately take our culture?

RAM: At this point, it is not at all clear what the end game will be, but we do know that once the hermeneutical brakes are taken off, there are virtually no limitations on what will be allowable and eventually celebrated. So, the egalitarian movement was followed very quickly by the gay rights and gay liberation movements, and then they were transformed at the level of individual identity, and then the gender revolution — and by that I mean the rejection of the so-called gender binary. All this has happened within not only my adult lifetime, but really within a single generation. That pace of social and moral change is unprecedented, as has been noted by even secular historians, who may contrast the speed of our current moral revolutions as compared to, for example, the very long period required for western civilization to put an end to the slave trade.

Now in late modernity you have social change aided and abetted by the breakdown of the family, the erosion of social cohesion, the volatility of social and digital media, and even now various forms of transhumanism and the confusion of human beings and machines, human beings and other creatures. A society that loses a coherent definition of what it means to be human is a society in which it will be increasingly dangerous to be a human being.

CBMW: Why should evangelical pastors and theologians devote energy to promoting and defending complementarianism?

RAM: I don't believe for a moment that evangelical pastors, leaders, or church members should spend any time whatsoever defending complementarianism as complementarianism. There is no time to be wasted in the support of any mere "ism," but the church has the responsibility to receive, to celebrate, to teach, to preach, and to apply the Word of God and all that it contains. So, I would argue that an affirmation of what Scripture teaches, beginning in the very first chapters of the Bible, will require a definition and defense of complementarianism — but not as complementarianism, but as God's revealed truth.

Luther rightly said that we have to defend the Word of God at the very point at which it's being attacked. I think we understand that that means we have to be willing to define a position as established in Scripture and defend it; but no doctrine stands alone, and eventually no doctrine can be defended alone. Eventually the church must stand clearly upon the comprehensiveness of biblical truth. In that sense, every doctrinal battle, every doctrinal controversy represents multiple dangers. One is to avoid all necessary definition, and the other would be to define the issue in a way that is abstracted from the totality of biblical truth. That's a good reminder to those of us who are complementarians: we don't start out in our self-identity by being complementarians, but by being committed to the gospel, to Christ, and to the Scripture — and then trying to live that out and think that through faithfully.

CBMW: Imagine a dystopic future where the Southern Baptist Convention endorses same-sex marriage. What acts of capitulation must we now safeguard against so we do not accommodate?

RAM: I have to go back to an assertion I made earlier based upon the observations that came to me even as a doctoral student back in the 1980s. That is, the parallelism between the hermeneutic of egalitarianism and the hermeneutic of the so-called sexual revolution and, eventually, and far more radically, the hermeneutic that facilitates the denial of the so-called gender binary. I think the tripwire would be allowing and facilitating an approach to Scripture that would allow what Scripture does not allow and would fail to affirm what Scripture does affirm, and I guess even before that would be embarrassment over holding to biblical truth. We're social creatures, and that's a very powerful social impetus. The secular world around us is doing its best to make us embarrassed to hold to virtually any vestige of biblical truth. Sadly, some of those same pressures are found among some who consider themselves to be evangelicals who think the only hope for evangelicalism is becoming less offensive to the world. There will be no end for that logic.

CBMW: What are the blind spots within complementarianism that we must do better to address?

RAM: I think one of the most dangerous blind spots or challenges for complementarians is being very clear that complementarianism does not mean male superiority. It just doesn't. It instead affirms different and distinct roles for men and women in church and in the home. But it is not grounded in male superiority; it is grounded in various arguments in Scripture, some based in creation, but the fundamental issue is that there is a stewardship of authority and a stewardship of responsibility that is assigned to men — and not just to men, but to husbands and fathers in the home and the church, specifically to those who are called to spiritual leadership in the teaching office. So it's wrongly understood to imply that every man in the church has authority over every woman in the church. That's simply not true.

Another blind spot I think we have to watch is failing to correct abuses that come in the name of complementarianism. Any time you talk about a structure in creation in which there are different assignments of authority and responsibility, then evil men can use such arguments to their own sexual, physical, and narcissistic inclinations. Consequently, complementarians who are not careful can allow not only men to believe that they are in a position of some male superiority, but girls and women to believe that what is being taught is female inferiority. So I think we've learned over the course of the last several years that this is not a hypothetical danger, and it needs to be articulated very clearly.

CBMW: What must evangelical denominations do in the present to secure a future complementarian witness?

RAM: Preach the Word in season and out of season. Be always ready to give an answer for the hope that is in you. It's the same exhortation given to every generation of Christians. We don't demonize egalitarians, but we do and must offer a robust counter-argument. We can't assume — and I think in many ways this is the greatest danger — that younger evangelicals have thought through these issues, because so many of them came to adulthood long after the debates reached evangelicalism in the 80s and 90s. So assume nothing. Teach everything revealed in Scripture, and do so happily, confidently, and in a way that's matched by our own obedience. Our arguments will mean nothing if contradicted by our lives. ✕

*R. Albert Mohler, Jr. is the
President of The Southern Baptist
Theological Seminary.*

*"Preach the Word in
season and out of season."*

*"Be always ready to give
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that is in you."*



BOOK

REVIEWS

STEVEN WEDGEWORTH

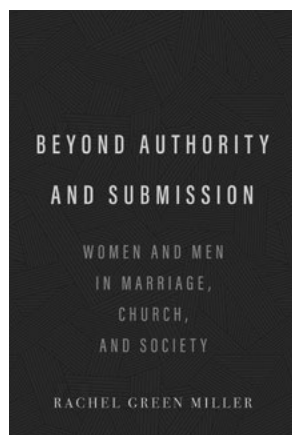
A New Way to Understand Men and Women in Christ?

A REVIEW OF RACHEL GREEN MILLER'S
BEYOND AUTHORITY AND SUBMISSION

Rachel Green Miller's *Beyond Authority and Submission: Women and Men in Marriage, Church, and Society* (P&R Publishing, 2019) represents a growing new voice in what might be called post-complementarian literature. In it, Miller affirms the biblical teaching of male-only ordination in the church and the husband's leadership in the family, but she seeks to correct what she considers an intrusion of unbiblical and even pagan assumptions into the traditional Reformed and Evangelical discourse.

In this review, I will first summarize the major sections of *Beyond Authority and Submission* and highlight its key points of argument. I will commend the admirable intentions which lie at its heart and even join in on a few important criticisms of some complementarian writers. Regrettably, I must also make several points of substantial criticism of the book. Its full thesis is not presented directly at the beginning, and so readers are forced to piece it together as

they move throughout the later chapters. Its biblical exposition, which ought to support the thesis, is actually quite meager. The book's persuasiveness is mostly found in its telling of the history, a damning history as told. Yet this narration is extremely selective, as Miller leaves large gaps in her timeline and appeals to a questionable history of ideas. It would be inappropriate to treat the book as an academic treatise, of course, yet these flaws make *Beyond Authority and Submission* misleading and unhelpful for practical purposes. Most troubling of all, however, is its unfair presentation of the complementarian position. Throughout the book, several shocking arguments or quotes are given as evidence of what leading Reformed men and women teach, but when the citations are examined, they repeatedly do not support the initial charge. This lack of fairness is so pervasive that one cannot avoid the impression of animus, a characteristic that makes the book potentially harmful for the average reader.



SUMMARY REVIEW

Rachel Green Miller opens her book by explaining her motivation. She says, “I’ve become increasingly aware of what’s being taught in conservative circles about the nature of women and men and what’s considered appropriate in marriage, the church, and society. It’s troubling, and much of it isn’t biblical” (14). She believes this is due to the tendency to reduce all male and female relations to the question of “authority and submission.” She does not dispute that authority and submission are necessary attributes of the relationship between husbands and wives, but she does not believe they should be used as a controlling interpretative paradigm for male and female relationships more generally. Further, even within marriage, these are not the only two important categories, but should exist in concert with other equally foundational categories like “unity, interdependence, and service” (14). This is what she means by moving “beyond” authority and submission. She is not rejecting those categories but rather balancing their use by placing them in a sort of multi-polar interpretive framework. As this is done, she believes that women will be given a more appropriate status of equality with men, as “co-laborers in all of life” (17). She believes this view is truly distinct from complementarianism (16) and represents a more biblical approach.

Miller also wants to make it clear what she believes about men and women. She lays out four possible positions that one could take: feminism, egalitarianism, complementarianism, and patriarchy (15). Having given these four options, Miller lists her own views, views which initially appear to be a variation of “complementarianism.” Miller admits that she once thought of herself as a complementarian:

So am I complementarian? I used to think so. After all, I believe that husbands are the leaders of their families. I believe that wives should submit to the leadership of their husbands. I believe that ordained church leaders should be qualified men. Isn’t that what complementarians believe? (16)

But she then states that she is no longer “comfortable” calling herself a complementarian because complementarians have embraced additional beliefs, beliefs about the nature of men and women as such. Though she doesn’t say it in the introduction, it will become clear that Miller’s main criticism of “complementarianism” is that it teaches that it is in men’s “nature” to be “leaders, providers, and protectors” and that it is in women’s nature to be “submissive and responsive” (23, 50, 65, 129, 195, 230, 244). Grounding the logic of authority and submission in the original creation order turns out to be the primary problem with complementarian thinking. For Miller, this kind of argument is still a sort of patriarchy which will necessarily work its way out into the open sooner or later. This is why her own proposal begins with equality and why she repeatedly emphasizes the term “co-laborers.” For her, authority and submission apply equally to all humans, and their use varies depending upon specific relationships and vocations. As she works this out, the difference between her view and complementarianism will become more obvious, and her overarching argument will become plain.

Part one of *Beyond Authority and Submission* lays out Miller’s own biblical theology for human relationships. Miller

understands the Bible to teach that equals voluntarily submit to others in limited ways according to their particular relationships and vocations. She states that original authority was given to both men and women equally (22). This authority is limited or relativized according to one’s relationships. It should be a servant-leadership: “A servant leader isn’t so much a leader who learns to serve but a servant who learns to lead through service” (24). Submitting to other authorities is itself a voluntary act (23). It is not a natural feature of a basic hierarchy, but rather the reasonable and appropriate thing to do based on vocation and competency: “Common sense tells us that we should recognize the situational authority of others” (23).

While Miller believes there are important differences between men and women, she contends that the most important feature of both is their “unity, interdependence,” and “call to mutual service” (36). Miller affirms the complementary attributes of men and women, but does not explain what they are or how they complement one another. She believes that “we need to stop defining women as the polar opposite of men and vice versa” (37) and instead see that we are called to a unity of co-labor. While society and harmful traditional assumptions emphasize “what divides us,” the “Bible teaches about what *unites* us” (37). Miller does believe that sexual distinctions are still real and do matter. For her, our sexual identities are a matter of “biological fact” (40). Yet even here, we are “interdependent” and we “complement each other” (40). We should work together, and, for the Christian, all of our work is service. Husbands and wives “serve each other” (43). So too with parents and

children. Even church leaders, employers, and government leaders serve others. Just as authority was equally given to all, so too all are equally called to serve. The necessary distinctions are found in one's particular relationships and vocations, and the implications of those distinctions are always to be used for the service of the greater whole.

Part two of *Beyond Authority and Submission* explains why this biblical position of ordered but equal service has proven so difficult for Christians to discover. Miller sketches a history of gender discourse, beginning with the ancient Greeks and Romans, moving next to the Victorians, then the first-wave feminist movement, and finally the twentieth century's conflict between second-wave feminism and the opposing evangelical reaction, complementarianism. For the ancient Greeks and Romans, "women and men are completely different and have few overlapping qualities" (50). Because of their particular philosophical and scientific views, these pagan thinkers argued that men should hold positions of authority and governance, whereas women should mostly be restricted to childrearing and other domestic duties.

Miller argues that the New Testament had a "revolutionary" effect on this ancient Greco-Roman society (58). It gave them new definitions of authority and submission, and she insinuates that the early Christians advocated the position of equal service she outlined in the preceding chapters. Miller concedes that "Christianity didn't change everything," but she argues that it nevertheless did greatly elevate the status of women and improve how they were treated in the ancient world

(59). Sadly, this revolutionary moment was not to last: "Hundreds of years later, the Victorians revived these pagan beliefs [the Greek and Roman teaching on patriarchy] and attempted to baptize them as Christian" (59). This is why the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries assumed a "tradition" so different from what Miller argues is the biblical teaching. It is because of this Victorian recovery of pre-Christian assumptions that more modern Christians assume that feminine piety should be marked by "purity, piety, submission, and domesticity" (110).

This then leads to the next major intellectual revolution, that of first-wave feminism. Miller is overwhelmingly sympathetic to first-wave feminism. She attempts to correct unfair caricatures of the early feminist movement, arguing that it should not be judged by later distortions. Indeed, Miller believes that the original feminists had justified complaints and wanted to improve the lives of women in reasonable ways. They did not "want to make women independent," but rather "believed that their changes would be good for society—for both women and men. If their reforms were enacted, men and women could work together as equals and live together as partners" (78).

In Miller's estimation, the new era ushered in by first-wave feminism was mostly an improvement upon the previous one. This too, unfortunately, was lost, because of the effects of the two world wars and the semi-nostalgic reaction on the part of the rising white middle class. Many of these newly won women's rights "were abandoned" as men and women again allowed unbiblical traditions to control their imaginations (88). This would create a new reaction,

the second wave of feminism, which would in turn create the conservative Christian reaction we now know as complementarianism. These newer feminists had some legitimate concerns, but they went much further than their predecessors arguing for inappropriate sorts of interchangeability between men and women and sinful sexual practices (100).

At this point in the book, Miller focuses in on contemporary evangelical and Reformed writers associated with complementarianism. She seeks to show how their reaction to later forms of feminism have caused them to both revert to Victorian assumptions about piety and to institute new and peculiar sorts of teaching and practice. Parts three–six of *Beyond Submission and Authority* seek to make this case in the following way. The first chapter of each part lays out the modern reactionary position, with a broad sampling of evidence from contemporary books, articles, and lectures. The following chapters of each section then respond with Miller's understanding of the biblical teaching. She illustrates a number of troubling practices which have developed, including some which seem to use the father as a mediator between the church and his family, or perhaps between Christ and his family (196). She is afraid that traditional views of marriage have become a dangerous idol, eclipsing the preaching and teaching of the gospel (165). She believes that women have been unjustly limited from many leadership roles in church and society.

Throughout this section, Miller's understanding of the biblical teaching on men and women becomes clear. She argues against defining a uniquely

"masculine" or "feminine" nature. Instead, both are human, and she emphasizes the Scriptures sometimes teach that women are strong and sometimes call men to be gentle. While she affirms that there are important biological differences between men and women, Miller argues against trying to identify corresponding spiritual, emotional, intellectual, or dispositional differences. For her the matter is quite simple, "If God made you a woman, you are feminine" (148) and "If God made you a man, you are masculine" (149). Miller argues that if one affirms the "natural" argument that men should be "leaders, providers, and protectors," and that "it's the nature of women to be submissive and responsive to male leadership," then this will work its way out into all of society (230). Miller notes that some complementarians attempt to argue for strict laws directly from the Bible, while others have a "slightly softer version" that doesn't "focus so much on biblical rules" but instead "believe[s] that the nature of men and women determines what behavior is appropriate for them" (244). Here is Miller's full argument: complementarian principles are patriarchy.

Against this, Miller argues that "the Bible doesn't restrict women from serving in leadership positions in society" (245). The shared calling to work shows "the unity of women and men" (246), and men and women can work alongside one another (246–247). "The Scriptures indicate that both women and men should be 'inclined toward the home'" (253), and wisdom will dictate which partner does which job, as they make their decisions freely, in accordance with Christian liberty (254).

COMMENDATION

Beyond Authority and Submission is in many ways an attempt to be faithful to the teachings of Scripture while also not going beyond what is written in such a way to allow for legalism or abuse. It argues that the Bible does indeed teach male-only ordination and that wives submit to their husbands. It is not a “progressive” book in that way. Instead, the message is that conservatives need to examine themselves to see where their own errors and acceptance of extra-biblical and even anti-biblical traditions have led them astray. Miller speaks in earnest when she describes the way contemporary stereotypes caused her to question her femininity (124). “As an introspective person,” she writes, “I began to wonder what was wrong with me” (123). And she notes that many of the trendy evangelical books were of little help.

These are concerns that many people will share. Having served as a pastor in various churches for around a decade now, I have encountered several smart and capable women who were discouraged that the majority of the “women’s” studies focused only on topics of marriage and childrearing. The men get to talk about theology, while the women just talk about being women. This is indeed a problem, and church leaders ought to see that all members, men and women, are taught the entire content of the Bible, including theological topics, biblical symbolism, and Christian ethics for all of life.

Further, I agree that much of complementarianism literature has fallen into a rather shallow engagement with the Christian tradition. It sometimes allows its contemporary opponents to set the terms of the debate and the categories of thought. It can even give the impression that our notions of Christian manhood and womanhood are “roles” that we put on, quite apart from our natural constitution or the ordinary world.¹ This gives an air of artificiality to the supposedly biblical position, and can prevent us from carefully analyzing the important material and social factors affecting marriage and family in modern times.

My sympathies are entirely with Miller in her critique of the doctrine of the “eternal subordination of the Son” (116). Indeed, one could have wished her section on this topic were longer and more detailed. She notes that the doctrine stands in tension with traditional Nicene orthodoxy, but she does not attempt to demonstrate this in any detail. Neither does she note how this particular doctrine was something of a curiosity even prior to the advent of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. One can find precursors of it in various theologians in the early twentieth century. Additionally, it is not clear to me that “ESS” was articulated only to reinforce a notion of hierarchy. To the contrary, it has often been used by complementarians to explain how an apparently “hierarchical” relationship can still exist among ontological equals.

¹Thankfully there are contemporary complementarian writers who are aware of this danger. Abigail Dodds notes it as a possible error in the first chapter of her book, *(A)typical Woman: Free, Whole and Called in Christ* (Crossway, 2019) Kindle Locations 236-237. Andreas and Margaret Köstenberger also point it out in their article, “5 Myths About Complementarianism” Crossway Articles. Accessed September 21, 2019. <https://www.crossway.org/articles/5-myths-about-complementarianism/>.

CRITICISM

The first weakness with Miller’s book is the way it presents its argument. Initially, it looks as if she is attempting to correct imbalances among modern conservative or traditionalist Christians. One might expect that she will call for a return to an older and presumably less reactionary Christian position, a kinder and gentler form of complementarianism. But that is not what she does. Miller is also criticizing the philosophy of the sixteenth century Reformers and the seventeenth century Puritans, as well as many conservative evangelicals. It is certainly possible that Miller is not aware that her argument commits her to this, but that is, in fact, what it does.

This can be seen by *Beyond Authority and Submission*’s repeated rejection of the argument that male headship is grounded upon the natural constitution of men and women. Miller believes this concept is simply a “Greco-Roman” assumption (154) that was later recovered by the Victorians. She is wrong about this, for one finds precisely this teaching in John Calvin,² James Ussher,³ or William Gouge.⁴ Even Matthew Henry, who Miller herself quotes favorably, could say: “The woman was made for the man, to be his helpmeet, and not the man for the woman. She was naturally, therefore, made subject to him, because made for him, for his use, and help, and comfort.”⁵

"...the message is that conservatives need to examine themselves to see where their own errors and acceptance of extra-biblical and even anti-biblical traditions have led them astray"

²See Calvin's comments on Gen. 2:18, 1 Cor. 11:7-8, or his sermons on 1 Cor. 11, available in *Men, Women, and Order in the Church: Three Sermons by John Calvin* (Reformation Heritage Publications, 1992)

³Note Ussher's treatment of men and women in his exposition of the Fifth Commandment in *A Body of Divinity*, (Solid Ground Christian Books, 2007) 232.

⁴Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties* 3.3, (Chapel Library, 2006) 191.

⁵Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 1 Cor. 11:8



One is free to disagree with such explanations and find them worthy only of the trash heap of history. But it is not fair to the reader to bury this lede. Miller is not only criticizing ancient Greco-Roman and Victorian concepts; she is actually criticizing the larger Christian tradition. With this understood, Miller's thesis statement becomes much more significant. Her position looks more like a variation of egalitarianism, albeit an egalitarianism which still restricts church ordination to men.

Indeed, Miller's thesis is that there really is no such thing as "masculinity" or "femininity," at least not when it comes to Christian piety or vocational purpose. She quotes Gary Welton saying, "there should be no singular conception of what it means to be masculine or feminine" (148). When the original article by Welton is consulted, one finds him being so bold as to say, "These claims assume that the concepts of maleness and femaleness are meaningful, objective, and empirical realities. This is simply not the case."⁶

⁶Gary Welton, "My Human Identity Transcends Gender," The Aquila Report, July 30, 2017, <https://www.theaquilareport.com/human-identity-transcends-gender/>.

This is the foundation from which Miller can then say, "If God made you a woman, you are feminine" (148) and "If God made you a man, you are masculine" (149). For her, masculinity is nothing other than a person being biologically male and femininity is nothing other than a person being biologically female. Does this also mean that there are no temperamental, cognitive, behavioral, or vocational characteristics which should be associated with masculinity and femininity? Again, this is closer to the egalitarian position than the complementarian one.

Given the ambitious nature of Miller's thesis, and her goal to provide a "biblical" paradigm, one would expect *Beyond Authority and Submission* to engage in substantial exegetical argumentation. Surprisingly, this is not the case. The section on biblical theology of authority and human relationships is actually one of the shortest in the entire book. Miller makes foundational arguments in the briefest of ways. Her framing of the creation ordinance, the original relationship between man and woman, is limited to just a few sentences. When it comes to a passage which earlier Christians appealed to in support of a hierarchical view of humanity, Miller casually states, "Woman was made for man's sake, but all men since Adam have been born of women (see 1 Cor. 11:9–12)" (40). She gives no indication that this might be an extremely controversial passage or that its interpretation might be worth explaining more. She does not return to it anywhere else in the book. First Corinthians 14:34 is only mentioned once, and it is explained as only having an occasional referent, a specific group of particularly disruptive women. No consideration is given to the meaning of

"as the Law also says." Ephesians 5:22 is cited three times, but in only one place is an explanation given. That explanation is entirely a negative one, telling us what the text does *not* mean. Miller never tells us what it does mean. Colossians 3:18 is never mentioned. We are never told why Paul thinks it is important that the man was created first, and there is no discussion of the meaning of *kephalē* in 1 Corinthians 11. Likewise missing is 1 Peter 3:1. First Peter 3:6 is mentioned once, but again its meaning is not explained. Instead, Miller assures us that there was at least one time where "God told Abraham to follow Sarah's lead" (145). First Peter 3:7 is also mentioned only once, and there, again, we are only told what the text does not mean.

The reason that none of these individual passages are thought to be terribly significant is that Miller believes her interpretative paradigm of original equality, voluntary submission, and authority for the sake of service is the main "biblical" teaching. True biblical leadership is a matter of love and service, and any specific text can be read through that lens.

Miller also devotes little time to the more complicated aspects of leadership. She encourages love, service, sacrifice, and mutual submission, but she never discusses how real-life disagreements are to be resolved. Miller presents the notion of a husband's tie-breaking authority as one of the unhelpful notions argued for by complementarians (120). She does not explain what she would put in its place. On another occasion she says that a husband does possess a sort of leadership over his wife but that "he doesn't lord it over his wife or attempt to enforce her submission" (177). It's fine to say that a leader should

not be domineering. But if they ought not to think of their authority as tie-breaking authority and should not attempt to enforce their authority, how and in what way is their authority actually authoritative? Can it really be possible that submission will always come so easily, that a husband and wife will not find themselves in a significant disagreement? And how would submission that only occurs after both parties reach an agreement be different from the egalitarian position, which would propose all disagreements be handled as negotiations apart from any singular leading authority? This does not actually follow from the Christological example, either. After all, Jesus will indeed “enforce” His authority. Without further explanation, no actual new position has been advanced.

Along these same lines, one cannot help but notice how often Miller’s biblical argumentation relies on modern commentators, including egalitarian ones. She invokes Cynthia Long Westfall on numerous occasions and always in reference to Paul’s teaching on women. Westfall is a capable scholar, but her book is an admittedly revisionist project.⁷ Miller initially stated that she was herself not an egalitarian, but apparently she accepts some egalitarian interpretations of key texts. It may be the case that these new readings of the Scriptures are the correct ones, but that argument would need to be demonstrated. *Beyond Authority and Submission* makes no attempt to do this, and it often leaves us with more questions than answers as to what any given New Testament text means.

Miller’s use of history is even more concerning. It is certainly true that the ancient Greeks and Romans held to a hierarchical view of the world. Still, it is surely an overstatement to say that they believed “women and men are completely different and have few overlapping qualities” (50). Miller also chooses to place a quote from Plato at the top of this chapter, illustrating the typically patriarchal mindset of the culture (47). This is an unfortunate move, however, because Plato immediately goes on to contradict the statement she quotes. The following lines add more information, “the natural capacities are distributed alike among both creatures, and women naturally share in all pursuits and men in all,”⁸ and “The women and the men, then, have the same nature in respect to the guardianship of the state.”⁹ This is a point where Plato differed from Aristotle, and it is, ironically, a point where he approximates Miller. The fact that these sentences follow directly from the portion quoted by Miller makes one wonder if she attempted to understand Plato on his own terms.

The New Testament brought a “revolutionary” teaching to society (58), we are told. Apparently this revolution lasted until the Victorians: “Greco-Roman beliefs about women and men weren’t forgotten... Hundreds of years later, the Victorians revived these pagan beliefs and attempted to baptize them as Christian” (59). This is an amazing claim, even for an admittedly popular level book. The Victorian era begins in the 1830s, and so that means that Miller has jumped from the New

Testament era to modern times with no mention of anything between. The insinuation of *Beyond Authority and Submission* is that women enjoyed a higher position in society from the time of the early church until the nineteenth century. Are readers really being asked to simply accept this implicit claim?

And what of those first-wave feminists? It’s true that they were not, on the whole, as radical as later developments. Still, they were a decidedly mixed bag. The call for equality in ministry is plainly made in the Seneca Falls Declaration, “He allows her in church, as well as state, but a subordinate position, claiming apostolic authority for her exclusion from the ministry...”¹⁰ Female pastors of various kinds appear in the Wesleyan tradition in the early nineteenth century, and the Azusa Street Revival was infamous for allowing women to preach in 1906. Mary Wollstonecraft was regarded as a radical for her day, and the first-wave feminists were known for certain peculiarities of their time period. H. L. Mencken, no blind traditionalist, warned that “many of them also belong to other windy lodges—of anti-vivisectionism, of anti-vaccinationists, of medical freedomists, of initiators and referendos, of deep breathers, of eugenists.”¹¹

Among conservative American Presbyterians, the early feminist movement was not embraced with open arms. Old-school Presbyterian hero J. Gresham Machen stated that he was “not yet convinced” of women’s suffrage in 1918, and so he wrote

his congressman to ask him to oppose the passage of the 19th Amendment.¹² In quoting these men, I do not mean to imply that the history is “simple” in the other direction, that they were right and the feminists were wrong. Rather, the point is that the history is not simple. Feminism was always a controversial topic, and its growing acceptance is not due to a “biblical paradigm” finally coming into its own again after a short but disastrous Victorian detour, but is due rather to changing material and technological conditions, combined with new political theories of individual representation and civil rights.

This brings me to the final and most serious point of criticism. The various sources and citations offered throughout *Beyond Authority and Submission* are presented in a distorted way. Even though Miller identified four different positions in her introductory chapter (15), noting that a distinction could be drawn between a hard “patriarchy” and modern “complementarianism,” her later chapters essentially lump the two groups together. John Piper is cited alongside characters as diverse as Debbi Pearl and Helen Andelin. Andelin, as it turns out, is a Mormon. Yet when Miller cites Andelin, she refers to her as either a “complementarian” (108) or a “conservative Christian” (155). Is this really fair or honest? As one reads *Beyond Authority and Submission*, one comes to the conclusion that anyone who teaches any variety of sexual hierarchy is, in Miller’s mind, ultimately on the same side, even if they are not an orthodox Christian!

⁷Thomas Schreiner gives a thorough review of Westfall’s *Paul and Gender* in *Themelios* 43.2 (Aug. 2018) 178-192. That review is available online here: <http://tgc-documents.s3.amazonaws.com/themelios/Themelios-43-2.pdf#page=12>

⁸Plato, *Republic*, Book 5.455e.

⁹*Republic* 5.456b

¹⁰Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *A History of Woman Suffrage*, vol. 1 (Fowler and Wells, 1889), pages 70-71; available online here: <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/senecafalls.asp>

¹¹This quote comes from a 1913 article in *The Baltimore Evening Sun*, available online here: http://mencken.org/mencken-society/text/Free_Lance/Articles/FL04971913-02-12.html

¹²Machen, “Against Women’s Suffrage” (Letter to Representative John R. Ramsey) available online here: <https://www.read-machen.com/misc/1918/against-woman-suffrage/>

Miller also frequently gives her citations readings which run contrary to their original intent. On page 27, she cites Emily Jenson as an example of someone who believes that a wife should “cater to their husband’s preferences.” Miller suggests this is a matter of viewing authority in “military terms” (27). Yet when Jenson’s original article is read on its own terms, Jenson states that the goal was “nearness,” to “start the day as companions and make traditions for us to remember.”¹³ Jenson believed that she was pursuing companionship and intimacy. A similar situation appears in Miller’s citation of Mark Jones. She cites him as an example of someone with a low view of “companionship” in marriage (168). But again, when one reads the original source, he does not see Jones criticizing a companionship theory of marriage but rather the contemporary use of the title “best friend.” Jones states that his wife “belongs in a category that goes beyond friendship,” and then goes on to explain that he has a different sort of relationship with his male friends than with his wife. A reader might disagree with both Jenson’s and Jones’s articles, but they ought to actually make an argument, rather than just describing their views in overly negative ways.

On a few other occasions, Miller’s footnotes are entirely prejudicial. On page 143, she writes, “Others go so far as to say that men are emasculated by taking an active role in caring for their children.” She then cites Voddie Baucham Jr. This is an incredibly strong claim, and Miller does not quote

Baucham directly. When readers check the footnote she gives (pg. 76 of the Kindle edition of *What He Must Be... If He Wants to Marry My Daughter*) they do not find any discussion about men and childcare. Instead, Baucham is explaining that Christians must not marry non-Christians. Perhaps Miller simply got the page number wrong, but one suspects that no matter which quotation is finally supplied, it will not so baldly state what she has claimed. Douglas Wilson suffers a similarly harsh fate. In one place, Miller says Wilson teaches that “men should control the finances, because women will spend too much if men let them” (164). But when the citation is checked, Wilson says that a husband can be a poor leader in the area of finances by failing to set appropriate limits. Wilson says that this can happen in two ways, husbands can either “allow their wives to spend beyond the family’s resources” or the man can “make irresponsible purchases for himself.”¹⁴ This is an entirely different kind of argument, an illustration about passivity in leadership and not a claim about essential gender characteristics. On another occasion, she says that Wilson defines women by how they are useful to men, thus reducing women to objects. She illustrates this by stating that Wilson calls the wife “‘a man’s vessel’ for ‘sexual possession’” (236). Yet again, when one follows Miller’s footnote, they find nothing of the sort. Wilson is arguing against various forms of sexual immorality, and the only use

of “sexual possession of a man’s vessel” is in his quotation of 1 Thessalonians 4:4. Wilson is not here saying that a man must control his wife. Wilson is saying that a man must control himself by being faithful to his wife. He says this directly, “Christian men must discipline themselves in their faithfulness to their own wives.”¹⁵ Miller has given an egregious misrepresentation of Wilson on this point. Wilson is certainly a controversial writer, known for his love of startling statements, but on this occasion it seems that the entire shock factor comes simply from the fact that he used the King James Version.

Writers do occasionally “misfire” in their polemical exchanges with others. Had Miller not done this so frequently, it might be somewhat understandable. But her book is characterized by this misrepresentation throughout. When we add to this the additional fact that she rarely attempts to explain her opponent’s arguments and that she is willing to lump diverse writers together into a single group, we cannot escape an overall impression of blinding bias.

CONCLUSION

Despite its earnest intentions, *Beyond Submission and Authority* is not able to adequately demonstrate a coherent “third way” alternative to egalitarianism and complementarianism. Its central argument is not clearly stated, and it is never adequately demonstrated. The methodology is even less adequate, as the historical narrative offered by Miller is simplified to the point of caricature and her use of sources is frequently egregiously inaccurate.

Beyond Authority and Submission raises many good and important points of conversation. Some of the questions it raises are exactly the sorts of questions that faithful Christians and especially church leaders ought to be asking when they think about the relationships between men and women. It is precisely because these questions are so important, however, that I cannot commend the book. ✕

¹³“Wives, Honor Your Husband’s Preferences.” CBMW. Accessed September 21, 2019. <https://cbmw.org/topics/marriage-public-square/wives-honor-your-husbands-preferences/>.

¹⁴Wilson, *Reforming Marriage* (Canon Press, 1995), 92.

¹⁵Ibid., 121.

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Primal Screams: How the Sexual Revolution Created Identity Politics

One of the lessons young writers are taught is that one of the keys to good writing is to repeatedly emphasize your thesis. This is typically taught in some variation of “tell them what you’re going to tell them, tell them, then tell them what you told them.” The idea is that through repetition, reminder, and the marshaling of evidence, the writer is able to clearly communicate what it is they want to communicate to the reader. This leaves the reader with no doubts as to the central argument. While the idea is simple enough in theory, it is much more difficult to implement in practice (as this review endeavors *not* to demonstrate).

Whatever literary faults Mary Eberstadt may exhibit, a lack of clarity around her central thesis is not one of them.

Eberstadt, a past research fellow at the Hoover Institution and current senior fellow at the Faith and Reason Institute in Washington, D.C., has spent the

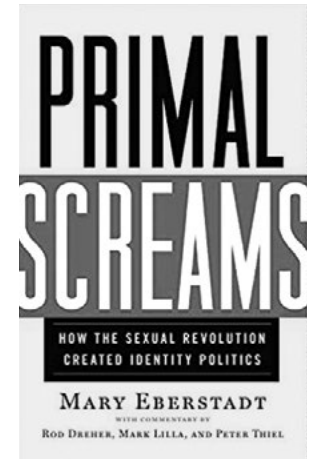
better part of her career displaying the folly and malignant wake of the sexual revolution. Her *Adam & Eve After the Pill* explores how the pill functions as a quasi-sacrament of the sexual revolution, ushering in the “already-but-not-yet” of sexual liberation. And in *How The West Really Lost God*, she explores unexamined aspects of secularization theories in the West, highlighting the ways in which the decline of family formation has led to a decline in church attendance. Highlighting the cyclical nature of family and religion, she charts how the decline of mediating institutions, especially churches, leads to the rise of social dislocation — and thus the rise of loneliness, depression, vice (be it substance abuse, internet addiction, etc.), and ultimately meaninglessness.

It makes sense, then, that Eberstadt’s new book, *Primal Screams: How the Sexual Revolution Created Identity Politics*, would focus on the question that animates human existence: who am I?

In *Primal Screams*, Eberstadt makes an *a fortiori* case, using the recent research exploring the social environment of animals, that the rise of identity politics goes part and parcel with the increasing dislocation of the family. As the family goes, so goes the rise of the identitarians. Whether it’s overly aggressive young elephants, maladjusted monkeys, or treed house cats, zoologists have concluded that things once thought to be innate to animals are acquired through social learning. It turns out animals are quite social. If this is the case for animals, how much more is it the case for homo sapiens, a rational animal? Eberstadt’s argument is that, inasmuch as society becomes increasingly hostile to the family, the rise of the politics of identity will follow.

The existence of identity politics cannot be limited to just one causal factor. The increased focus on identity can be attributed — convincingly or not — to a multiplicity of factors: globalization, multiculturalism, secularization, advanced technologies, capitalism, sexism, racism. For Eberstadt, however, these other factors, as helpful as they may be for understanding our times, fail to grasp at the primal nature of the animating question, who am I? The argument of her book is that “today’s clamor over identity—the authentic scream by so many for answers to questions about where they belong in the world—did not spring from nowhere. It is a squalling creature unique to our time, born of familial liquidation” (11).

Central to Eberstadt’s argument is what she calls the “Great Scattering,” that is, the sense of dislocation that has come to the offspring of the sexual revolution of the 1960s. By fraying the bonds of



sociality that once governed human relations, answering questions like “who am I?” becomes much more difficult if one can’t also answer such as, “who are my parents? siblings? cousins? aunts and uncles?” Such questions are only more complicated when one introduces concepts like in vitro fertilization, surrogacy, and other advanced reproductive technologies.

To defend her thesis, Eberstadt focuses on four pieces of supporting evidence: the zero-sum game of competing groups, feminism as a “survival strategy,” the rise of androgyny, and what #MeToo says about social learning. Each chapter is stimulating in its own right, supporting Eberstadt’s contention that the rise of identity obsession has at least something to do with the sexual revolution and the resulting Great Scattering. While the subtitle seems to be promising more than it can deliver (the sexual revolution *created* identity politics?), Eberstadt is on to something.

Eberstadt’s continued emphasis on the centrality of the family is important for helping Christians love their neighbors, helping policy wonks articulate policy that guides toward the common good, and offering a critique of visions of the “good life” that emphasize liberty — especially sexual liberty — as a means without an end.

While Eberstadt’s thesis remains a sound, convincing argument for the importance of the family — an emphasis with which I wholeheartedly agree — one wonders whether the story is complete. There are legitimate questions one can ask about Eberstadt’s thesis, and which other more competent reviewers than I indeed have

already asked, but one area I want to highlight is the relationship between family stability, religion, and secularism.

In short, it seems to me that the issues regarding identity are fundamentally religious, with the family serving as one flash point that signals a larger debate between what we could call *immanentist* religion and *transcendent* religion. For one, ultimate meaning is located strictly in the immanent frame, that is, meaning resides ultimately *within* the cosmos; for the other, meaning is ordered to transcendence, and primarily the God who stands above and beyond all creaturely reality.

This is why Steven A. Smith’s thesis in his important new book, *Pagans and Christians in the City: Culture Wars from the Tiber to the Potomac*, deserves to be carefully considered by all cultural prognosticators when thinking about our current ailments. Smith argues that, contra the prevailing secularization narrative, the West has been in a dialectical tension between paganism and Christianity — understood as religion that is largely immanent (e.g. paganism and pantheism) versus transcendent religion (Christianity and other Abrahamic faiths). Smith does a careful analysis of the actual religious practices of paganism and, relying on the work of scholars like Kyle Harper, showcases how the transformation of sex was at the center of this revolution.

With Constantine’s conversion, the rise of Christendom, and the official establishment of Christianity within the Roman Empire, the defeat of paganism seemed complete — that is, until the birth of the so-called modern age.

Smith carefully shows how the modern age, and especially the late-modern world in which we live, bears striking similarities to paganism in antiquity with its immanentist *religio* — just with a different pantheon of gods. Lest we forget, the concept of the “nuclear” family, at least in the West, is a uniquely Judeo-Christian twist on male-female relations. Take away the brutal patriarchy, and our sexual revolutionaries would likely find much to commend in ancient Roman sexual practices. For all intents and purposes, the sexual revolution was no revolution at all; it was a practice in retrieval theology.

For this reason, modernity’s turn to the self is explicitly theological. The superiority of the subject, the turn inward, moves the human person away from his final end, and with that, the elimination of “ends” or “purposes” at all. The moment the subject is placed at the center of his or her universe, meaning resides within. In this situation, the search for meaning is a creative endeavor in which the subject identifies for himself those things which are only then imbued with meaning. With this move, the dislocated self is free to pursue whatever god he or she so desires within the pantheon, whether it be aggrieved identity groups on the left or right. In this sense, our modern identitarians are radical Kantians. Or better, modern pagans.

Returning to the question of family, in the relationship between the *religio* and the family, which is the cart and which is the horse? Eberstadt, both in this book and her earlier *How the West Really Lost God*, reminds us that the two are often

in symbiotic relationship such that the decline of one means the decline of the other. In addition, Eberstadt is correct to highlight that, in terms of natural ends, the family is perhaps *the* key to human flourishing. Yet the question remains: is the dissolution of the family, the sexual revolution, the rise of loneliness — all of it — really the product of forces unleashed in the middle of the twentieth century, or is it a larger question about the decline of Christianity and the rise of a unique form of paganism, American style? In other words, are the crises we face centuries in the making?

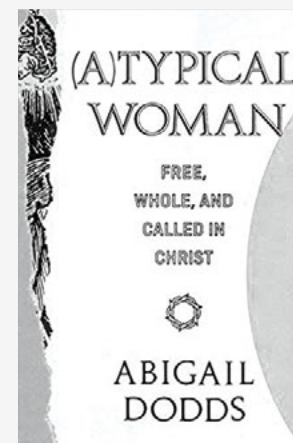
It is impossible to think about the decline of the nuclear family — the Judeo-Christian understanding of the male-female kinship bond — without thinking about the decline of the God at its center. What is needed in our cultural diagnosis is the hope of the beatific vision. Mary Eberstadt helps us to see more clearly the gnawing gap that is left vacant by the space that the family, the natural end of all creatures, once occupied. But natural ends are not enough. What is needed more than ever is a recovery of supernatural grace in the ancient war that has been raging since the Garden, when the good God, the final end of all creatures, created woman from man and proclaimed to all of creation that their union was good — nay, *very* good. ✕

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REVIEWED BY ADRIEN SEGAL

(A)Typical Woman



INTRODUCTION

(A)Typical Woman, by Abigail Dodds, is written to Christian women who may be struggling with what it means to be a woman in today's world and/or may be confused and enticed by the messages and expectations for women from voices outside the church. Does it level the playing field to think of ourselves as simply human in the way that men are, "compartmentalizing" femininity as one, not very noteworthy, aspect of our identity? Or is there value in understanding the kinds of things God had in mind when he created women uniquely different from men? What are women missing when they compare themselves to men and find themselves wanting? What are the most important truths that should shape our identity?

Dodds explores these and other questions in a very readable volume, broken into short chapters perfectly structured for small groups, with discussion questions at the end of each chapter.

"Her faith, tested by so many trials, shines through so brightly..."

SUMMARY

(A) *Typical Woman* is presented in three parts. Part One establishes our identity in Christ and unfolds how living in fullness as women uniquely reflects Christ. The chapters in this section outline the importance of seeing ourselves as *Christian* women, what it means to perceive oneself as wholly woman, the essential role of the Bible, and the glory of our unique bodies. In short, some of the foundational truths that should cause us to find joy in being (a)typical.

Part Two establishes the importance of understanding that God intends us to bring our essential womanhood to every role in which we're placed. This section begins with a chapter about God's sanctifying transformation, followed by encouraging chapters addressing single women, married women, mothers, working women, and the role of discipling other women.

Part Three opens our eyes to see the unique freedom and joy we have as women in Christ. These chapters explore what it means to be strong and to be "weak," the strength of dependent women, the unique challenges of afflicted women, and finally the freedom we have when we live in Christ with joy.

CRITICAL INTERACTION

When I picked up this book, I expected that it would be more confrontational, challenging the voices of society that press women to minimize their femininity and view themselves as equal to men in every aspect. This is not a confrontational book, and while I was a little disappointed at first, I came to feel Dodds is exercising great wisdom as she directs women's eyes away from the lies of the world to the truth in which we will find our greatest joy. Dodds calmly takes us into the Word to be reminded of who we really are as Christian women and why we should be celebrating the unique ways God made us to reflect him and his glory. She sums up her tone and approach well in her introduction: "I want women to be at peace as women, to be grateful for being made women, and to see it all as an essential part of Christ's mission and work" (13). The more I read, the more I was grateful for this approach.

One of Dodd's gifts is a winsome way of crafting a good illustration, and she sprinkles them generously throughout the book. Her own life has been "blessed" with extraordinary challenges, including a severely disabled child, yet one never gets the sense hard things have done anything except strengthen her faith, her

dependence on God, and her joy in the life he has given her. Her faith, tested by so many trials, shines through so brightly it has a way of making you more eagerly alert to hear what this strong and joyful woman has to say about being contented as a woman in every circumstance.

Dodds is a thoughtful writer, and I really appreciate that the book is not filled with Christian cliché. One example is in the chapter on "Bible Women," where she emphasizes the importance of reading the *whole* Bible to understand womanhood, not just focusing on the "women" passages and stories. When we immerse ourselves in the whole counsel of God, we see the "women" passages with new eyes (46).

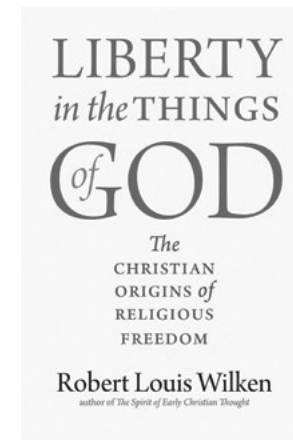
I think my favorite chapter might be "Embodied Women." She has a lovely illustration about a pregnant woman waiting with excitement to hear the sex of her child, but unlike the anticipation of hearing from a doctor, when we are born again into Christ, God doesn't say, "It's a girl," but "It's *my* girl" (48). In this chapter, Dodds beautifully addresses the concept of the "weaker" sex, helping us appreciate that being "weaker" is actually a gift, encouraging growth in maturity and faith, and is combined with being "fearless" in 1 Peter 3:6 in a poignant way. I also

loved the way she described our bodies as being a *home*, and the natural gifts women are given to make a home for those in her family and sphere of influence (53).

Of course Dodds does address the "elephant in the room," submission, and she does it well in the chapter on "Married Women." She begins by pointing us first to the fact that we are *all* called to submission, even as Christ was, and he is our model for the spirit we should bring to this calling. She carefully clarifies that women are not called to submit to their husband's sinful behavior or to the urge to sin. I was, however, waiting for her to address submission when no sin is involved, when a husband and wife strongly, but respectfully, disagree. I was a little let down that there wasn't more pointed counsel for this eventuality.

If there is one "big" addition I would make to the book, it would be a greater emphasis on prayer. Dodds does such a good job reminding us to be grounded in Scripture, but in my own life Scripture has had its most sanctifying power as I have lifted my confusion, resentments, questions, and heartfelt desires in prayer. Prayer has clarified much for me and helped me as a woman, wife, and mother discern when to be quiet and when to speak, when to act, and when

Liberty in the Things of God



A widely-held paradigm in Western intellectual history is that religious freedom originated with enlightened intellectuals during the seventeenth century. By this telling, philosophers fatigued by Europe's never-ending wars of religion introduced new concepts about toleration and religious freedom which helped usher in the modern age. It was only as institutional religion weakened and religious beliefs diversified that the state saw liberty of conscience as a right worth protecting. Christian theology is usually seen as an unhelpful impediment to the emergence of today's liberal consensus on religious freedom, if it is considered at all.

Robert Louis Wilken's latest book, *Liberty in the Things of God: The Christian Origins of Religious Freedom*, challenges this dominant narrative. Wilken argues that the concept of religious freedom originated with Christian thinkers in the first centuries of the church. Rather than impede the development of religious freedom, Christianity served as its impetus.

To support his thesis, Wilken briefly surveys centuries of Christian reflection on religious freedom, beginning with Tertullian, the first person to use the phrase "freedom of religion." In chapter one, Wilken identifies two important themes in Tertullian's thinking. First, Tertullian believed that religion arises from inner conviction and thus consists of more than outward gestures and rituals. Whereas the Romans saw practice and outward conformity as the most important aspect of religion, Tertullian argued that belief — what Christians held in their heart — was what mattered.

to wait. I understand it is impossible to emphasize everything that is important, but if Dodds ever feels called to expand her thoughts about the power of prayer, I will be first in line to read them!

CONCLUSION

There is so much gold to be mined in this book, whether reading it on your own or discussing it in a group. Without a doubt, women will be encouraged in their understanding of the unique and precious gift it is to be a woman even as they are more deeply centered in their life in Christ. It's a wonderful thing to read chapter after chapter and at the end of each one saying, "I want *more*." There is always more that can be said on any subject, but *(A) Typical Woman* provides plenty to inspire, to think about, and to clarify what it means to be a woman, especially an (a)typical woman in Christ. ✕

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"...women will be encouraged in their understanding of the unique and precious gift it is to be a woman..."

Moreover, because religious belief is inherently spiritual, it cannot be coerced. Second, Tertullian argued that religious freedom applied to the beliefs of communities, not just individuals. Wilken notes that Tertullian offered theological arguments for religious freedom rooted in a biblical understanding of the human person and the *Imago Dei*.

After attending to Tertullian, Wilken quickly summarizes subsequent developments in thought concerning religious freedom, moving toward an analysis of the changes brought on by the Reformation. In chapter two, he briefly discusses how ideas that had been first set forth in defense of persecuted Christians were reformulated and reinterpreted for Christians who began oppressing others. Wilken notes that some of Tertullian's immediate successors differed with him on the efficacy of coercion. Augustine, for example, believed some forms of coercion were needed to punish schismatics who threatened the unity of the church. However, Tertullian's view that humans are endowed with freedom and that religious faith is an inward disposition of the mind and heart (and therefore cannot be coerced) was not forgotten and was retrieved by later thinkers.

The uniformity of Western Christendom was shattered in the early sixteenth century with the onset of the Protestant Reformation. The resulting lack of a shared consensus on religion forced political and religious thinkers to rethink centuries-old assumptions about the relationship between church and state and about how society should be structured. Wilken devotes the rest of his book (chapters 3–9) to analyzing these questions.

Focusing on developments in Switzerland, France, England, and the Netherlands, Wilken traces the course of religious freedom thinking as it developed during this time of significant societal upheaval. He notes that one of the most consequential changes brought on by the Reformation was the formation of religious minorities within nations that had previously been united by a common confession. For example, in Catholic France, the emergence of the Huguenots eventually plunged the country into a bitter civil war. These events were repeated across Europe, as religious dissenters in other countries demanded religious freedom and were met with entrenched opposition.

Wilken's presentation of history in an accessible and engaging manner is a strength of these chapters. With attention to the significant personalities and developments, Wilken shows how the movement toward greater toleration was slow but steady. He highlights one example from France, explaining that, similar to other countries, progress was slow, and at times regressed. Although the Edict of Nantes (which granted tolerance to French Calvinists) was signed in 1598, it was revoked in 1685. This illustrates the daunting challenges faced by those advocating for religious freedom. However, by relying on and rearticulating the themes initially expressed by Tertullian — including the inherently spiritual nature of faith and the futility of religious coercion — public opinion continued to shift during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Wilken concludes the book by returning to Tertullian via Thomas Jefferson. In an appendix, Wilken relives his own discovery of finding underlined text in Jefferson's personal copy of Tertullian's *Ad Scapulam*. Specifically, Jefferson's copy highlighted the place where the church father discussed the futility of religious coercion. While it is difficult to discern how much Jefferson's conception of religious freedom was due to Tertullian, it is fascinating that the author of the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom was aware of his work; this testifies to Tertullian's enduring relevance in discussions of religious freedom.



Wilken's survey of early church history (particularly Tertullian) is superb and an important contribution to discussions on religious liberty. But the book's subtitle — *The Christian Origins of Religious Freedom* — likely gives readers the expectation that the book will provide the biblical origins of religious freedom. However, readers expecting a thorough biblical basis for religious freedom rooted in exegesis of relevant texts will be disappointed. Of course, many of the relevant passages for developing what has been called the Bible's derived doctrine of religious liberty are covered when he discusses primary sources from the time of the Reformation; nevertheless, the book could be strengthened by showing how the Bible itself provides a compelling case for religious freedom.

In the introduction to *Liberty in the Things of God*, Wilken writes, "Memory is indispensable to Christian intellectual life, and nowhere was this more evident than in debates over religious freedom. Familiarity with earlier writers had a steadying effect on the judgments of religious and political thinkers, allowing them to see the conflicts of their own times with eyes trained by the wisdom of the past."

By showing how the memory of early Christian advocacy for religious freedom influenced later generations of Christians in their own quest for religious freedom, Robert Wilken makes an important contribution. Moreover, he dispels the long-standing myth that religious freedom is the result of secular thinkers influenced by the Enlightenment. To the contrary! As Wilken demonstrates, religious freedom is primarily the result of believers insisting throughout history that God has sole jurisdiction over the soul, and while the state should be respected and obeyed in the areas where it has legitimate authority, it can never require ultimate allegiance. As Jesus taught in Matthew 22, there is another sphere that is directly accountable to God — the realm where people must render "to God the things that are God's." Christians have believed this from the earliest days of the church. In an age where religious liberty is increasingly misunderstood, this memory must guide today's Christians as they continue to advocate for our important freedom. ✕

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us, and not we ourselves;
We are His people and the
sheep of His pasture.*

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