

APPENDIX XI

REPORT ON WOMEN'S VOTING RIGHTS

By the committee appointed by General Synod Smithville
of the Canadian Reformed Churches 1980

WOMEN'S VOTING RIGHTS

to the General Synod of the
Canadian Reformed Churches
meeting in Cloverdale, BC, November 1983.

Esteemed Brethren,

We hereby submit to you our Report pertaining to Women's Voting Rights, in accordance with the received MANDATE:

- a. to reexamine the matter, including the Study-Report presented to Synod in the light of the criticism voiced in letters to Synod and in the report of the Advisory Committee;
- b. to give more consideration to material available in other study reports re the place and task of women in the Church;
- c. to submit a report with recommendations to the next General Synod, with a sufficient number of copies to the Churches.

For personal reasons, Rev. S. DeBruin informed the Committee that he could not take part in the work of the Committee.

Wishing you the guidance of the Holy Spirit by His Word in all your work, we respectfully submit our report and recommendation to you for your consideration.

The Committee:
D. DeJong
C. Hoogerdijk
J.D. Wielenga

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May 1983

I SCRIPTURAL DATA

A. Remarks on the Previous Report's Chapters on Women in Scripture

We did not see a need to completely rewrite the part on women in Scripture. It will suffice to make some necessary corrections, and to correct and re-write some of the conclusions.

In chapter V, Women after the Fall, the statement, "The female is now placed in SUBJECTION to the male (Genesis 3:16)," does not mention by whom this is done, although in a note (7) an exegesis is referred to which gives the impression that this is an ordinance of God. We are convinced that man's rule over the women as meant in Genesis 3:16 is not an ordinance of God, but part of the curse of sin. The Hebrew word for "desire," "teshuqah" is also used in Genesis 4:7, and Song of Songs 7:10. In Genesis 4:7 the Lord says to Cain: "its (i.e. sin's) desire is for you, but you must master it." The apparent meaning is, that sin's desire is to master Cain, and that Cain may not accept this, but on the contrary must master sin. In Song of Songs 7:10 the bride says: "I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me." Here again, as in Genesis 4:7, the object of the desire is what is mentioned in the other part of the sentence: his desire is to belong to his beloved. Accordingly we must in Genesis 3:16 find the object of woman's desire in the second part of the sentence, namely "to rule," and read the verse as follows: "yet your desire shall be to rule over your husband, and he shall rule over you." This is of course not an ordinance of God which must be obeyed, but a statement of the cursed state of affairs caused by the fall into sin. Eve, instead of following Adam, actually tried

to rule over him when she listened to Satan and caused Adam to sin as well; this will from now on remain woman's desire, but in vain; the sad consequence of her refusal of following man but her instead desiring to rule over him will bring the opposite, namely that man is going to rule over her, instead of leading her as it was in the beginning. (1)

For this reason the first sentence in chapter VI, Women in the Old Testament, should not read, "The matter of the rulership of the male over the female in Marriage is further developed in the Old Testament after the Fall," but, "With respect to the matter of the rulership of the male over the female in MARRIAGE, the consequences of the curse of sin can be noticed in the history of the Old Testament after the Fall (e.g. Deut. 24:1-4), together with ordinances intended to curb these consequences." (Later we will return to this when we deal with Peter's words in 1 Peter 3:1-8). We also doubt the evidence of a "development" of the rulership of the male over the female in marriage in the other mentioned Scripture passages Numbers 5 and 30, where according to us we read of limits put to man's ruling over woman. The law of jealousy e.g. does not show the ordinance of God, but God's reckoning with the curse in protecting the woman against man's dominance. The law took correcting measures in a society which was much affected by the curse. (2) Therefore there is no reason to insert the word "even" when it is said about women: "They were even granted theophanies," and "Some even occupied a leading and prophetic role."

When it is said that Miriam "was certainly not of the same rank and standing as Moses," but had a prophetic "position subordinate to that of Moses," we must remark that the same applies to all other prophets, whether male or female (cf. Deuteronomy 34:10).

Further we would like to emphasize and ask attention for the last paragraph in this chapter concerning the character of prophecy.

In chapter VII, Women in the New Testament, we disagree with what is said under A. The gospels, as if the Lord Jesus disapproved of Moses and the Law. The Lord Jesus did disapprove of the convenient way that man divorced their wives in His own time, abusing the law of Moses.

When under B. The Acts of the Apostles, (IV) Acts 15:22, the previous Committee expresses as its "feeling," "however, it feels that the 'excluding position' is much more likely," the remark must be made that this feeling has no grounds in the text and contradicts the earlier made statement (at the end of [III] Acts 6 1-5). "In the final analysis it is doubtful whether one will be able to speak a conclusive word about the matter of female involvement in this passage."

As to C. The Epistles, (I) Galatians 3:28, we would like to add that Paul's emphasis is on the equality of men and women etc. as HEIRS in Christ.

Since we intend to replace the part about 1 Corinthians 11 in our addition to this part of the Report, we will limit ourselves to one remark only on (II) 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. In note (21) it is mentioned that The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology goes in the same direction as the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament when it asserts, "Here head is probably to be understood not as 'chief' or 'ruler' but as 'source' or 'origin.'" Without argumentation this interpretation is rejected and the statement made, "Man is the head of the woman and rules over her (cf. 1 Timothy 2) and man is the origin, the source of woman." However, 1 Timothy 2 does not at all say that man rules over her, but that woman may not rule over man. Genesis 3:16 (see above) states as a fact of the curse that man rules over woman, but from the beginning this was not so; then it was leadership and not rulership, as was made clear in chapter IV.

It is said under (VI) 1 Timothy 2:11-15, "Some would say that man has dominion and the woman lived in subjection, or that man ruled and the woman obeyed. Your Committee considers that to be too harsh an evaluation of the ideal conditions in

Paradise." We are convinced that this evaluation is not just too harsh, but simply wrong, and that therefore the next words, "It is more correct" should read, "It is only correct." (From this it follows that the last word of chapter IV, "obedience" had better be read as "recognition of his leadership.")

VIII SUMMING UP THUS FAR

- a. This conclusion can be maintained.
- b. Same
- c. The words "and the Lord proclaims" must be replaced by "in the curse"; the words "and the wife shall obey" must be left out.
- d. To this sentence must be added: " but from the beginning this was not so."
- e. This conclusion can be maintained.
- f. Same
- g. Same
- h. and i. These conclusions will be replaced by other conclusions on the basis of the following addition.

B. Addition to the Previous Report's Chapters on Women in Scripture

(I) *Ephesians 5:21-33*

The verb "be subject" in verse 22, "Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord" is inserted in our translation from verse 21, "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ." The Greek word "hypotassomai," "does not so much mean to obey — though such a relationship could result from placing oneself under — or to do someone's will, but TO LOSE or TO GIVE UP YOUR OWN RIGHT or YOUR OWN WILL." (3) Thus to be subject to one another means here the same as e.g. in Philippians 2:3, where Paul says, "Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves."

This must be done out of reverence for Christ who is, chapter 6:10ff. the Commander of God's army. As soldiers in God's army we must, 6:10, "be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might" in the struggle against the enemy. But in our relationship toward our fellow-soldiers we must be quite different. There we must not be strong, but humble and meek. This does not mean that the one soldier is subordinated to the other in the sense that he must obey his commands, like e.g. he must towards his officers. No, he must respect his fellow-soldier in the position which has been assigned to him by the Commander, out of reverence for the Commander, Christ.

Paul applies this to the several positions which have been assigned to differently positioned people, to children in 6:1, fathers in verse 4, slaves in verse 5, masters in verse 9, and husbands and wives in 5:22-33 (see specifically his summary in verse 33).

"As to the Lord" in verse 22 does not mean that they must obey their husbands as their lords and masters like they must obey the Lord Jesus as their Lord and Master, but that they must know their position in connection with their husbands because in that way they obey Him who as the Commander has assigned to them their different positions.

Why does the Lord Jesus assign to them a different position with respect to their husbands? Verse 23 says, in a more accurate translation than the RSV, "because man is head of the woman." Often this is read as expressing the thought that like the head rules the body, so the man rules the woman, and therefore head is taken to mean something like final authority, superior rank, or something similar to it. However, the Greek word for head, "kephale," has as the common meaning for Greek-speaking people "source," or "beginning," or "what comes first," or "what goes ahead," or "completion" or "crown." While the Hebrew word for head, "roosch," also has the meaning of authority, superior or commander, the Greek translation of the O.T. uses in such cases preferably not the word "kephale," because this would convey the wrong idea. (4)

In an army, soldiers in the rear are not subordinated to those who go ahead, although they do well to listen to them and to follow them. Well, says Paul in verse 23, that's the position of the man, he is head of the women, he goes ahead, in relation to the woman, who follows. Just as Christ, continues Paul in verse 23, is the head of the Church. Here Christ is not called the Lord, but the head of the Church, who as its Saviour is the first one, who goes ahead of her, as her Protector. That wives must be subject to their husbands means in this connection, that they must follow where he leads, where he goes ahead. And both must love and respect each other on the place assigned to them (verse 33).

(II) *1 Peter 3:1-8*

It seems to be that Peter's teaching is different from that of Paul as explained above, because he refers to Sarah as an example who "obeyed Abraham, calling him Lord."

Peter uses the same word as Paul for being submissive or subject, namely "hypotassomai." However, Peter writes about this in a different context, the context being that of the sufferings which Christians must endure in the human relationships and institutions as these have grown wrong in the course of the time because of sin and the curse of sin. In this context he writes about the relation of husbands and wives in the specific situation of wives whose husbands are unbelievers who do not obey the Word of God and therefore do not treat their wives like the Lord wants them to do this. (5)

These wives are like Sarah (Sarah's children, verse 6), if they like Sarah do right, and, like Sarah, let nothing terrify them. Apparently both they and Sarah were up against terrifying things in their marriages, with abuses comparable to those that slaves were often subjected to.

In Genesis we read that Abraham was called by God out of the city of Ur of Chaldees to go to the land of Canaan. And Abraham "took Sarai his wife," and all that belonged to him, and went. He simply took Sarah with him as if she was part of his property. Sarah did not rebel, but went with him, gladly as we may suppose, because she too believed God's promises. Together with Abraham she "hoped in God," looking forward to the city with foundations, the everlasting inheritance. Then, in the same chapter Genesis 12, we read that Abraham went to Egypt, not because God called him to, but because of a famine. He commanded Sarah to tell the people that she was his sister, "that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared on your account." For his selfish reasons Sarah must not only lie, but also give up her honour as a woman by letting herself be taken into the harem of Pharaoh, as no more than a slave in Abraham's eyes with whom he can do what he wants to.

This was normal for Abraham, for we read in Genesis 20 that Abraham did the same thing in Gerar, where he admitted, "When God caused me to wander from my father's house, I said to her, 'This is the kindness you must do to me: at every place to which we come, say of me, he is my brother.'" And Sarah obeyed Abraham like a slave, acting like a slave, and in doing so calling him her lord or master. What a terrifying suffering must this have caused her. This command of Abraham was on her all her life, and characterized their marriage to a great extent. Sarah has patiently suffered this injustice which was a consequence of the curse which lay especially heavy on women in societies where the Word of God was not known and obeyed at all, or, as in Abraham's case, only in an initial stage.

Sarah did not rebel, but obeyed, although Abraham did not have the right to ask her obedience in these things, but only that she would follow him where God had called him to go. She called him lord, although he was not entitled to this title as her head. It is this Sarah who is pictured before the eyes of Christian women whose husbands treated them like slaves as an example to be followed. Although they have no right to demand obedience and to be called lord, yet, do it, like Sarah did it, so that, although they do not obey the Word, anyway some of them may be won without a word by the reverent and chaste behaviour of their wives.

Now of course this example is not to be placed before Christian brides and bridegrooms on the day of their wedding (and therefore this has rightly been omitted in our new Marriage-form, although the word "obey" still has been left in and as yet should be replaced by "follow"). This example is to be used when counseling is needed in a marriage where the one abuses the other. For Christian husbands this means, continues Peter, that they must live with their wives "according to knowledge," namely the knowledge that they are not their slaves but joint heirs with them of the grace of life, acknowledging them as (literally translated) "the weaker vessel, namely female."

The word vessel is in Greek a word for body, but sometimes also rendered as woman. Since the word female is added it should here be taken as body. (6) Then Peter says the same as Paul in Ephesians 5:28, "Husbands should love their wives as their own bodies," because the husband's wife is his own body, according to the words in Genesis 2, "and the two shall become one." This points to their equality. Yet, they are also different in position. This is expressed by the words "weaker, namely female." Often the word weaker is explained as meaning weaker in either physical, mental or psychological respect. However, this is just an assumption which even in several respects is in conflict with the facts of life. It is better, since Peter in several ways uses the same argumentation as Paul, also here to expect a reasoning like that of Paul. The woman is called the weaker one because she, as female, was created after man had been created, and therefore according to God's creation-order is the follower in God's service, and man the leader. (The same can be said about the relation between parents and children, namely that children, as coming from and after their parents, are the weaker ones. This would hold true, also when e.g. a 17-year-old boy has grown mentally and physically stronger than his mother and father. Also, the fact that "weaker," refers to a different status among basically equal positions is borne out by the use of this word in 1 Corinthians 12:22-25. The word "inferior" in verse 24 is not a literal translation and should be read in the context as "so-called inferior.")

(III) 1 Corinthians 11:3-16

A main difficulty is in verse 10, where Paul says that a woman ought to have "exousia" on her head because of the angels. A look in a Greek concordance shows that Paul uses the word "exousia," together with the related words "exousiasthai" and "exestin," repeatedly in the previous chapters.

The Corinthians have approached Paul with questions concerning our Christian freedom, and in answering these questions Paul makes use of the word "exousia," of which the original and most common meaning is, to have the freedom or the authority to do something, or to be licensed to do something. (7) In chapter 7:4 the word appears in connection with the relation between husbands and wives, and is translated by the RSV as meaning, to rule. This would mean that the woman may rule her husband's body. This cannot be correct, for it would bring Paul in our verse in conflict with what he writes in 1 Timothy 2:12, where Paul does not permit women to rule over men. It does mean that none of the two has the freedom or authority to do with his or her own body what he or she wants, because their bodies belong to each other.

In chapters 8-10 the question is dealt with whether Christians have the exousia to eat food which has been offered to idols. In chapter 10 Paul denies that freedom if it would mean taking part in heathen worship services in their temples; but further he stresses in chapter 8 that our Christian exousia or freedom is to do it, unless it would appear to be a stumblingblock to others. He illustrates this in chapter 9 with his own exousia or freedom as an apostle to accept remuneration and to be married, and adds that he does not make use of his exousia but rather makes himself a slave if otherwise offense would be given to the preaching of the gospel. At the end of chapter 10 he sums this up in a conclusion (verses 31-33), "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense

to Jews or to Greeks or to the Church of God, just as I try to please all men in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved."

It is **ON THE BASIS OF THIS CONCLUSION** that Paul continues in chapter 11 with the way in which this exousia, this freedom or authority to do certain things, is used in Corinth when both men and women prophesy (11:3-16), and when the members come together for the Lord's Supper celebrations (11:17-33). The second part deals with social discrimination which must be abolished, the first part deals with sexual differences which must be recognized in order that no contentions may arise in this respect.

Now coming to verse 10, there is no reason why the word exousia should not be understood in the same way as it has been used by Paul in the previous chapters. A woman ought to have a license or authority or freedom (to do something) on her head, because of the angels. Her exousia is apparently different from that of the men, for Paul stresses in this chapter that a man may only pray or prophesy with his head uncovered, while a woman may only do it with her head covered. The having of different exousia's or, e.g., licenses for doing the same thing is not so strange. We know of the same in connection with driver's licenses. An adult driver must show a valid driver's license to the police officers, while a 15 year old must show a learners permit. If they show the wrong license, they are sent off the road, a shameful situation.

"That is why a woman ought to have an exousia on her head, because of the angels," says Paul. Why because of the angels? The Bible tells us in Hebrews 1:14 that the angels are "ministering spirits sent forth to serve" the believers. They are God's messengers who take God's messages to men (Hebr. 2:2, Gal. 3:19, and several Old — and New Testament — stories about angels appearing to people). This means that when someone prophesies a revelation coming directly from God, this message is brought by the service of angels. The Bible also says that our prayers are taken to God by the service of angels (Revelation 8:4). Just like police officers must see the correct license in order to accept a driver on the road, so the angels must see the correct license of those who pray or prophesy. (8)

How must a woman show that she has the exousia, the freedom or authority, the correct license, to pray and prophesy? By showing the proof of being licensed, just like a driver must show the proof by means of a document which identifies him or her, with picture and all. A woman must show to the angels that she is a woman who knows her place as a woman. How? In the way her head is covered; not like the head of a man, in the unisex way, but (of course in accordance with local customs which may differ) like the head of a woman. That's HER license. HER proof of freedom or authority to prophesy and to pray. That's HER privilege and pride.

Some commentaries admit that going by the rules of Greek grammar it is strange to call the exousia on the woman's head a sign of man's authority over her, instead of a sign of her authority. (9) Yet almost all commentaries explain it that way, because of their wrong preconceived idea of what it means that man is the head of woman (see above, (1) Ephesians 5:21-33).

The conclusion must be, from simply reading this verse in the context of Paul's writing about our Christian freedom, that verse 10 speaks about Christian freedom of the woman to pray and to prophesy, provided that she does it **AS a woman**, not abusing her Christian freedom by now also acting and showing herself as if she would be a man. This would be unnatural, that someone born as a woman (natural refers to birth) would act as if she is not a woman but a man. Anyone can judge that for him- or herself, especially a Christian who believes that God created man male and female, and that Christ has come to restore us again into the original position for which we had been created in the beginning.

Of course, the same applies to the men. They must show that they pray and prophesy **AS men**. The difference between the sexes is a creation-ordinance which God wants to be recognized for all times (see Deut. 22:5). Now the question arises why

this is shown in the custom of man uncovering his head (resp. having short hair), and women covering her head (resp. having long hair). This teaching of nature goes back to the ordinances of the Creator of nature. Man, says Paul in verse 7, is the glory (manifestation, weight, cf. Hebrew "kabood") of God. God gave His commands directly to Adam, and thus brought His weight directly to bear on the man, without anything in between. In the New Testament Christ is called the head of the man, because He has become the Mediator between God and man and thus, as the second Adam, has become the head of every man, while the head of Christ is God. But the woman, Paul continues in verse 7, is the glory of man. God spoke His commands via Adam also to Eve, and God's fellowship is reflected and brought to bear on Eve via Adam. In other words, the man has received his place between God and the woman. Now the fact that there was nothing between God and Adam when God communicated His will to him is made visible in the custom that when a man responds to God in prayer his head is uncovered; there is nothing between God and his head, and in this way he shows that he is a man, and not a woman. On the other hand, the fact that God when giving His commands communicated with Eve via Adam is made visible in the way her head is covered by something in between, a way in which she shows that she is a woman, and not a man.

Both the man and the woman have been created in the image of God, but there is a difference which must be recognized, namely that man is the glory of God, and woman the glory of man. In the beginning both shared equally in the work of praying and prophesying and having dominion over God's creation works, as priests and prophets and kings; but man as being the first going ahead, and the woman as woman following him, and not each of them independently of each other (cf. verse 11). Thus it should remain, for as woman was made from man (therefore second), so man is now born of woman (therefore yet equal) (cf. verse 12).

(IV) 1 Corinthians 14

On the basis of his conclusion in chapter 10:31-33 Paul has instructed the congregation in chapter 11 that everyone in the Church, in spite of sexual and social differences, must know his or her own place in the Church, which must be discerned as being a body (11:29).

In chapter 12 Paul works this picture of the Church as a body out by showing that, although there are many and diverse gifts among the members, so that indeed there are differences among the members, yet all these different gifts are "inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as He wills" (12:11).

Thus Paul again stresses that all members are equal, and yet that there are differences as well. But then, in chapter 13, he shows the most excellent way of love, on which way all are bound together, and in which way of love each member must take the place assigned to him or her, and use the gifts assigned to him or her. Not only this, but Paul also shows in chapter 14, that the gift of prophecy is the one most to be desired, because verse 3, "he who prophecies speaks to men for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation," and edifies the Church (vs. 4) also by giving certain revelations to the Church (vs. 6, 26, 30).

When we want to find out the character of God's speaking through prophecies we must go back to how it was in the beginning. Adam and Eve had been created in the image of God, and as such were priests and prophets and kings. As kings they had dominion over all of creation, and as priests they dedicated themselves completely to the LORD. Whenever Adam and Eve spoke, their words reflected the revealed will of God. When e.g. God had told Adam how He had made Eve from his body, Adam prophetically interpreted this in the first wedding-song. And when the serpent asked Eve what God had said about the trees in the garden, Eve passed on the Word of God, that we may eat of the fruit of the trees, except from the one in the midst of the garden.

After the fall however the situation changed, and so we find that prophecy has more

and more become the work of certain privileged persons, to whom God reveals His will, and who pass on the Word of God which has been entrusted to them to others. Basically two kinds of prophets can be distinguished in the Old Testament. On the one hand there are those who prophesy in ecstasy; they are as it were completely overpowered by the Spirit of God, and speak with ecstatic utterances which they have not under control of their own mind. An example of this we find in the story of Saul who met such a band of ecstatic prophets and by the power of the Spirit was forced to join them. This kind of prophecy was also found among the heathen, whose prophets were possessed by evil spirits.

More common however was the prophet to whom the Lord revealed His will in ways by which the own personality and mind of the prophet remained intact so that he passed on the Word of God in his own language and style of speaking. Moses was the greatest prophet of the Old Testament because God spoke to him face to face; others received the Word of God from angels, in dreams, or in visions, while also a means of knowing the will of God was by casting the lot.

Sometimes such prophecy was of a predicting nature, other times it consisted of interpreting the deeds or words of the Lord in the past or in the present. Part of the prophet's work was also the application of the Word and will of God to the special situation in which either the Church as a whole, or certain members of the Church, found themselves; then this prophecy was of a judging or an encouraging or an admonishing nature.

On the Pentecostal day Christ poured out His Holy Spirit over the whole Church, both men and women.

Yet, although since then the office of prophet has become the office of all the believers, the time of the early Christian Church was still a time of transition. The New Testament like we have it today was not written yet, and God wanted the Church to grow very fast, also in many countries outside of Palestine. For that reason there were, besides the Apostles who had a very special function in this respect, also prophets who prophesied with a special gift or charisma. They could be compared with those prophets in the time of the Old Testament, who received special revelations of God concerning certain things or situations, and among whom there were who were so gripped by the Spirit that they with ecstatic minds played musical instruments and uttered strange sounds.

Thus it was also in Corinth. Although all the believers were prophets by virtue of sharing Christ's anointment with the Spirit, by which they had been restored in the original prophetic office of Adam and Eve in Paradise, they could also strive to receive the special gifts of speaking in tongues, which could be converted into prophecy by means of the gift of interpretation of tongues, or, what Paul even recommended as most desirable, the special gift of prophecy itself. Those who had this special gift received revelations of God which, when they passed them on to the others in the congregation, served "for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation." This way they edified the Church and, if there would be unbelievers present, could convict them, call them to account for their unbelief, disclose the secrets of their hearts, and, by the grace of God, bring them so far that they would join in worshipping God. (vs. 3, 4, 24, 25).

Not only in Corinth were there such special prophets. We read in Acts 21 that the four daughters of the deacon and evangelist Philip practised this gift, and that there was a certain Agabus who prophesied that Paul would be arrested if he would go to Jerusalem.

We also read how this kind of prophecy, which as we have seen was just a particular form of the prophetic office of all the believers, and therefore could and should be desired by all the members of the Church, men and women alike, functioned in the election of special office-bearers. In Acts 9 and 22 we read that in Damascus a certain Ananias in a vision was charged by the Lord to go to Saul, and that on the basis of this prophetic vision he informed Saul of his appointment by God to

become His apostle among the gentiles. In Acts 13 we are told that there were some prophets in the Church at Antioch to whom the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." "Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off."

In Acts 16:1-3 we read about Timothy in Lystra, who "was well spoken of by the brethren at Lystra and Iconium," so that as a result Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him in his mission-work. Although this recommendation of Timothy for the mission-work is not called prophecy here, Paul himself reminds Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:18 that he must perform his office "in accordance with the prophetic utterances which pointed to you." (10)

In all these examples it appears that the election of special office-bearers consisted of an appointment to their respective offices, preceded by a prophetic pointing out of the persons to be appointed for these offices! This prophetic pointing out of the persons to be appointed was as well done by prophecies based on special revelations given by God, as by a form of prophecy which consisted of applying the Word of God in the way of recommending a person for office, in accordance with the revealed Word of God concerning the requirements for a special office in God's Church.

To sum it up, we can say on the basis of what the Scriptures say about the character of prophecy, that prophecy is the privilege of all the believers, both men and women, and that therefore all the members of the Church, again both men and women, also ought to desire that special gift of prophecy which consisted of receiving special revelations from God to be passed on to the congregation. Further, that this special gift of prophecy had to serve the building up and edification of the Church, and therefore was not restricted to a practice at home and in private only, but rather should receive its legitimate place in the midst of the congregation, in its official meetings.

Now, as far as we today are concerned, we have received the complete revelation of God in the books of the Old and New Testament. For this reason we are not called anymore to strive for the special gift of prophecy as this was found in Corinth and other Churches in these early days of the Christian Church. We are called to desire, and to strive after, such a knowledge of the BIBLE that we can all prophesy for the edification of the Church, and the conviction and conversion of those who are outside.

All of us, without any form of discrimination. For our God is not a God of confusion, a God who at one place in the Bible says that all may prophesy and at another place takes this back again, but our God is a God of harmony, of the peace of the Church which Christ has brought about by his sacrifice for our sins on the cross.

The fact that someone prophesies does not take away the responsibility of the hearers; on the contrary, it is their responsibility, as Paul says it somewhere else, in 1 Thess 5:21, to test everything which is prophesied and then to hold fast what is good. That's why Paul says in verse 29 that the others who are listening must "weigh what is said"; they must carefully judge it.

This judging is in the first place necessary because there could also be false prophets in the Church. We refer to the warnings in 2 Corinthians 11:4, Galatians 1:6, Colossians 2:18, 2 Thessalonians 2:2, 1 Timothy 4:1, 2 Timothy 3:13, Titus 1:10, 2 Peter 2:1, and 1 John 4:1. In the light of all these warnings it is no wonder that Paul instructs the Corinthians "to weigh what is said" by those who prophesy in the Church.

But there is also a second reason for this. Even when, after testing the prophecies by the revealed Word of God, the teaching of salvation which they had received already, they may conclude that the prophecy indeed comes from God Himself, the question arises how they must act on this prophecy. We have a good example of this in Acts 11:27-30. The prophet Agabus "foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world." This prophecy was apparently discussed in the Church at Antioch where this prophecy was given, and then we read that "the

disciples determined . . . to send relief to the brethren who lived in Judea." So they judged this prophecy on the question what to do with it, how to act on it.

A similar example we find in Acts 21:10-14. The same prophet Agabus prophesied that the Jews at Jerusalem would arrest Paul and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. A serious discussion took place among those who heard this to the extent that they begged Paul not to go to Jerusalem, till they agreed with Paul's decision that he would go to Jerusalem anyway. So again, this prophecy was discussed and judged on the question, how to act on it.

The purpose of the prophecies which God gave the prophets in order that they would pass them on to the Church is, says Paul in verse 31, "that all may learn and all be encouraged." But of course this means and implies that they must practise what they have learned and act on the encouragement which they have received. Decisions must be made, a course of action established, and the decisions executed. We should e.g. think of the prophecies which pointed to certain men who should be appointed as special office-bearers in the Church: Paul, Barnabas, Timothy. These prophecies required that decisions would be made; decisions of accepting them as coming from God, and then also decisions concerning how to go about it, and how to implement and execute.

This brings us to the question what kind of character this judging of prophecies has, or, to put it differently, with what kind of authority this judging of prophecies takes place.

In verse 32 Paul writes that "the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets." In chapter 12 Paul has made it clear that also the prophecies are inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. However, it is impossible that now in our text Paul would mean to say that the Holy Spirit of God would be subject to prophets; it is just the other way around, the prophets are subject to the Holy Spirit of God. Thus the spirits of prophets must mean something else than the Holy Spirit of God.

In chapter 11 we have seen that both men and women who pray and prophesy must show their authority or license to pray and prophesy to the angels. The angels, says Hebrew 1:14, are "all ministering spirits sent forth to serve" the believers. They take their prayers to God, and bring God's messages to them. Apparently the spirits of prophets who are subject to prophets are the angels, who as ministering spirits serve the believers and thus are placed below them. Although, as Hebrews 2 further explains on the basis of Psalm 8, God made man, because of sin, for a little while lower than the angels, yet in Christ everything is subjected under His feet, the angels included. Paul had already expressed the same thought earlier in his epistle, in chapter 6:3, where he asked the Corinthians the question: "Do you not know that we are to judge angels?"

The prophets must judge whether the angels, the spirits from whom they receive their revelations, indeed are angels of God, and not angels of Satan. Once the prophets have made their prophecies known to the Church, the others must carefully weigh and judge what is said, again as to the question whether the spirits behind these prophecies are angels of God or angels of Satan, and then also as to the question how further to act on them.

Now, it is in this context that Paul sees the need to underline what is the rule in all the Churches of the saints, namely that "the women should keep silence in the Churches." This is a rule, says Paul, which has been given by God Himself, in His law. From other places in Paul's epistles it is quite clear to what the apostle refers here. It is the law of God from the beginning, that man was made first, as the head, and therefore the glory of God, to whom God directly spoke His Word; while woman, being made after and from the man, is the glory of man, to whom God spoke His Word via, and in connection with the man. That's why Paul here says to those women in Corinth who apparently wanted to act as if they were men: "What! Did the Word of God originate with you, or has it reached you just by yourselves." this means, apart from the men, in isolation from them? (11)

The answer to this question is of course, no. God first spoke His Word to Adam, and Adam taught Eve the will of God, as her head. Eve did not teach Adam, but Adam taught Eve. And when after the fall God also spoke to Eve. He did not do so by addressing her apart from Adam, but in connection with him. It was exactly Eve's sin that she judged the words of the fallen angel Satan instead of giving first Adam the opportunity to give his judgment, and thus let herself be deceived, and then even taught Adam to follow her wrong judgment.

It is on the basis of these things, of what the law says in Genesis 2 and 3, that Paul in 1 Timothy 2:12 says about the position of women in the Church: "I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor." It is for these reasons that Paul also says in our text that the woman should keep silence in the Churches.

Of course Paul is not taking back here what he has said in 1 Cor 11, that also woman may prophesy in Church provided that they do it AS women, properly licensed as such. What Paul forbids here is not prophesying, but teaching; and then specifically teaching in such a way that it has a decisive character, so that by this teaching men would be ruled by women, because they would have to subject themselves to her teaching as authoritative.

Now why does Paul bring up this matter of women not being allowed to teach in the Church and thus ruling over men, while he first has allowed them to pray and prophesy in the Church? The reason for this is, that now he began to speak about JUDGING of prophecy. And as we have seen, this judging has the same character as teaching with authority; decisions are to be made; angels must be judged, whether they are spirits sent by God or angels of Satan; some prophets, among whom men, must be silenced as false prophets on the basis of the sound doctrine or teaching of the gospel; decisions must be made concerning what some people, men among them, ought to do; in matters of prophecy concerning men who are pointed out as possible office-bearers, decisions concerning these men must be taken, they must be ordained and sent out with a specific charge.

It is clear, that if also the women in the Church would take part in this decision-making, they would also judge over angels; and that while Eve had sinned when she not only made the wrong judgment, but did not leave the judgment up to Adam as the head; and it is also clear that if women in the Church would take part in this decision-making, they in that way would be judging and teaching and ruling men in the congregation. Well, says Paul, that kind of speaking in the Church would be shameful for a woman. For in that way she would abandon her place as a woman, as the glory of man, and try to act like a man, teaching him the will of God and ruling over him by means of that teaching. For then she would teach men the Word of God with the same authority, as Adam was called to do to Eve; as if the woman was the first created and addressed by God, and not the man. But Eve was to learn from Adam what is the will of God concerning decisions to be made, and therefore the married women in the church should ask their own husbands what they want to know about decisions to be made concerning angels and men.

Yes, also concerning men who had been pointed out as possible office-bearers by prophecies uttered by women. Women may prophesy. Paul has made this very clear in 1 Cor. 11. This means in this respect that they also may point out as prophets, that is on the basis of the revealed Word of God, which men should become office-bearers in the Church. It does not really make any difference whether they do this by word of recommendation only or also by vote, but taking part in the discussion about the judging of these prophecies which leads to the definite decision about it, that's forbidden. Forbidden, not just by Paul, or by the Church-Order, but by God Himself. Forbidden in the Church today, because it was not meant to happen in the beginning either.

In the beginning there was no confusion, but harmony. And the glad message of

the gospel is, that God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever would believe in Him would not perish, but have everlasting life. The Son of God has come, to gather all those who believe in Him together in His Church. There, in the Church, He leads all things back again to how it was in the beginning. (12) There the curse of sin is taken away by the grace of God, the forgiving blood of Jesus Christ. Also the curse, that women's desire has become to rule over men, with the consequence that men began to rule it over women. In the Church men and women have received their own place again. Co-heirs of everlasting life, yet each having their own place and calling in the Will or Covenant of God. That's the message of the gospel which sets men and women free. Here in the Church, and for all eternity.

Notes

- (1) For this exegesis of Genesis 3:16, cf. W. H. Gispen, *Genesis* (in *Commentaar op het Oude Testament*), and the *Westminster Theological Journal*, Vol. 37, No. 3, of Spring 1975, Article on "What is the Women's desire?" by Susan T. Foh, p. 376.
- (2) cf. W. H. Gispen, *Numeri*, Vol. I, p. 90: "Ook moeten wij bedenken, dat de onschuldige vrouw door deze wet van de jaloezheid beveiligd werd tegen haar al te jaloezse man."
- (3) Gerhard Kittel, *Theologisches Woerterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, s.v. "hypotassoo" (translated by us from the German language).
- (4) *Christianity Today* of February 20, 1981, article "The 'Head' of the Epistles," by Berkeley and Alvera Mickelsen. Cf. Gerhard Kittel, o.c., s.v. "kephale."
- (5) Especially for the exegesis of 1 Peter 3:1-8 (but also for other parts of our report) we are indebted to Rev. A. Hordijk's book, *Een hulp die bij hem past*, Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, Goes, 1968.
- (6) See also W. Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary*, on 1 Thessalonians 4:4.
- (7) Gerhard Kittel, o.c., s.v. "exousia."
- (8) Cf. DeBoor, *Wuppertaler Studienbibel*, 1 Corinthians 11:10, page 182.
- (9) E.g. *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*: Dr. Jos Keulers, *De Brieven van Paulus*. See especially Dr. F. W. Grosheide's commentary on this verse, who tries to mix the two meanings of freedom and subjection.
- (10) Cf. W. Hendriksen, 1. 2 Timothy and Titus (in *N.T. Commentary*) p. 85.
- (11) Most commentaries apply these words to the Church at Corinth, however, without showing grounds for this in the text. Our exegesis of these words fits in the context as again a reference by Paul to the place of woman after man.
- (12) For this reason, and because the teaching with authority concerning God's Word is meant, the question whether men may be governed by a Queen or taught at schools or universities by woman-teachers or professors is irrelevant.

C. Conclusions

On the basis of part B of our report we now add the conclusions h-j to those mentioned at the end of part A. These conclusions read as follows:

- a. In the Genesis 1 and 2 account, although both are involved, man stands out as the leading figure in fulfilling the creation mandate and the woman is presented as the one who helps, supports and makes it possible for him to meet his objectives. She must look to him for leadership; he must look to her for support.
- b. Although there is a functional and chronological difference between man and woman, they are of equal worth since both male and female are made in the image of God.
- c. As the result of the Fall, the harmonious relationship between man and woman is destroyed in the curse that the husband shall rule.
- d. In the Old Testament this rulership of husband (man) over wife (woman) is evident in marriage and in the Church, but from the beginning this was not so.
- e. Our Lord Jesus upholds the worth and the dignity of the woman during His entire ministry on earth, as opposed to the established demeaning tradition upheld by the scribes and Pharisees.
- f. As a result of our Lord's redemptive work all racial, social and sexual distinctions,

as they bear on a believer's standing with God, are eliminated. All believers are equal before the Lord.

- g. In the New Testament there is, however, a clear prohibition on woman being involved in a ruling or official teaching capacity in the Church. This prohibition does not rest on Pauline prejudices but on the creation account of Genesis 1-3.
- h. It is clear from the Scriptures that both men and women are exhorted to prophesy since both share equally in the anointment of Christ with the Holy Spirit; however, in doing so the differences between them as men and women by virtue of God's creation ordinance must be acknowledged. (cf. conclusion f).
- i. Although the Scriptures do not provide a detailed account of voting as we know it today, it is clear from the Scriptures that the part of the election of special office-bearers which consists of pointing to men who according to Scriptures are deemed fit for special office in the Church, belongs to the prophetic task to which both men and women in the Church are called. (cf. Acts 9:15, 16 and Acts 22: 14, 15, Acts 13:1-3, Acts 16:1-3 and 1 Timothy 1:18).
- j. It is also clear from the Scriptures that the part of the election of special office-bearers which consists of discussing the received recommendations and taking the relevant decisions concerning the ordination of those who have been elected, belongs to the official task of governing the Church which exclusively has been entrusted to men, chosen and ordained for this task. (cf. conclusion g).

II CHURCH HISTORY

A. General Remarks.

The Church History part of the Committee Report is in our opinion somewhat one-sided. More positive things could have been said about the position of women in the early Church. H. Bavinck in *De Vrouw in de hedendaagsche maatschappij*, Kok, Kampen, 1918, twice refers to Mausbach *Die Stellung der Frau in Menschheitsleben*, Munchen-Gladbach, 1906, for his statement that women "hier en daar soms met de mannen aan die (bisschops) verkiezing (deelnamen)" (here and there the women partook of the election of the bishops). In general, women in the early Church displayed great activity, f.i. as deaconesses and in other functions, assisted in baptisms and in the preaching and teaching of the gospel to those outside. This was one of the reasons the adversaries despised Christianity as the "religio pauperum and mulierum" (a religion of the poor and the women) *Evangelisches Kirchen Lexikon*, I 1346). The forces which pushed the women into the background and channeled their energy and charisms into the monasteries, were Asceticism, Heresy, and Hierarchy (Bavinck, page 36, 138). For many centuries however, women seem to have occupied in the women's orders high positions of authority also over priests and monks: "The right of abbesses to rule was not questioned until the time of the Renaissance, when there was a return to a Greco-Roman culture in which women had had a lower status than in Christian times" ("The Lady was a Bishop." Joan Morris, Macmillan 1973). The Reformation gave back to women a place of dignity as wife and mother, and initially involved her again in the work of the Church as deaconesses (Articles of Wesel, 1568). Luther went so far as to allow women even to preach in the emergency when men would not be available. (*evang. Kirchen Lexikon*, I 1348). In general however the Reformation did not succeed in transcending the view of women which it inherited from the Middle Ages. The Enlightenment changed the thinking of the world about the position of women, with eventual consequences for the Churches which followed the trend by granting women passive and active voting rights. Understandably, the more liberal Churches were the first to do so. Bavinck points out that we have to do here with an irreversable historical development (Women Emancipation Movement), in which are Biblical and acceptable elements which must not be rejected on the ground of the unbiblical and revolutionary stimulants which the movement received from apostate philosophies. By comparison we could think of the definite parallels between Reformation and

Humanism in the 16th Century, in spite of the fundamental differences.

B. Voting Rights

The Reformation returned to the principles of the early Church re the rights of the Congregation to choose its own office-bearers. Calvin refers to Cyprian to state that in that time, just like in N.T. times, "the call of a minister is lawful according to the Word of God, when those who seemed fit are created by the consent and approval of the people; moreover that pastors ought to preside over the election in order that the multitude may not go wrong either through fickleness, through evil intention or through disorder." According to Cyprian, the proof of a bishop's worth and fitness is by public decision and testimony. (Institutes, IV, Chapter III:15). In the early Church no one was to be thrust into office who was not acceptable to all. The people had to approve of the office-bearer by their acclamation. The task of the clergy was to repress, if need be, the multitude's foolish desires. It could therefore happen that the clergy first elected the office-bearer they deemed fit; then the magistrate, senate and leading citizens ratified the election. "Then they brought the matter to the people, who, *although not bound by the previous decisions*, nevertheless could not raise a tumult." Neglecting the right and freedom of the people to choose their office-bearers renders an election and appointment void and invalid (Institutes, IV, Chapter III.:11, 12.) (Calvin does not indicate whether women participated in the election. On the one hand it is hard to imagine that women were absent when candidates were presented to "all the people" for their approval; on the other hand, Calvin's reference to the Roman consuls who convened the assemblies of the people to receive the votes for creating new magistrates and only acted as moderators of the people in the election, may indicate that women were excluded from the election in the Church. Given the position of women in ancient Greece and Rome, it is highly unlikely that they were allowed to participate in the election assemblies.) Also the early Church Orders after the Reformation, starting with the Articles of Wesel (1568), are silent about the participation of women. Only in Art. 5 Ch. II, we may read a reference to the subject of the vote: "op die plaatsen echter waar het volk minder geschikt zal wezen om te kiezen, hetzij wegens het klein getal der gelovigen, hetzij wegens het gebrek aan geleerde en vrome *mannen* . . ." (transl.: "at those places however where the people will be less suitable to choose, either on account of their small number of believers, or on account of lack of learned and pious men . . .").

H. Bouwman, *Gereformeerd Kerkrecht*, tells us that A. Lasco (1599-1653) definitely excluded women from the vote while in England. Voetius did the same. He had no high regard of women anyway (*De dienst van de vrouw in de Kerk*, K. Deddens, page 57). By Voetius' authority the Church Political course was set for the following centuries. In the light of the general view of the position of women in society the exclusion of women from the vote must have been acceptable to all parties. It is the change of this view in society since the previous century which caused the Churches to reconsider its principles and practices. So far the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands with which the Canadian Reformed Churches are in correspondence, have resisted a change in voting practice.

C. Recent developments in the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands.

1. "Rapport inzake de materie van het VROUWENKIESRECHT nader gezien vanuit de H. Schrift- aan de Generale Synode van de Gereformeerde Kerken — Kampen 1975."

We quote from page 25: "Hebben de ambtsdragers het recht, om by de verkiezing van ambtsdragers ook een beroep te doen op de medewerking van de vrouwelijke belijdende leden? Er is vroeg en laat bij herhaling op gewezen, dat de Schrift op deze vraag geen antwoord geeft met een uitdrukkelijk verbod of voorschrift. We moeten hier concluderenderwijs te werk gaan. Daarbij is allereerst te letten op de aard van de medewerking van de zijde van de gemeente bij deze aanstelling. Welnu,

dan blijkt dat die medewerking wordt gevraagd bij en verleend aan *een deel van het leiding geven aan de gemeente*. Maar zulk leiding geven is aan de vrouw ontzegd krachtens Gods scheppingsordinatie." (Do the office-bearers have the right, when office-bearers are to be elected, also to call on the cooperation of the female communicant members? It has repeatedly been pointed out, early and late, that Scripture gives no answer to this question with an express interdiction or instruction. We have to go here by way of inference. Then first of all we have to observe the nature of the cooperation on the part of the congregation in this matter (of appointing office-bearers). Well then, it appears that this cooperation is requested for and rendered to a part of leading the congregation. But such leading is denied to the woman by virtue of God's creation ordinance).

Our Study Committee in its Report for Synod Smithville came basically to the same conclusion, page 31, conclusion 2 and 4: "... involved in the act of governing." Synod Kampen 1975 made no decision.

At Synod Groningen 1978 there was a majority report and a minority report.

2. Majority Report

- a. Notices that the debate in the Churches was dominated by the question whether voting is an act of governing or simply an act of giving an advice to the Church council. As background is seen a certain theological construction of which elements are found already in Voetius, but which mainly has been developed by A. Kuyper. Meant is the well-known distinction between a general office of the believers and a special office of the believers and the division of this office into the office of priest, prophet and king. Appointing office-bearers is seen as belonging to the ruling authority of the Church. Casting the vote is exercising ruling authority in the general office of all believers as kings. Women shall not rule in the Church. The report analyzes this theological construction and concludes that it is unscriptural and a deviation from the Scriptural notions of the Reformers concerning the nature of governing in the Church. Only Christ rules through his Word and Spirit.
- b. According to the Report, God is the one who calls the office-bearers and does this through the congregation. Christ is the one who gives the office-bearers. The congregation does nothing but recognizing the gifts which the Lord gives to certain brothers in order to have them appointed to the office. In the vote the congregation recognizes this action of the Lord. In the vote the congregation does not rule or exercise authority, but in fact implicitly declares itself willing to submit itself to the leadership of those whom it recognizes as given by the Lord.
- c. The Scriptural status of women is to follow and not to lead. 1 Cor 14 prohibits her to speak in the congregation, but this is meant in the sense of teaching with authority or enter into discussion with the prophets or interrupt them. The character of being silent must be understood in the light of texts like Luke 14:14; Acts 21:18; 21:14; 22:2.

Casting a vote is "speaking" of an entirely different nature. The women do not speak in that case to the congregation, but *together* with the other members of the congregation, joining her voice to the voice of all, like in prayer, or the submission of names or the approbation. The male members do not exercise authority either when they cast the vote. Voting is that the congregation as a whole expresses its opinion and insight regarding the gifts Christ has given to some brothers whom He wants to see installed in office to serve Him and the congregation.

Voting is not act of exercising authority or partaking of the government of the Church.

3. Minority Report.

According to the Minority Report the crucial question is not: "does the prohibition to speak (1 Cor 14) also apply to the act of voting by women?" but the question:

“Is casting a decisive vote in accordance with the status of women to be submissive?” To cast a decisive vote is a decision-making act. This is in conflict with the status of women.

The Minority Report agrees with the conclusion of Synod Arnhem 1930, but rejects with the Majority Report Arnhem’s use of the theological construction concerning “general governing power” and “special governing power” (“algemene regeermacht” en bijzondere regeermacht”).

4. Decision Groningen 1978. Acts 287.

In the vote the congregation gives its opinion, but this act of giving its opinion is of binding character as regards the Church council. It is not in accordance with the position of submissiveness of women to credit them with an independent decisive vote.

(N.B. Synod rejected with the Majority Report the Kuyperian construction which had been used by Synod Arnhem 1930, namely the above mentioned distinctions in the office of the believers and the nature of the governing power in the Church.)

5. Submission Classis Grootegast of Synod Groningen 1978.

This submission played a role in the discussions at Synod, Acts, Art. 277. According to Classis the submissive position of women according to the Scripture is the decisive factor in the matter. The meaning of this Scriptural notion is that women should not act independently. For this would break the splendid marriage-harmony. In a good marriage the insights and the voice of the wife will reach the Church council via the voice of the husband. This implies that she should not submit names for the nomination either, nor approach Council independently if, in the context of the approbation, she would have objections against elected brothers. This does not exclude the eventuality that women have to approach Council independently, namely, if they are single (widows, unmarried women), or in case the husbands refuse to do their duty. These however are exceptional cases, and a rule shall not be based on the exceptions.

D. Comment.

1. We take note of the fact that neither Synod Groningen, nor the Minority Report, nor the Submission of the Classis Gootegast, any longer support the position of Synod Arnhem regarding the nature of voting as an involvement in the act of governing the Church; nor do they support anymore the theological construction regarding a “general power to rule” and a “special power to rule.” In this respect the conclusions of the Majority Report seem to have been convincing.
2. The denial of women’s voting rights is now based on the view that voting is acting independently and a decisive acting which is binding on the consistory. This, though no longer considered to be participating in an act of governing the Church, must still be considered to be in conflict with the submissive position of women according to Scripture. The opponents of women’s voting rights seem to have fallen back on Arnhem 1930’s alternative position: “Is dat stemrecht van een leidinggevend, regeerend karakter, dan is het uit wat de apostel schrijft wel duidelijk, dat aan de vrouw zoodanig stemrecht niet toekomt. *En zelfs als het bloot adviserend ware, zou de toekenning aan, en de uitoefening van het stemrecht door de vrouw, nog in strijd komen met het sterke woord van de apostel in 1 Cor 14 en 1 Tim 2.*” (page 14/15) (If the vote is of a leading, governing nature, then it is clear enough from the apostle’s word, that the women have no right to such vote. *And even if the vote were of mere advisory character, granting the vote to women and casting the vote by them, would still be in conflict with the strong word of the apostle in 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2.*)
3. In our opinion, the abandoning of the position that voting is an act of governing, takes away an essential pillar on which, also historically, the denial of women’s voting rights rested. It takes away the objective criterium that voting is ruling, which of

course Scripture denies to women. In the place of this objective criterium, different criteria are introduced, like acting independently and decisive acting which binds the consistory, which criteria only according to subjective judgment can or cannot be considered to be in conflict with the Scriptural position of woman.

4. Classis Grootegast shows whereto this leads. We cannot deny this Classis consistency when it denies woman also the right to submit names for the nomination and the right to bring forward objections against the elected candidates. It is now completely left to the subjective (male) judgment to decide what is and what is not in accordance with the submissive position of women. An element of arbitrariness is introduced which leaves the field wide open to judge a score of other activities which (though not considered acts of ruling with authority) are nevertheless felt to be in conflict with a submissive position.
5. In our opinion, the position of Classis Grootegast is untenable in the light of its own statements. If it concedes that there are situations in which the woman is forced to act independently, namely when she is a widow or an unmarried woman, or when the husband refuses to do his duty in the calling of raising Scriptural objections against chosen candidates or in the matter of submitting names for the nomination. In such cases the voice of the woman must address the consistory directly, not via husband, for he is not there or he does not function. Here Classis acknowledges that women have wisdom and insight, given by the Holy Spirit, which must not remain unfruitful for the upbuilding of the congregation. However, the question is why Classis does not apply this to the matter of the vote as well. It is fine to state, as Classis does, that the insight of the woman reaches the consistory via the voice of the husband and that in that way her input is made fruitful for the Church, but the question which Classis ignores, is: what if the woman's insight does *not* reach the consistory f. i. via the voice of the husband in case the insight of the woman is not shared by the husband and he votes for a different candidate than the woman had suggested. In that case the insight of the woman apparently must cede for the insight of the husband. That means that in the name of the marriage harmony the voice of the woman is stifled and her God-given wisdom kept unfruitful for the upbuilding of the Church. The rule of Classis: "the insight of the woman reaches the consistory via the husband," only applies if there is harmony of insight and wisdom (in which case the woman's insight is superfluous anyway), or if the husband sacrifices his insight for his wife's. The conclusion seems inescapable: denying the vote to women is stifling the God-given wisdom of the women, in the name of the marriage harmony while there is no harmony on this point of insight. If the Spirit is given to women no less than to men, it is difficult to see how it can be in accordance with the will of the Spirit that the (possible) unwisdom of the man (in case he lets himself be motivated in the vote by sinful considerations) must prevail over the wisdom of the woman, only because he is the male and she the female in the marriage relationship. If voting is no longer to be considered an act of governing with authority but an expression of insight, the insight of women must be considered as of equal value as the insight of men. In that case denying women to express their insight by their vote, cannot be defended on good grounds.

III. CHURCH POLITY

- A. The basis for Reformed Church polity is laid down by Calvin in Book IV ch. 3.:1 of the Institutes: Christ alone shall rule and reign. We mentioned already in this report Calvin's emphasis on the right and freedom of the Church to choose its own office-bearers. The clergy acts more as moderators of the election-process than as rulers of the Church who decide who will be office-bearers and who will not. The responsibility of the clergy is to see to it that the rule of Christ and of His Word is asserted concerning the office-bearers to be appointed in the Church. The consistory cannot appoint an office-bearer who is not acceptable to the people. The consistory on the other hand cannot appoint an office-bearer who is not acceptable to the consistory on scriptural grounds. Office-bearers can only be appointed by

the combined actions of people and consistory. In case of conflict the major assemblies would decide. (Wesel).

These principles which Calvin derived from the relevant passages in the O.T. and the N.T., found their way into the Confessions. Art. 30 B.C.: "We believe that the ministers of God's Word, the elders and the deacons ought to be chosen to their respective offices by a lawful election by the Church, with calling upon the name of the Lord, and in that order which the Word of God teaches." The original version of Guido De Brès read: "... to be chosen to their respective offices by a lawful election with calling upon the name of the Lord *and with the votes of the Church*, and after that ought to be ordained in their offices by laying on of hands, as the Word of God teaches." The underlined words were left out of the adopted version of the Confession because it was believed that the precise regulation as to how the election should take place belonged rather in a Church Order than in a Confession (H. Bouwman: C. Vonk, *De Voorzeide Leer* III B page 163). The change was not meant to take the vote away from the people. The idea that the election by the congregation is essential is also reflected in the Heidelberg Catechism L.D. 31, in the words: "... or who are thereunto *appointed by the Church*." The congregation appoints them, that is of course the congregation together with its office-bearers. This Scriptural principle found its way in the Church Order, be it initially in minimal form. The Articles of Wesel show that there was great concern about the "unruly crowds." Therefore Wesel saw as ideal a cooperation between the clergy and magistrate in the election and appointing of office-bearers. Absence of Christian magistrates made Wesel decide for what it considered the second best method (II Art. 3): to "add the common consent of the congregation to the authority of the elders."

Acts Synod Emden 1571 Art. 13, 14: Office-bearers shall be chosen by the consistories and be presented to the congregation "dat zij ofte door stilzwijgen van de gemeente aangenomen worden, ofte so daar yet ware daarom die gemeente in de Verkiezinge niet verwilligen en wilde, dat binnen 15 dagen ongevaarlijk voortgebracht werde." ("that they either by the silence of the congregation are accepted, or that — if there were something why the congregation would not consent to the election — this within 15 days would be undauntedly brought forward.")

Some Churches which had the custom of having the office-bearers chosen by the common people, were allowed to continue such for the time being.

Synod Dordrecht 1574 confirms the decision of Emden concerning the election of ministers, "dat de consistory het recht der verkiezinge zal hebben." (Art. 27). (that the right to elect office-bearers shall lie with the consistory). It was decided however in Art. 28: "de consistory zal dubbel getal der ouderlingen en diakenen der gemeente voorstellen dewelke de helft daaruit zal kiezen. (The consistory shall present to the congregation a double number of the elders and the deacons from which the congregation shall choose half).

Dordrecht 1578 (I, 12): "Het recht der benoeming zal bij de kerkraad staan, alzo dat een enkel getal kan voorgesteld worden om aangenomen te worden door de gemeente, of een dubbel getal waaruit de helft verkozen worden zal." (The consistory shall have the right to appoint, thus that a single number can be presented to be accepted the congregation or a double number from which half shall be chosen).

Middelburg (I, 5) 1581: "Ende men zal niemand der gemeente tegen haren dank opdringen." (And one shall not thrust anyone on the congregation against her wish). Further, in Art. 15, the terminology is interesting: "... soo veel Ouderlingen alsser van noode zijn der Ghemeijnte voor te stellen, om van deselue (ten ware datter eenich beletsel voorviele) gheprobeert! ende goet ghekent, ende met openbaren ghebeden beuesticht te werden: Of een dobbel ghetal, om het half deel by der Ghemeijnte gheprobeert op deselue wijze inden Dienst te beuestighen." (... to

present to the congregation as many Elders as are needed, to be approbated and approved by her (unless any obstacle would present itself), and to install them in a public worship service: Or a double number, to install in the same manner the half approbated by the congregation).

Den Haag 1586: "... om van deselve geaprobeert en goedgekeurd zinde ofte een dubbel getal om het half deel bij der gemeente verkoren ..." (... being approbated and approved by the congregation, or a double number half of which chosen by the congregation ...)

Waalse Synode Dordrecht 1577: "Om het kerkvolk bij zijn recht en vrijheid te handhaven, zullen de benoemde en geexamineerde dienaren in de volle samenkomst der gemeente worden uitgeroepen, en gedurende vijftien dagen zullen zij die erkend zijn voor ten avondmaal gerechtigde leden der kerk worden opgewekt om oprecht en in goede consciëntie te verklaren of zij enige billijke oorzaak weten ter verhinderende dat de benoeming zou worden bekrachtigd en de benoemde personen hun als dienaars gegeven zouden worden, wat geschieden moet voor de kerkraad, aan het oordeel waarvan de redenen van bezwaar onderworpen zullen zijn. (appel op classis mogelijk). Als er geen bezwaren worden kenbaar gemaakt, zal het stiltzwingen van het volk gehouden worden voor goedkeuring."

Walloon Synod 1577: "In order to maintain the right and freedom of the Church-people, the appointed and examined ministers shall be announced in a plenary meeting of the congregation, and during fifteen days those who have the acknowledged right to partake of the Lord's Supper, shall be urged to declare, sincerely and in good conscience, whether they know any good cause to prevent the appointment from being confirmed and the appointed persons from being given to them as ministers, which (raising objections) must be done before the consistory to whose judgment the reasons of the objection shall be submitted. (appeal to classis is possible) If no objections are brought forward, the silence of the people shall be taken for approval."

B. Comment:

1. where the decisions of Emden, Dort 1578, Middelburg 1581 mention single nominations, the rule of the Waalse Synode will have applied: approval and approbation by the communicant members. This includes women.
2. In case of conflict between congregation and consistory, the major assembly shall decide: the objection from a female-communicant member is not inadmissible just because she is a woman. In other words, the women were equally involved in the call to approve and approbate.
3. The decision of the Waalse Synode also teaches that the act of approbating is a positive act of giving consent and receiving as office-bearers those presented to the congregation. Non-communicant members, children and outsiders were excluded from the approbation.
4. The approbation is seen in this decision as necessary and essential in order to do justice to the "right and freedom" of the congregation. This is the terminology of the Institutes. The approbation without which the election is nul and void (Institutes), was to be done by all who were entitled to partake of the Lord's Supper. This includes women.
5. Interesting is the terminology of Dort, Middelburg and Den Haag.

Dort 1578	: aannemen (accept)	
Middelburg 1586	: approberen en goedkeuren (approbate and approve)	(single number)
Den Haag 1586	: approberen en goedkeuren (approbate and approve)	
Dort	: verkoren (chosen)	

Middelburg	:approberen (approved)	(double number)
Den Haag	:verkoren (chosen)	

The terms "to approbate" and "to elect" are interchangeable. Dordt calls "election" what Middelburg calls "approbating," namely the half of the double number. This confirms the conclusion that the great principle was to maintain the freedom and right of the congregation to accept or to reject an office-bearer. The essential act of accepting or approbating an office-bearer could be done in two ways which were only alternative ways which were not seen as basically different from each other. The congregation could approbate (is: approve of and accept) a single nomination by its silence (not raising objections), or by acclamation (raising hands?), or whatever method, but the congregation could also approbate one of a double number presented to her, by way of voting, maybe also done in the way of raising hands. In that case a period of time was inserted before installing the office-bearer to give opportunity to those who voted against to bring forward lawful objections.

5. The question whether both ways of approbating were open to women as well, is difficult to answer. Approbation of the single number was open to women as well, according to the Waalse Synod (all communicant members). The approbation of the chosen candidate before his installation was also expected from the women. It would be logical if women also participated in approbating by way of voting from a double number. But this seems not to have been the case, generally, considering Bouwman's remark that A. Lasco in London excluded women from the vote. It is possible that the Churches in 1571 and following years followed his lead. If there was no uniform practice, this will have changed since Voetius decided the matter against women voting rights on the grounds that voting is an act of governing in the Church.

IV CONCLUSIONS

1. The great principle of the Reformation was that office-bearers cannot be forced upon the congregation against its will. The election of its office-bearers is the right and freedom of the congregation. The congregation's approbation therefore is essential. Voting from a double number is an alternative way of approbating. By letting the congregation vote, the congregation is not given increased "right and freedom," but a more convenient way of implementing its Scriptural "right and freedom." In the light of the Institutes and the early Church Orders, it is highly unlikely that in the early years of the Reformation the act of approbating or voting was seen as an act of governing in the Church. If the participation of the congregation in the election-process was restricted, it was out of fear of disorder and confusion by the unruly crowds, not out of uncertainty who actually should rule and govern in the Church. That was no question: Christ only, through His Word and Spirit. (This does not take away from the own responsibility of the office-bearers to see to it that in the election process everything is done according to the demands of Scripture, so that indeed Scripture rules).
2. The historical Church-political developments do not support the distinction the Study Report Smithville made on page 28 between approbation and election. The source of the objection is definitely fundamental: only communicant members were called to the act of approbation. (see Waalse Synode). The Committee's distinction seems to be based on the practice it experienced in our time. Historically and Church politically, however, the approbation was the essential positive act of accepting and receiving an office-bearer by the congregation. Non-communicant members and outsiders were excluded from this activity. Also the submission of names is an activity which is historically more significant than it has become in our present day practice on which the Study Committee seems to base its characterization. Submission of names, voting and approbation must be seen as a whole. In the submission of names the congregation says: these brothers we want as office-bearers. After the nomination of a double number by the consistory, the congregation nar-

rows its choice down by the vote, and the majority of the congregation says in the vote: this one we want as office-bearer. The vote is an extension of the submission of names. In the approbation of the chosen candidate the whole congregation confirms the choice of the majority, and says: this one we want and accept as office-bearer. The submission of names can be eliminated. The consistory can present a single or double number. The voting can be eliminated. But the approbation by the congregation remains essential.

The Advisory Committee at Synod Smithville has rightly shown that the Study Committee has not been able to define voting as an act of governing or involvement in governing. Indeed, the opinion that voting one way or the other is related to governing in the Church, has been abandoned in recent times also by the brotherhood in The Netherlands. If nevertheless voting is thought to be in conflict with the Submissive position of women, the consequence should be and indeed is drawn by Classis Grootegast — that submission of names and approbation likewise is unfitting women.

3. The principles of the Reformation have not been sufficiently implemented in the matter of voting rights, not even in the days of the Reformation itself. This can be explained in the light of the spirit of the times, which was unfavourable to a Scriptural view of the position of women. The view of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance prevailed. In other words: the time was simply not ripe for women voting rights. By way of comparison we could refer to a phenomenon like slavery. In the light of Scriptural principles regarding the relationship between man and his neighbour, slavery in which one man owns another man, cannot be seen as the ideal will of God. Yet, the N.T. times were not ripe for the abolition of slavery.

4. In this connection it may be helpful to consider the matter of women's voting rights from the viewpoint of Ethics. The definition of Ethics as given by K. Schilder is well-known among us: the theological discipline of the constant principles, the changing dispensations and the concrete actual situation for determining the will of God. (literally the definition reads: "Ethiek is de wetenschap van de constante rationes, de wisselende oeconomieën en de actueel concrete bepaaldheid der obligatie van de wil des mensen tot gehoorzaamheid aan Gods geopenbaarde wil).

The leading position of man in relationship to woman is a creation ordinance, and as such a constant ground, a constant principle which never changes. But this constant principle must be applied in the concrete actual situation of our times in today's world. We cannot ignore the developments in society in the course of the centuries. "What was possible in the past, is no longer possible today." (Dr. J. Douma, *Verantwoordelijk Handelen*, Ethisch Commentaar No. 7, page 49: "Wat vroeger kon, kan nu niet meer, zoals . . . slavernij." "Nieuwe omstandigheden laten een andere ethische houding toe." (page 50). (Different circumstances ask for a different ethical attitude). "Een vader huwelijkt zijn dochter niet meer uit zoals Paulus dat nog gewoon vindt in 1 Cor 7:38." (A father no longer marries off his daughter, like it was accepted practice in Paul's days). It was not considered unethical in O.T. and N.T. times to have slaves or to marry off one's daughter without her consent. In today's world no Church would still consider such practices ethically acceptable. We have to ask ourselves whether to deny women voting rights can still be considered in our time an ethically acceptable application of the "constant principle" of woman's secondary position as a creation ordinance. By putting this question we are not in the line of modern Situation Ethics, for *we do not let the situation dictate the will of God* (in that case today's evaluation of women and her position in society would dictate to allow her to be installed as elders and ministers). We only *take into account the new situation* of the changed times, which allows for woman to receive the place which Scripture never denied her, but which she could not receive in times (Biblical times included) in which this would not have accorded with the prevailing views concerning the position of women. Voting today is no longer seen in the Church as involvement in the act of government in the Church. The matter

must now be decided by a subjective judgment as to what is felt to be in accordance with the Scriptural position of women. In this situation the "actual concrete situation," the changed times, cannot be ignored as a factor. What was not unethical in the past, in casu the denial of the vote to women, may become unethical in present times in today's world.

SUMMARY CONCLUSION

Voting was not seen in the Scriptures, the Confession and the Church Orders, as act of ruling with authority over the Church, over the male members or over the consistory. This has been acknowledged in the Reports and decisions of the major assemblies of the corresponding Churches in The Netherlands. In our time, to allow women an equal voice with the men, to express their insight, cannot be seen to be in conflict with the Scriptural position of women. On the contrary.

V RECOMMENDATIONS

Synod decide:

that there are no Scriptural or Church-political grounds which forbid the consistories to call the sisters in the congregation to participate in the election of office-bearers by their vote.

Grounds:

1. voting is not an act of participating in the government of the Church
2. women have received the Spirit of wisdom no less than men to exercise the congregational right and freedom to elect its own office-bearers.