The Synod of the Reformed Church has appointed a committee to study the ordination of women in the church. This of course means the ordination of women to all offices of the church. If such a study is to be of real value to the church, it ought not to be done solely by the members of the committee. There should be a thorough discussion of the problem by the church at large. Moreover, the discussion should be carried on during the life of the committee. It should be rooted in a firm desire to discover what the Word of God has to say to the church on this problem. This paper is presented in the hope that it may stimulate the church to think and to write. It is not the intention of this paper to come to a decision, but rather to place the problem before our minds. With that in mind, we approach our task.

The ordination of women has been instituted in some churches with very little discussion. This is especially true of some of the younger churches. Others have given very serious thought to the question, as for example De Hervormde Kerk in the Netherlands. Perhaps it may be well to mention some denominations who have given women the right of ordination. The Congregational Church has full ordination on a level with men. This is also true of the Evangelical and Reformed Church. The Salvation Army has always numbered women among its officers. The Church of God has a number of ordained women. More recently the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., has given women the right of ordination. In Great Britain the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Church and the United Free Church of Scotland permit ordination of women to all offices. The Church of Christ in China has for years ordained women as elders. The Presbyterian Church of Korea ordains women to the office of deacon. The Church of Christ in Japan and the Church of Christ in the Philippines ordain women to the Christian ministry. These last two denominations ought to be of interest to us. Since we are closely connected with the work of these churches, one might say that we are already doing on the foreign field that which we are studying at home. This list is not complete, and as you have perhaps noted, does not in all cases apply to all the offices of the church. But the list ought to guard us from any hasty generalizations. Certainly one of these is that to grant ordination to women is following in the path of a very liberal attitude toward the authority of the Word.

When we turn to church history, we get little help. The position of women was such as to exclude them from office on an equality with men. The cultural situation was such that it was almost impossible for the problem to present itself. It is true that in the fourth century the office
of deaconess was in vogue. But the duty of these women was to prepare children and women for baptism. Instruction of men by women would have been considered an impossibility. This order passed out of existence somewhere between the tenth and twelfth centuries.

The history of the period of the Reformation shows little change in the attitude toward women. Here again the background of the Reformers certainly influenced their attitudes. Their lives were rooted in the exclusive clerical and monastic experience of the mediaeval theologians. To this one must add the abuse of mariology, and the cultural pattern of the day.

In more modern church history there has been a greater interest in the place of women in the church. The list of churches which have given the right of ordination to women is certainly indicative of this renewed interest.

It may be of interest to note that in churches where women have been given the privilege of ordination to the Christian ministry, few women have accepted this privilege. In pursuing this problem, we ought not to disregard what other churches have done. We can learn from others. Perhaps we ought to keep a few statements in mind.

1. The fact that other churches have ordained women does not sanction our doing so.

2. A seeming lack of precedent in church history should not keep us from doing so.

3. The fact that few women have taken up the Christian ministry should not influence our judgment.

4. We shall have to be careful not to allow any notions we now have to influence our exegesis of the Word. We must pray that the Holy Spirit may guide us in our study.

The two passages most often cited as being opposed to the ordination of women are I Cor. 14:34-35, and I Tim. 2:11-12. Let us examine both of these passages, turning first to I Cor. 14:34-35. "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church." The immediate reaction to this passage has often been to interpret it as a ban on the ordination of women on the ground that here they are prohibited from speaking in the church. Is this correct? One other passage in the same book will either help us or make the problem more difficult. This is I Cor. 11:3ff. Both passages refer to prophesying in the church. In I Cor. 11:5 the apostle definitely speaks of women who prayed and prophesied in the church. If


this is correct, then the passage in I Cor. 14:34-35 which also refers to prophesying would seem to be in contradiction to it. That the commentators realized this dilemma is very obvious. Calvin seeks to harmonize these two passages by saying, "For when he reproves them for prophesying with their head uncovered, he at the same time does not give them permission to prophesy in some other way, but rather delays his condemnation of that vice to another passage, namely in chapter fourteen."

Meyer in his commentary admits that Paul is speaking of women who did pray and prophesy. In order to harmonize this with chapter 14, he seeks to interpret this as a freedom allowed in smaller meetings, more limited circles assembled for worship, somewhat similar to "a church in the house." One may well ask whether in both cases this is not a forced interpretation of the text. I am quite sure that if Paul had not written I Cor. 14:34-35, neither of these men would have found a problem in a passage which seems rather simple to understand. Forgetting for the moment our notion about the place of women, it seems rather plain that Paul does allow women to pray and prophesy in the public assembly, but they are to have their heads covered. And why should women not prophesy in the church? The prophecy of Joel which is quoted in Acts 2:17 certainly pointed toward this. Acts 21:9 tells us of the four daughters of Philip who prophesied. The gift of prophesying was given to women as well as to men, and they made use of this gift in the public gathering of the church. Since this is so plain, perhaps the harmonizing ought to be done at I Cor. 14:34-35.

If we are going to understand Paul at all, we must first divest ourselves of thinking of the church service in terms of our own day. A public gathering, with the minister preaching a sermon and the people quietly listening, is certainly not the picture of a church service of the first century. Certainly it is not the picture of the Corinthian church. The type of service referred to in verses 34 and 35 is clearly explained in verses 26 through 33. The meeting was rather informal. Note verse 26. "How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation." Paul was certainly not opposed to this informality, but insisted that all things should be done decently and in order. Note verse 31. "For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted."

We may ask ourselves as to whether or not this type of meeting, in which there seems to have been a great deal of discussion, was unusual. Seemingly not. In Acts 17:2 we read concerning Paul that "three sabbath days he reasoned with them out of the scriptures." The word used here is a form of διάλεγομαι, which indicates a discussion or dispute. In such a service there was undoubtedly the asking of questions. The same word is used in Acts 17:17, 18:19, 20:7, and others. In Acts 20:7, where we have

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the incident at Troas, it is hardly reasonable that Paul preached six or eight hours. If this was a discussion, the time element makes sense. After all, the New Testament service came out of the synagogue, which was not the formalized service of our day.

We must look at I Cor. 14 from the point of view of the type of service that was being held. It was informal with many taking part. Paul has been discussing the speaking in tongues and the prophesying. Beginning at verse 29, he turns to the prophets. Two or three may prophesy. But then the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. Obviously women took part in the prophetic utterances. This would be in harmony with I Cor. 11. But in the questioning of the prophets, that is, in a discussion of what has been said, a new problem arises. If we join the last phrase of verse 33 to verse 34 (which is most likely correct) then Paul is pointing out that the practice in the Jewish Christian church is for women not to take part in this part of the service. They are to remain silent.

Why are they to remain silent? First we must take note of the fact that he is speaking to married women. He makes no mention of the single women. He bases his argument on the law, though he doesn't cite any particular passage. The Old Testament does have something to say about this in Numbers 5 and Numbers 30. It may be of interest to note that in Numbers 30:9 where women are enjoined to be subject to their husbands, the freedom of widows and divorcees is definitely granted. Paul from his Old Testament background has some definite ideas of the relationship of the husband and wife. The husband is definitely the head of the family, and the wife is in a relationship of hypandros (under the man). Romans 7 gives us an excellent idea of Paul's thinking on this subject. This relationship of the headship of the husband is to be maintained in the Christian service. The cultural pattern was such that for these married women to take part in the discussion in the presence of their husbands would have been a disgrace. It would have been out of place. A very pertinent question is whether single women and divorced women had a right to take part in the question period. Paul is interested in having all things done decently and in order—I Cor. 14:40.

Do we have here a rule against women ministers? These women did prophesy. Or do we have here rules for proper decorum in the Christian church, especially in view of the Jewish and Greek attitude toward women? If we have here simply Paul's attitude toward the place of women in a free discussion, and in more particular married women, then there is no difficulty in harmonizing the passage in I Cor. 11 and Paul's statement in I Cor. 14:34-35.

Let us now turn to I Timothy 2:11-12. "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp au-

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authority over the man, but to be in silence." We ought to take note at once
to the speaking to which Paul refers. It is again a speaking in order to
learn, just as we have in I Cor. 14:34-35.\(^6\) It is very obvious when we
place this passage against the background of what a New Testament ser­
vice was like, that we again are faced with the problem of women main­
taining their proper decorum. If this were simply prophesying, it would
be for the edification of the church and not for learning on the part of the
speaker. If, on the other hand, this were a learning simply by listening,
then the words of Paul in verse 12 would make no sense. From what we
know of the New Testament service, the teaching and learning involve a
discussion in which there is the asking of questions.

In I Cor. 14 we have a discussion with those who prophesy. Here we
have a discussion with those who teach. Seemingly there were many
teachers in the New Testament church. This is very logical, since having
heard the preaching of the gospel, the believers are now ready to be
taught. Timothy is told: "And the things that thou hast heard of me
among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall
be able to teach others also." Timothy is to warn the church at Ephesus
that those who are teaching must teach no other doctrine. Hebrews 5:12
indicates that the members of the church ought to be teachers. Romans
15:14 expects that the members of the church will admonish, that is, teach
one another. Ephesians 4:11 indicates that there were a number of teachers
in every church.

As we noted above, the problem involved in this text is the proper
decorum of women in the church. We may be sure that again the married
women are in the mind of the apostle. In the ancient world women mar­
rried young, and the possibility of a number of mature unmarried women
was out of the question.

We have Paul's attitude toward women from a Jewish point of view.
Much the same was the attitude of the Greeks. The ancient Greek culture
expected that a woman should keep silence in the presence of her hus­
band, lest she show disrespect for him. "Silence," says Sophocles, "is
woman's glory." Socrates put the question, "Is there anybody to whom
you entrust more serious matters than to your wife—or to whom you talk
less?" The attitude of Jew and Greek toward married women in the pres­
ence of their husbands was very similar.

Paul says that the woman is to learn in silence and to be in silence.
The word which he uses for silence is *esuchia*. This word is used in I
Thess. 4:11 and II Thess. 3:12 concerning the busybodies whom Paul
commands to do their work in quietness. In these passages the meaning is
that these people are to work within the proper rules of their society. Our
interpretation of I Tim. 2:11-12 would therefore be that the women are

\(^6\)George H. Gilbert, "Women in Public Worship in The Churches of Paul,"
to learn within the proper rules of decorum, that is, with a proper respect toward their husbands. In I Cor. 14:34-35 the word used for silence has the meaning of silence as opposed to speaking. The passages may well complement one another. Proper decorum in the presence of the husband may be shown by not taking part in the questioning. This may be the Timothy passage. Being silent (as opposed to speaking) while the prophets are questioned is proper decorum. This may be the Corinthian passage.

The word which Paul uses for authority is *authentein*. The meaning of the word is to act on one's own authority. When we place this word alongside *andros* (man), and think for a moment about the meaning of *esuchia*, then we immediately get the full force of Paul's words. He doesn't want these women to take part in the discussion while their husbands are present. He feels that by doing so, they will not be in their proper realm. In our own day, in spite of the emancipation of women, we don't look too kindly on a woman who constantly has the floor while her husband is present. One need only to read Titus 2:3-5 to come to the conclusion that the advice was rather badly needed.

Perhaps it may be well to make some statements about our study of these passages.

1. Paul does allow women to pray and prophesy in a public service, but with proper decorum.
2. Married women are not to take part in the discussion of prophecy in the presence of their husbands.
3. In the process of teaching and learning, they are to show proper respect. The very nature of the situation indicates that married women are in the apostle's thinking.
4. Paul does believe that women have a position in the marriage bond which requires certain proprieties.
5. There is no discussion in these passages of church offices.

It would be well to turn to I Timothy 3 where we have a list of the qualifications for the office of *episkopos*, (elder) and deacon. All the qualifications for the office of elder indicate that the apostle has in mind only men. He is to be the husband of one wife and he must rule well his own house. Verses 8-10 deal with the qualifications of deacons. Verse 11 in the King James Version reads "Even so must their wives be grave, no slanderers, sober, faithful in all things." The possessive (their) which gives the idea of a reference to wives is not in the original. We have the same introductory word in verse 8 and verse 11—*hosautos* (even so). Verses 12 and 13 go back to the office of deacon and list qualifications which would have reference to men. We are now faced with the problem whether verse 11 refers to the qualifications for women deacons. If we say that this verse refers to the wives of the deacons, then why is nothing said of the wives of the elders. The early church fathers, includ-
ing St. John Chrysostom, Theodorct, and Theodore of Mopsuestia believed that verse 11 referred to women deacons.7

Earlier in this paper we mentioned the office of deaconess which existed in the early church. We find this office in I Tim. 5:9-10. This seems to have been a specific order of widows sixty years and over. This office which was dormant for some time is again coming into its own. If this is a New Testament office, and if we are insistent on the New Testament pattern, are we doing what we ought in this respect?

The New Testament speaks highly of women who labored in the early church. We have Priscilla, a helper in Christ Jesus; Mary, who bestowed much labor; Tryphena and Tryphosa, who also labored in the Lord; Persis, who labored much in the Lord; the beloved Apphia, Euodias, and Syntyche, who labored with Paul in the gospel. The same words of praise that were spoken of the men were used for the women. We don’t have any instances of women elders or deacons, with the exception of Phoebe in Romans 16:1. In this case there may be some discussion as to the translation. But on the other hand, we don’t have much information on the male elders and deacons in the church. If the seven in Acts 6 are deacons, these constitute the bulk of our information.

We have noted before that women did prophesy in the church. We must restudy I Timothy 3:11. Do we have here a basis for women deacons? Should we follow I Timothy 5:9 and establish everywhere the office of deaconess?

May women be elders in the church? At this point the authority of the elders to rule the church has always been a bone of contention. Let us grant the matter of authority. We are now faced with the question of what we mean by having authority. We must be careful not to view the elders as a modern board of directors, or an executive committee. The church is under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and the elders must act in faith under this same Lordship. We realize that within the marriage bond the wife stands in a relationship of hypandros. Would this make it impossible for her to rule in faith under the Lordship of Christ?

The question of whether women ought to be admitted to the offices of the church is not as simple as an exclusion on the basis of I Cor. 14:34-35 and I Tim. 2:11-12. Neither is the other side of the question an easy one. Certainly we ought not to overlook the tremendous use of women in the New Testament Church. This is even more meaningful in view of the position of women in that early culture. There have been other times when the church has had to make decisions that were difficult. Let us as a church study together and discuss together what the Word of God has to say to us! And let us pray the Lord of the Church to guide us through his Spirit!8

7F. D. Bacon, Women in The Church (London: Lutterworth Press, 1946) pp. 45ff. 8N. J. Hommes, De Vrouw In De Kerk (Franeker: T. Wever, 1951). The writer has made wide use of this study. It is the most complete work available on the subject.