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A Critique of the ‘Novel’ Contemporary Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9–15 Given in the Book, *Women in the Church*. Part I.

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Key words: New Testament; 1 Timothy; women; ministry.

In Australia many evangelicals continue to argue that the Bible clearly teaches that God has appointed men to lead in the church and the home. To deny this, we are told, is to deny the authority of the Bible. Those who take this position have welcomed with great enthusiasm the publication of the book, *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9–15*,¹ which they believe finally settles the issue in their favour. I was interested in reading the book to discover that I am named as one of those who has rejected the plain, ‘historic’ meaning of the Timothy passage by adopting a ‘progressive hermeneutic’. In doing this I have undermined the authority of the Bible and overthrown traditional family values. In particular I am criticised for arguing ‘with more comprehensiveness and verve’ than either Krister Stendahl or F. F. Bruce that the Bible’s comments about slavery are to be understood in the same way as its comments about women—a reflection of the cultural values of another age.² These charges are levelled against me on the basis of my 1994 *Evangelical Quarterly* essay, ‘The Biblical Argument for Slavery: Can the Bible Mislead? A Case Study in Hermeneutics.’³

In *Women in the Church* 1 Timothy 2:9–15 is singled out for meticulous examination on the premise that this one text most explicitly and clearly sums up what the Bible teaches about the ‘differences’ and ‘roles’ of the two sexes.⁴ The aim of the book is to build a cumulative

1 Edited by A. J. Köstenberger, T. R. Schreiner, H. S. Baldwin, Grand Rapids, Baker, 1995.

2 *Ibid.*, 185.

3 *EQ* 66:1, 1994, 3–17.

4 In Australia this one key text approach also rules the debate in the Moore College sponsored case for the permanent subordination of women. See the double edition of the journal published by the Revd Phillip Jensen, *Briefings*, 159/160, June 20th, 1995.

case to settle once and for all the plain, historical meaning of this passage and to argue that what it teaches still applies today. The conclusion reached is that sound contemporary exegesis gives exactly the same meaning to 1 Tim. 2:9–15 as has every commentator until recent times. These authors thus chose to call themselves upholders of the ‘historic’ position. In this first part of my response I want to briefly review each chapter in this book, outline what past commentators have actually said, and show that what is claimed to be the ‘historic’ meaning of 1 Timothy chapter 2 is in fact quite novel. The eight authors, I maintain, are themselves practitioners of a ‘progressive hermeneutic’, ‘Cartesians’, who read the Bible in the light of their present situation—the very things they accuse their evangelical opponents of doing.⁵ In the second part of my response I will take up the fundamental theological errors inherent in this book, and in similar books which argue for the permanent subordination of women in exactly the same way, and then offer a better way forward.

Women in the church.

All the essays in this book are deductive in nature. They are presenting evidence for what is already believed to be true. Except for the first three essays to be discussed, which are historical in nature, or somewhat technical semantic studies, all the others are full of generalisations, special pleading and highly emotive language. The editors in fact depict themselves as a faithful minority who are suffering and misunderstood for their obedience to the inspired Scriptures. God has raised them up to oppose other Christians, especially other evangelicals, who have succumbed to the pressures of this world by ignoring ‘functional gender distinctions’.⁶

S. M. Baugh in the opening historical study gives an informed and balanced description of life in Ephesus in the first century. I too doubt that there was ever ‘feminist Ephesus’. The case that Ephesus was much like other first century Hellenistic cities is compelling. Public life was dominated by men and in the home women were subordinated to their father or husband. I am, however, not convinced that the Ephesian’s ‘passionate devotion’ to the gymnasium ‘resembles the current interest in fitness centres’⁷—I thought a Greek gymnasium was a school of culture—or that many of the women in the Ephesian church were well educated.⁸

5 *Women*, 171–178.

6 *Ibid.*, 211.

7 *Ibid.*, 13.

8 *Ibid.*, 45–51.

Next follows H. Scott Baldwin's essay, 'A Difficult Word: ἀϋθεντέω in 1 Timothy 2:12.'⁹ Baldwin summarises the data and concludes rightly, I believe, that this Greek verb had a range of meanings conveying the idea of authority in one sense or another, negatively and positively. Andreas J. Köstenberger in the essay which follows has the task of determining which of these meanings is most likely in the specific usage in 1 Tim. 2:12.¹⁰ In a very detailed piece of work he argues that a sentence in which two infinitives are joined by οὐδέ the 'activities denoted will either both be viewed positively or negatively by the writer'.¹¹ As the first infinitive in 1 Tim. 2:12, 'to teach' (διδάσκειν), must be taken positively he concludes so too must the second, 'to have or exercise authority' (ἀϋθεντέιν). Paul is forbidding two things, both allowable for men, but not for women. Women are not to teach in church or have/exercise authority over men. I think Köstenberger makes a good case and I personally have no trouble with accepting this interpretation. Nevertheless, it has to be pointed out that what he has shown is simply that the most likely meaning of the verb ἀϋθεντέιν in this context is 'authority' in a positive sense, if the normal usage of the conjunction οὐδέ is taken as the sole determining issue. If someone else should take the use of the exceptional verb as the primary indicator of something unusual and questionable being forbidden then another answer is still possible. The fact that οὐδέ usually connects two positive or two negative infinitives does not prove that this rule was followed in 1 Tim. 2:12. People, even apostles, break grammatical rules at times. When this verse is considered in the wider context of Pauline theology and practice seen elsewhere, the exceptional verb expressing the exceptional command continues to suggest to many that something exceptional, which involved only women, is being forbidden. These three introductory essays, we are told, establish the 'historic meaning' of 1 Timothy 2:9-15. Women are not to teach or have authority over men in the church or the home.

T. David Gordon has the job of determining the literary genre of 1 Timothy.¹² Correctly he agrees that all the New Testament epistles are occasional in character. This means there is nothing special about 1 Timothy in this regard. In interpreting epistles he allows that there are odd comments which are particular in nature, such as Paul's request that Timothy bring his cloak from Troas (2 Tim 4:13). He insists, nevertheless, that most of what is said in the epistles, and the Pastorals in particular, continues to speak authoritatively to the present because it is 'grounded in some theological or ethical norm

9 *Ibid.*, 65-80.

10 *Ibid.*, 81-103.

11 *Ibid.*, 103.

12 *Ibid.*, 53-63.

or rationale'.¹³ For example, Paul's instruction on the care of widows (1 Tim 5:9–10), is grounded in the 'Old Testament discussion of God as the defender of the orphan and the widow'.¹⁴ This sounds plausible but what is ignored is that the church today does not single out widows for special care because in our culture widows are not necessarily destitute, or in need of male protection. In other words, despite the fact that this command is grounded on an ethical principle, we do not obey it. What is more, today men do not pray in church (as a general rule) with lifted hands; women do not literally obey Paul's instruction on dress; unmarried men are ordained, although Paul insists overseers and deacons are to be married and church teachers are not necessarily paid double to other ministers. Then we have the problem of slavery, which definitely is grounded on a general norm, Christ's own willingness to serve no matter what the cost, and the teaching of Christ (note 1 Tim. 6:3 which seems to look back to what has been said to slaves). Does Scripture commend enslaving the weak in every age? If not, why not? Gordon loses his case before he gets to 1 Timothy 2:9–15 which he believes is for ever binding because it is grounded on 'the entire created and fallen order'.¹⁵ Does not Paul also ground his command that women cover their heads in church on the created order (1 Cor. 11:2–16)? No one takes this command as binding today. In regard to the 'fallen order', I thought Christ came to give us victory over this! Working out what is transcultural and for ever binding on Christians in the Bible, and what is not, is more difficult than Professor Gordon recognises. A far better set of guidelines for determining what is normative and binding in Scripture and what is not, are given by Joel B. Green in the book, *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*. He suggests three criteria: 1. 'The relative amount of emphasis given to a subject in the biblical witness'; 2. 'The degree to which the biblical witnesses are uniform and consistent on a given issue'; and, 3. 'The degree to which a writer's cultural situation provides him or her with only one option (or limited options) within which to work'.¹⁶ On these principles we may conclude that 1 Tim. 2:9–15 in its entirety is not normative or binding on Christians today.

In chapter 5 Thomas Schreiner tackles the overall exegesis of 1 Timothy 2:9–15. He follows the well-worn path that other hierarchalists have followed in the last twenty years and answers recent counter-opinion by those whom he calls 'progressives'. He rightly

13 *Ibid.*, 56.

14 *Ibid.*, 57.

15 *Ibid.*, 60.

16 Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1995. See his essay 'The Practice of Reading the New Testament', 425.

insists that the text addresses men and women, not wives and husbands, and he admits that v. 12 'alone does not contain sufficient evidence to establish that the prohibition is a universal one'.¹⁷ In answer to the objection that Paul would not have forbidden women from teaching in church when he allowed them to prophecy, Schreiner insists that the two ministries are quite 'distinct'.¹⁸ He ignores the problem that Luke can speak of all forms of authoritative preaching as 'prophecy'.¹⁹ What makes Paul's instruction binding for all time are the two reasons he gives for forbidding women to teach and hold authority. In verse 13 the apostle appeals to a once-given 'order of creation' which establishes a permanent and transcultural 'legitimate role difference between men and women'²⁰—a euphemistic turn of phrase which means men are to teach and exercise authority, women are to listen and be subordinate. This is backed by v. 14 which speaks of Eve being deceived, not Adam. Schreiner considers various attempts to make this comment mean something other than 'women are more liable to deception, more gullible, and more easily led astray than men',²¹ but concludes that something like this is implied. His rewording of this conclusion has, however, no correlation with what he has just said. He takes the words to mean that women are forbidden from the teaching office because 'men and women have different inclinations'. For this reason women 'are less likely to preserve the apostolic tradition'.²² He dismisses the view that v. 15 is an allusion to women being saved by 'the childbearing', that is the birth of Christ. Instead, he argues, Paul is teaching that (Christian) women 'will be saved by adhering to their ordained role'.²³

Next Robert Yarbrough is allocated the difficult task of addressing the issue of hermeneutics,²⁴ which T. David Gordon has already introduced. Given the conclusion reached in earlier chapters in this book, that the Timothy passage in its plain historical meaning forbids women from teaching in church or exercising authority over men, Yarbrough has to show that the original meaning still applies authoritatively today. Nothing very profound or detailed is said about hermeneutics. The most insightful comment he makes is in his admission that 'moving from the original message of the text in its historical setting to today,

17 *Women*, 127.

18 *Ibid.*, 129.

19 See K. N. Giles, 'Prophecy, Prophets, False Prophets', *DLNTD*, 970-977.

20 *Women*, 135.

21 *Ibid.*, 144.

22 *Ibid.*, 146.

23 *Ibid.*, 151.

24 I do not want to enter the vexed question of the authorship of the Pastorals. The authors of this book all argue for Pauline authorship as might be expected. I am happy to work on this premise.

from “signification” to “significance”, is complicated’.²⁵ I agree especially when it comes to matters like ‘taking care of tomorrow’, foot washing, marriage and divorce, hair styles, slavery and the status and ministry of women. But having admitted the challenge posed by the modern discussions of hermeneutics, Yarbrough reverts to what may only be called a fundamentalist approach: what the text says must apply one for one in every place for all time. He does not concede that there is any problem at all in applying what was said in a first century context, in a debate we do not fully understand, which does not easily match up with many things said elsewhere in the New Testament, to the present day church and the home when the position of women has radically changed.

The problem with application lies not with the Bible, he maintains, but with three major impediments which lie in the minds of many evangelicals. These are the acceptance of ‘Western culture’s liberalised views of women; the putative meaning of Galatians 3:28; and the alleged tie between women’s subordination and slavery’.²⁶ The possibility that the greatest impediment may in fact be the radically changed status and the greatly enlarged opportunities for women in modern society is not mentioned. The implication always is that the Bible is timeless, transcultural truth. Right exegesis is the key to right application. It is his view that nothing is ‘of greater importance’ than upholding the ‘historic’ meaning of the 1 Timothy passage. Only by doing this will Christians be able to stand against the ‘liberalising attitudes to women’s and men’s identities and roles’.²⁷ His rhetoric is so extravagant that one feels that he believes the whole future of Western civilisation stands or falls on whether or not we get our exegesis right on 1 Timothy chapter 2.

On the first impediment he waxes long and passionately. He argues that too many Christians, including many evangelicals, like F. F. Bruce and myself, have been seduced by modern culture. They have been sucked into accepting all the evils of modern Western liberal democracies, including the terrible evil of women’s emancipation, which has only brought ‘woe to women and children’.²⁸ For this reason they cannot accept the ‘historic’ meaning of 1 Timothy 2:9–15. They are guilty of what the German theologian Thieliicke calls the ‘Cartesian’ error. They give new meaning to the text to make it fit their cultural perspective. As a result their interpretation of 1 Timothy is quite ‘novel’.²⁹ Women’s emancipation has not been without its problems

²⁵ *Women*, 157.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 159.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 160.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 171.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 178.

but to call the whole drive to grant women equality of consideration 'a disaster which has overtaken women'³⁰ seems a slight overstatement to me. I leave his charge for the moment that progressives are Cartesians. In due course I will argue that Yarbrough and his fellow essayists are also Cartesians with novel ideas.

The so called 'putative' exegesis of Galatians 3:28 is not discussed at all. Instead in a colourful diatribe Yarbrough condemns those who set this text above, or in contrast to, 1 Timothy 2:9-15. Again the bogey of Cartesianism is raised.³¹ The omission of any serious engagement with this key text, which suggests that being 'in Christ' in some ways is more important than our creation-given maleness and femaleness,³² greatly weakens the case being made. The emotive rhetoric implies that honestly dealing with the text is too difficult.

His response to my argument that the Bible actually endorses slavery both in the Old and New Testaments is amazing. He first of all attacks me personally³³ and then simply denies that the Bible endorses slavery. He even warmly commends me for criticising the great Reformed theologians of the Old South, such as Dabney, Thornwell and Charles Hodge, who developed last century a comprehensive 'Biblical Theology' of slavery.³⁴ But, having said this, he then adds, well if the Bible does endorse slavery it is not all that bad, it is only unpleasant work like many people endure today.³⁵

To claim that slavery is only a form of demanding work and not an evil is reprehensible in a supposedly scholarly work. As I pointed out in my original essay slavery is characterised by three defining marks. Slaves are the property of another human being; they are completely subject to the will of their owner, and their labour is gained by coercion.³⁶ No worker in the modern world bears these burdens. No matter how poorly they are treated or paid, workers are not bodily owned by their employer, nor totally dominated by him/her, nor forced by fear of whipping or worse to work. What is more, the women workers cannot be violated without redress by their master, nor can

30 *Ibid.*, 162.

31 *Ibid.*, 180-181.

32 I will substantiate this point when I come to discuss the order of creation argument.

33 In a moment of generosity he does, however, call my essay, 'an impressive study', *ibid.*, 181. His claim that I argue that those who support the permanent subordination of women are 'guilty of the same heinous sins as Old South slaveholders' (p. 186) is simply not true.

34 *Ibid.*

35 *Ibid.*, 187-188.

36 I am of course aware that there are various forms of slavery. 'Debt slavery' mentioned in the Old Testament does not fit exactly these characteristics. I have in mind what is usually called 'chattel slavery' which is what is most commonly endorsed in the Old and New Testaments and was accepted as pleasing to God in the Old South.

they or any of their family be sold like a farmer might sell a cow. This apologetic for slavery, to put it politely, is not very convincing.

What has to be underlined is that in his reply to me Yarbrough does not address my central point at all, that the Bible actually endorses slavery in principle and practice. To refute this claim is a fairly big challenge, for the 'Biblical' case for slavery developed by the great theologians of the Old South last century is impressive, if one accepts that every word of Scripture actually reflects the mind of God. This challenge is even more difficult today for modern critical studies of slavery in the Bible have confirmed that the biblical endorsement of slavery is pervasive and unquestioned.³⁷ If my claim cannot be refuted then on his own admission his arguments for women's permanent subordination are problematic.

Harold O. J. Brown's article on Galatians 3:28 is the most emotive and unscholarly in the book.³⁸ He summarily dismisses those who read '1 Timothy 2:12, as well as 1 Corinthians 14:34 and related texts' other than he does, arguing that they are directed not by the text of Scripture but 'an entire civilisation which has increasingly strayed from God's order of creation'.³⁹ Their goal he insists is 'to establish total sexual equivalence'.⁴⁰ I am certainly not driven by that impossible ideal, nor do I think was Professor Stendahl whom he assails. Indeed, I have yet to hear or read a Christian feminist who denies that God has made us men and women. In advocating that women be granted equality of dignity, equality of opportunity and equality to use God-given gifts no one is confusing the sexes. Finally Brown contends that the 'progressives' approach is in fact 'gnostic'!⁴¹

The most fascinating chapter is, however, the one by Daniel Doriani entitled, 'A History of the Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2'.⁴² What he sets out to prove is that the exegesis and application of 1 Timothy 2:9–15, as given in this book, is what has been held throughout church history until the first wave of feminists last century advocated a change, introducing unconvincing and novel interpretations of the sacred text. This chapter is absolutely foundational to the whole case put in this book. Doriani has the challenge to substantiate what most of the

37 See for example G. C. Chirichigno, *Debt Slavery and the Ancient Near East*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993; J. A. Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves in Early Christianity*, Tübingen: Mohr, 1995; C. Osiek and D. Balch, 'Slaves', chapter 7, in *Families in the New Testament*, Louisville: Westminster, 1997, 173–192.

38 See chapter 7, 'The New Testament Against Itself: 1 Timothy 2:9–15 and the "Break-through" of Galatians 3:28', *ibid.*, 197–208.

39 *Ibid.*, 198.

40 *Ibid.*, 200.

41 *Ibid.*, 201. On this absurd charge, often found on the lips of those upholding the permanent subordination of women, see R. B. Groothuis, *Women Caught in the Conflict*, Grand Rapids, Baker, 1994, 187–198.

42 *Ibid.*, 213–267.

authors claim time and time again. That is, that they are faithfully restating the 'historic' interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9-15.

Because this chapter is so critical to the whole case being presented it demands careful scrutiny. What I want to argue is that the authors of this book, and similarly those in the sister volume *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*⁴³ are putting forward in fact a quite novel and ahistorical interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9-15 and related texts. Instead of facing honestly the challenge that the modern discussion of hermeneutics has raised, namely that when the historical and cultural context changes the application of some parts of Scripture becomes problematic, these authors creatively reinterpret the text to make it 'fit' the changed context. They then claim mischievously, or because they are blinded by dogma, that what they are teaching is the 'historic' interpretation of the passage in dispute.

The historic interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9-15.

Vv. 9-10. Older commentators are agreed that here the apostle asks women to dress modestly and to concentrate on good works. This instruction is given to all women and the setting envisaged is public worship. Chrysostom,⁴⁴ Calvin,⁴⁵ and many later commentators,⁴⁶ argue that these verses are penned to direct men *and* women how lead in pray when the church is assembled. Men are to pray 'without anger or argument': women are to pray in modest dress. In v. 9 the words addressed to women lack a verb which must be supplied from v. 8. In v. 8 there are two verbs, 'to desire' and 'to pray'. The adverb *ὡσαύτως* (in like manner) suggests both are to be carried over.

V. 11. Paul's command, 'Let a woman learn in silence', has generally been taken to mean women should not open their mouths in public, least of all in church. This verse, and 1 Cor 14:34, have been regularly cited by popular preachers and theologians, even in this century, in opposition to women speaking publicly.⁴⁷ In regard specifically to the church setting Paul's words have generally been taken to mean that he is demanding absolute silence by women in church (Tertullian, Origen, Cyprian, Cyril of Jerusalem, Chrysostom, Jerome, Aquinas and

43 Edited by J. Piper and W. Grudem, Wheaton: Crossway, 1991. See my review of this book in *EQ* 65, 1993, 276-281.

44 *Library of the Fathers*, Oxford: Parker, 1853, 'The Homilies of St John Chrysostom. Timothy, Titus and Philemon', 63-64. The Greek speaking Chrysostom takes it for granted that this is the plain meaning of the Greek.

45 *The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1964, 215.

46 Spicq, Barrett, Dibelius, Conzelmann, *et al.*

47 For numerous quotes see A. J. Schmidt, *Veiled and Silenced: How Culture has Shaped Theology*, Georgia: Mercier, 1989, 156-159.

as late as the 1890s the Southern Presbyterian Synod of Virginia).⁴⁸ Calvin⁴⁹ and Luther⁵⁰ also took Paul to be saying women should keep silent in church, yet in practice they allowed women to sing hymns in church. Calvin allowed that they could lead in prayer, Luther did not. When the second part of this verse is discussed, it is usually taken to mean that women are to be subordinate to men in all things in all situations.⁵¹ Charles Ellicott, writing in 1864, says that v. 11b sets the agenda for what follows. Paul is teaching that 'woman, ie any one of her class (must be) yielding in all cases'. 'The $\pi\alpha\varsigma$ (all) in all subjection (is) extensive rather than intensive'.⁵²

V. 12. All commentators until recent times agree that here Paul forbids women in general from doing two things, teaching in church and having authority over men. Chrysostom is adamant that women are not even to speak in church, let alone teach, and that all women in every area of life are to be subject to men.⁵³ Virtually no one differs on this point: women are not to speak publicly in church. In regard to women's exclusion from exercising authority this is taken to be universal. Luther asserts, 'This passage makes woman subject. It takes from her all public office and authority'.⁵⁴ Likewise Calvin says this passage teaches that, 'women by nature (that is by the ordinary law of God) are born to obey, for all wise men have always rejected $\gamma\upsilon\nu\alpha\iota\kappa\omicron\kappa\rho\alpha\tau\iota\alpha\nu$ the government of women, as an unnatural monstrosity'. And a little later he adds, 'the true order of nature prescribed by God lays down that the woman should be subject to the man'.⁵⁵ John Knox⁵⁶ and the Puritans⁵⁷ are equally adamant that women are to keep silent in church and be subordinate to men in all areas of life. R. L. Dabney, commenting on 1 Timothy 2:9–15, says, the principle stands at all times and in all situations, 'man is the ruler, woman the ruled'.⁵⁸ 'Her race is a subordinate race'.⁵⁹ While the great Charles Hodge writes: man's 'superiority... en-

48 Quotations in support given in Schmidt, 150–154.

49 *1 Tim. Com.*, 216.

50 *Luther's Works*, ed. H. C. Oswald, 28, 'Commentaries on 1 Corinthians 7, 1 Corinthians 15, Lectures on Timothy', St Louis: Concordia, 1973, 276.

51 *Ibid.*

52 *The Pastoral Epistles*, London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts & Green, 1864, 36.

53 *Tim. Hom.*, 70–71.

54 *Works*, 28, 276.

55 *1 Tim. Com.*, 219.

56 *The Works of John Knox*, ed. D. Laing, Edinburgh: J. Thin, 1895, 4, 365ff. On 16th century Reformed abhorrence of the rule of women see R. L. Greaves, 'The Gynecocracy Controversy' in, *Theology and Revolution in the Scottish Reformation*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1980, 157–168.

57 Doriani's comments make this plain but see in detail J Morgan, *Godly Learning: Puritan Attitudes Towards Reason, Learning and Education 1560–1640*, Cambridge: CUP, 1986, 142–171.

58 *Discussions Evangelical and Theological*, London, Banner of Truth, 1967, 111.

59 *Ibid.*, 107.

ables and entitles him to command'. 'This superiority of the man is . . . taught in Scripture, founded in nature and proved by all experience'.⁶⁰ I can find no dissenting voice until modern times to the view that God has set women in general under men in every area of life, the subordination of the wife in the home being one particular application of this principle.

V. 13. Again the testimony of past commentators is uniform. Paul gives two reasons why women should not teach in church or be set over men. The first reason is that because woman was created second she is to take second place to man; she is an inferior being. The chronological order in which God created the sexes determines their status. Chrysostom says God made man first to show male 'superiority', and to teach that 'the male sex enjoyed the higher honour . . . having pre-eminence in every way'.⁶¹ Aquinas asks: does the fact that man was created first, woman second, imply she is a deficient or defective male? He answers in the affirmative. He describes women as 'by nature of lower capacity and quality than man'.⁶² In the 16th century Luther also argues that women are to take second place because they were created second and are thus inferior to men. In commenting on v. 13 he says what is 'first' is 'the most preferable', and 'this passage makes woman subject'.⁶³ This 'subjection of women and domination have not been taken away'⁶⁴ by the coming of Christ. In his commentary on Genesis he explicitly adds that the female sex is 'inferior to the male sex'.⁶⁵ Calvin likewise basis woman's subordination on the chronological order in which she was created. He says, 'woman was created later to be a kind of appendage to the man, on the express condition that she should be ready to obey him'.⁶⁶ And, 'The true order of nature prescribed by God lays down that the woman should be subject to man'.⁶⁷ 'The reason that women are prevented from teaching is that it is not compatible with their status, which is to be subject to men, whereas to teach implies superior authority and status'.⁶⁸ Chrysostom, Augustine, Aquinas and many medieval scholars add that woman is inferior not only because she was created second, but also because on

60 *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, Grand Rapids, Banner of Truth, 1964, 312. Doriani is simply mistaken when he claims in *Women*, 255, that Hodge did not think the permanent subordination of women implied their inferiority.

61 *Tim. Hom.* 70.

62 *Summa Theologiae*, London: Blackfriars, 1963, 13, 35-36. I am not convinced by Doriani's attempt in *Women*, 231-232, to explain away such comments in Aquinas.

63 *Works*, 28, 276.

64 *Ibid.*, 279.

65 *Luther's Works, 1, Lectures on Genesis 1-5*, St Louis: Concordia, 1958, 69.

66 *1 Tim. Com.*, 217-218.

67 *Ibid.*, 217.

68 *Ibid.*

her own woman does not fully bear the image of God.⁶⁹ Jane Dempsey Douglas, in her very sympathetic account of Luther and Calvin's views on women, concludes that both reformers were 'deeply influenced by the tradition which sees men as more fully made in the image of God than women.'⁷⁰ This is why they stress the inferiority of women. In the historic English tradition Paul is also understood to be grounding woman's permanent subordination on her inferiority due to the fact that she was created second. The idea that because woman was created second she is inferior to the man is found repeatedly in the many Puritan discussions on the family.⁷¹ Adam Clarke writing in 1859 says, 'God designed that he (the man) should have the pre-eminence . . . the structure of woman plainly proves that she was never designed for those exertions required in public life. In this is the chief part of the natural inferiority of woman'.⁷² In interpreting Paul's first reason why women should not teach or hold authority past commentators are of one mind. Because woman was created second she is ontologically inferior to man.

V. 14 The second reason Paul gives as to why the double command of v. 12 should be obeyed is because 'Adam was not deceived but the woman'. This has been historically taken to mean that Eve is to be blamed for all evil and death and that she and all her sex are more prone to sin and error than men. Irenaeus concludes, 'Having become disobedient, she (Eve) was made the cause of death, both to herself and the whole human race'.⁷³ Tertullian is the most outspoken. Speaking to women he says, 'And do you not know that each of you is Eve? . . . You are the devil's gateway: you are the first deserter of the divine law . . .'⁷⁴ Chrysostom says women are to be subject because they are 'captivated by appetite'. Her sex is 'weak and fickle . . . collectively'. 'She taught once and ruined all'.⁷⁵ Commenting on 1 Cor 14:34-35 he describes women in comparison to men as 'some sort of weaker being and easily carried away and light minded'.⁷⁶ Luther says it was Eve who went 'astray'; she 'brought on transgression'. This shows that 'Adam is approved as superior to Eve' because 'there was greater wisdom in Adam'.⁷⁷ Calvin concludes that

69 G. Lloyd, *Feminist Theology*, London: SPCK, 1990, 90-98; K. E. Borresen, *The Image of God: Gender Models in Judeo-Christian Tradition*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991, 187-209.

70 See her essay, 'The Image of God in Women as Seen in Luther and Calvin', in Borresen, *ibid.*, 260.

71 As Doriani, *Women*, 243-246, admits explicitly. See also Morgan, *Godly Learning*.

72 *The Holy Bible with Commentary and Criticism*, London: W. Tegg, 6, 448.

73 'Against Heresies', 3, 22, *Ante Nicene Fathers*, edited by A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1972.

74 'On the Apparel of Women', *ibid.*, 4, 1979, 33.

75 *Tim. Hom.*, 71.

76 *Library of the Fathers*, 'The Homilies of St John Chrysostom on 1 Corinthians', 521.

77 *Works*, 28, 278-279.

because the woman 'seduced the man from God's commandment, it is fitting that she should be deprived of all her freedom and placed under a yoke'. To women he says, is to be imputed 'the ruin of the whole human race'.⁷⁸ The Puritan, Matthew Poole, believed this verse was penned by the apostle, 'to keep the woman humble, in low opinion of herself, and the lower order wherein God hath fixed her'.⁷⁹

V. 15 'Yet she will be saved. . . .' One interpretation of this verse which appears early (Ignatius, Irenaeus, Justin, Tertullian)⁸⁰ and has a long history⁸¹ is that despite the responsibility women bear for the Fall they will be saved through 'the childbearing', that is, the birth of the Messiah by the second Eve, Mary.⁸² But the dominant opinion across the ages has been that here Paul is teaching that women's special domain is to bear children. This is how she will work out her salvation. Chrysostom reads Paul to be saying that, although women must continue to accept the consequences for Eve's sin, there is a word of encouragement for them. 'Be not cast down, because your sex has incurred blame . . . the whole sex shall be saved, notwithstanding, by childbearing'.⁸³ Similarly Luther argues that Eve's 'penalty remains' for all women. 'The pain and tribulation of childbearing continue. These penalties will continue until judgement'. Then addressing women directly he says, 'You will be saved if you subjected yourselves and bear children with pain'. Women's salvation, he adds, is not apart from faith, yet it is 'for bearing children'.⁸⁴ In writing specifically on marriage he is even more forthright. He says, if women 'bear themselves weary—or ultimately bear themselves out—that does not matter. Let them bear themselves out. This is the purpose for which they exist'.⁸⁵ Calvin believes these words were added for the 'consolation' of women. In case it should 'reduce women to despair to hear the whole ruin of the human race imputed to them . . . Paul reminds them that although they must suffer temporal punishment, the hope of salvation remains for them'.⁸⁶

78 *1 Tim Com.*, 218–219.

79 *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3, London: 1685, 779.

80 See further W. Lock, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Edinburgh: T&T Clarke, 1924, 33.

81 It is supported by Ellicott, von Soden, Wohlenberg, Hammond, Liddon, Rowland, Fairburn, Locke *et al.*

82 A. J. Köstenberger, 'Ascertaining Women's God-Ordained Roles: An Interpretation of 1 Tim 2:15' *Bulletin for Biblical Research*, 7, 1997, 107–44, disputes the messianic interpretation in the Church Fathers, insisting that the verse should be read literally to ascribe fixed roles to men and women. I am not convinced by either side of his argument but this is not an issue for this essay.

83 Chrysostom, *Tim. Hom.*, 71.

84 *Works*, 28, 279.

85 *Works*, 45, 'The Estate of Marriage', 46.

86 *1 Tim. Com.*, 219.

It is hard not to come to the conclusion that so much of what we have just outlined, which purports to be the exegesis of 1 Tim. 2:9–15, is not more a reflection of the androcentric and misogynist views of the theologians quoted, who are immersed in a thoroughly patriarchal culture, than the mind of God as revealed in Scripture.⁸⁷ It will be interesting to see if in fact the authors of *Women in the Church* fully endorse these comments.

The neo-historic interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9–15.

Vv. 9–10. Modern day conservative evangelicals opponents of the emancipation of women agree that here Paul asks women to dress modestly in church and concentrate on good works. The authors of *Women in the Church* refute convincingly the minority opinion that in this section Paul is only addressing wives and husbands.⁸⁸ They insist all men and all women are in mind. Nothing is said about the very strong possibility that Paul envisages women leading the assembled church in prayer.

V. 11. When v. 11 is discussed in *Women and the Church*, it is agreed that this verse is the counterpart of v. 12.⁸⁹ Women are to learn in 'silence' and be 'submissive' to the male teachers who have authority in the church. It is not suggested that Paul is forbidding women from speaking publicly in other contexts and it is conceded that this verse and the one following do not settle the question as to women teaching a mixed Bible class or in a seminary.⁹⁰ In regard to the second part of the verse Schreiner insists that Paul is *not* demanding, 'the submission of all women to all men.' The 'all' in 'all submission' has 'elative' force, meaning 'with entire submission'.⁹¹ Repeatedly we are told the domain of this submission is limited to the home and the church.

V. 12. The authors of *Women in the Church* insist that Paul forbids two things, women teaching in church and holding or exercising authority in the church or the home. The teaching envisaged is ordinary teaching given in church and the authority is the proper authority to be exercised by Christian men. Yarbrough puts it this way. Men have 'to bear a few strategic burdens that women normally do not'.⁹² Schreiner admits that Paul's use of the verb ἐπιτρέπω in the present, active indicative form, could mean that Paul is saying, 'I am not permitting women

87 It is to be noted that I only give a small selection of quotes about women from the great theologians of the past as I am only interested in their understanding of 1 Tim 2:9–15. For a fuller account of this sad story see Schmidt, *Veiled and Silenced*.

88 *Women*, 115–117.

89 *Ibid*, 91, 121, 123, 218, 262.

90 *Ibid*, 210.

91 *Ibid*, 123–124.

92 *Ibid*, 195.

to teach or exercise authority *at this time*'. On its own the verse does not indicate this is a 'universal principle'. What proves that the double 'command is universal and for all time', he says, is verse 13.⁹³

Verses 13 and 14 are taken to give the reasons why Paul forbids women from teaching in church and exercising authority over men. The γάρ introducing these two verses, is understood to be causal in force. T. David Gordon insists that both verses indicate transcultural, permanently binding directives. He says, Paul's dual command is 'grounded in the entire created and fallen order'. Verse 13 is taken to mean that in creation God established an 'order' which differentiates men and women giving them different roles. The chronological order in which the sexes were created is sometimes mentioned, but what is determinative is a constitutive 'order' given by God in creation, which because it was established before sin entered the world is permanent and transcultural. Doriani says that 'for complementarians, the phrase, "Adam was formed or created first" refers beyond chronology to God's sovereign decree that made males the spiritual heads of God's kingdom, churches and homes'.⁹⁴ Similarly Schreiner says, 'Paul appeals to the created order, the good and perfect world God has made.'⁹⁵ Harold Brown insists that this order, which differentiates the sexes allocating to them different roles, is one of a number of '*mandata Dei*'. Schreiner dogmatically asserts Paul's teaching in this verse does 'not imply women are inferior to men'.⁹⁶ Doriani says, 'this shift toward creation order and away from ontological arguments is a *reinterpretation* of 1 Timothy 2:14' by complementarians.⁹⁷

V. 14. As we noted above, the consistent 'historic' interpretation of this second reason as to why women should not teach or exercise authority is that following in the steps of Eve they are more prone to fall into sin and error. They are inherently weak when faced with temptation. In recent years much ink has been expended in trying to show this is not what Paul meant, but at least two of the authors of *Women in the Church* reluctantly allow that this interpretation is the most likely one.⁹⁸ However, they then proceed to reword it so that it becomes unrecognisable as the 'historic' interpretation. Schreiner says that Paul forbids women from teaching in church because, 'women are less prone to see the importance of doctrinal formulations, especially when it comes to the issue of identifying heresy and making a stand for truth'.⁹⁹ Doriani says the verse does not mean that 'women are intellectually deficient'

93 *Ibid*, 125-127.

94 *Ibid*, 262.

95 *Ibid*, 134.

96 *Ibid*, 135.

97 *Ibid*, 258.

98 *Ibid*, 143-144, 258-259.

99 *Ibid*, 144-145.

but rather that 'God created women with an orientation towards relationships more than analysis'. In contrast 'he created men to lead' and to teach in church.¹⁰⁰

V. 15. Many apologies for what the text seems to imply have been offered, but in *Women in the Church* the predominant historic meaning is allowed, although worded once again in a way no older commentator would recognise. Schreiner tells us that what Paul is saying is by bearing children Christian women 'will be saved by adhering to their ordained role'.¹⁰¹ The first thing we note when we compare these two readings of 1 Tim. 2:9–15 is that, although both are thoroughly androcentric in outlook, blatant misogynist language is missing in the second reading. Women are not blamed for sin and death; they are not described as 'weak and fickle', and they are not said to be inferior to men. A more positive view of women is given, albeit with many limitations.

Next, and more importantly, we note that on a number of very significant matters the authors of *Women in the Church*, explicitly contradict the historic interpretation of 1 Tim. 2:9–15. They reject the unified voice of older commentators that God has forbidden women from public speaking and from exercising authority over men *in any place and at any time*. Instead they insist that these restrictions apply only in the church and the home. They explicitly deny the historic view that God has made women ontologically inferior to men. Instead we are told that God has given men and women different *roles*, by which they mean, God has functionally subordinated women to men.

And thirdly, they virtually ignore the undisputed tradition which prescribes a secondary place to women simply because woman was created second. Instead they ground the differing 'roles' of men and women on a transcultural, permanently binding, constitutive order of creation. Even when 'historic' interpretations are given lip service, such as in verses 14 and 15, the wording of the interpretation provided in no way reflects what earlier commentators have said. Women are not excluded from speaking or exercising authority because they are inherently more prone to sin and error, and bearing children is not seen as women's primary responsibility in life. These apostolic arguments, we are told, only prescribe 'differing roles' for men and women. When the two traditions of interpretation are compared, the only conclusion possible is that what the authors of *Women in the Church* claim is the 'historic' position is nothing of the sort. Their exegetical work is novel. In what must surely be an unintended slip, Doriani admits that the interpretation given is in fact a 'reinterpretation'.¹⁰²

100 *Ibid.*, 266.

101 *Ibid.*, 151.

102 *Ibid.*, 258.

What is so interesting is that Doriani outlines the truly historic position in some detail, and even at times notes how it differs from the position he and his co-authors adopt, yet concludes that this radically different interpretation of 1 Tim. 2:9–15 is the 'historic' position. It is as if his theological blinkers, and those of his fellow contributors who also claim to be giving the 'historic' interpretation of this passage, determine what they see.

What we have in this 'putative' exegetical work, which has many parallels in contemporary conservative evangelical literature, is a distinctive new reading of 1 Tim. 2:9–15. In enunciating this these authors, and those who take the same approach, embrace a 'Cartesian' and 'progressive hermeneutic'—the very thing they accuse their evangelical brothers and sisters of doing. And worse still, they claim that what they are teaching is what Christians have always believed, which is simply not true. In the so called 'historic' interpretation of 1 Timothy 2, which is now seen in virtually all contemporary conservative evangelical writings arguing for the permanent subordination of women, three distinctive and novel elements stand out, and these are the pillars on which this whole case rests. In the second part of this essay these three matters will be explored and a better way to interpret 1 Tim. 2:9–15 will be given, one which does not set it in conflict with so much else in Scripture, and one which does not demean women.

Abstract

In this first part of a two-part article the author gives a summary of the essays in the influential book *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9–15*. He then summarises the traditional or 'historic' interpretation of the passage which forbids women to teach in the church or to have authority over men because they were created second and are more liable to error and deception than men. By contrast *Women in the Church* denies the inferiority of women to men but nevertheless forbids them to teach or have authority over men because they have different *roles* which are part of the binding, constitute order of creation. Thus the view presented in the book is actually a novel one rather than a restatement of the historic one. This claim will be substantiated in Part II of the article and a contextual reading of the passage will be defended.