

APPENDIX VI
The Committee on Women's Voting Rights appointed by
General Synod, Coaldale 1977.

To the General Synod of the
Canadian/American Reformed Churches
meeting in Smithville as of November 4, 1980.

Esteemed Brethren,

We hereby submit to you our *final* Report pertaining to Women's Voting Rights.

I. Mandate

- General Synod Coaldale 1977 gave our Committee the following mandate:
- (a) to make a thorough study of all biblical and church-political aspects regarding the question of Women's Voting Rights;
 - (b) to forward the result of their studies to the Churches one year prior to the next General Synod, and to invite comments to be submitted within six months after publication of the study;
 - (c) to submit their study with recommendations to the next General Synod. (*Acts 1977, Article 27.*)

II. Activities

At the first meeting of the Committee (February 23, 1978), the Rev. J. Visscher was appointed to act as Secretary. General Synod had already specified that the Rev. D. VanderBoom was to act as Convener. During the year 1978 we met five times, during the year 1979 eight times and during the year 1980 four times. Due to the vast amount of material that had to be covered we were unable to comply with point (b) of our mandate. The preliminary draft was sent to the Churches on March 24, 1980 and they had until July 31, 1980 to send in their comments and criticisms to the Committee (c/o Rev. J. Visscher, 18080 - 57A Avenue, Surrey, B.C. V3S 1J6). This schedule assumed that Synod Smithville 1980 would meet in either late October or early November. The July 31 deadline gave us sufficient time to study the replies received and to make use of them in the preparation of this final report.

III. Approach

Your Committee was charged with the duty of making "a thorough study of all biblical and church-political aspects regarding the question of women's voting rights." In order to do justice to this mandate we have ranged far and wide. Instead of limiting ourselves to a selected number of New Testament Scripture passages and to certain articles in the Church Order and their interpretation, we have taken a more comprehensive approach. We have studied the position, function and role relationship of women in creation, after the Fall, in the Old Testament, in the New Testament, in the history of the Christian Church and in Reformed church polity. In this way we hope to do at least limited justice to our mandate.

In what now follows we first ask your indulgence as we deal in a general way with the Scriptural perspective as it relates to women. Later we will become more specific and deal with the whole issue of women's voting rights in the church, especially as this pertains to the election of elders and deacons.

IV. Women in Creation

For a proper understanding of the nature and role of the woman we deemed it advisable that we turn our attention first of all to the creation account as we have it in the opening chapters of the book of Genesis. There we learn quite clearly that *man* is male and female, and that *both* male and female are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27, 5:1, 2).¹

Naturally this raised the question: "What does the image entail and does the woman share equally in it with the man?" To answer this question we may say that the "image of God" can be interpreted as referring to man's *person* and to man's *office*.² The former is then said to include such characteristics as "true righteousness and holiness" (Heidelberg Catechism, Question and Answer 6); whereas the latter refers to man's calling to "have dominion" (Genesis 1:28) and to rule over creation as God's representative.

Now there are some who advance the idea that the woman did not share in the image in the same way as man did. Calvin, in discussing Genesis 2:18, remarks that woman is in a second degree created in the image of God.³ Episcopi-us, in referring to I Corinthians 11:7 in which man is called God's image and glory, remarks that this is not due to the rational superiority of the man, but "because he exercises dominion over her."⁴ It is, however, difficult to support such a view especially if one carefully examines Genesis 1. There it is made clear that dominion is exercised over "the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" (Genesis 1:28). To this statement there is no special qualification added which would exclude the woman from exercising dominion over creation as well.

All of this, however, is not to say that it is unscriptural to make a distinction between the male and the female. Indeed one must be made, albeit then a subtle, if basic, one. We would describe it in the following way, "the male is to *rule* over creation and to *lead* the female; whereas the female is to *rule* over creation and to *follow* the male. Between leading and following there is harmony." In stating it in this manner we wish to make it clear that both are called upon to exercise dominion over creation, but that the common task that they have is coloured especially by man's headship.

On what do we base this? It rests on a variety of considerations. Consideration number one is that the male was first *chronologically*. He was created first by the Lord (I Timothy 2:11-15). Consideration number two is that the male was first *functionally* (cf. Genesis 2:15, 20). He was the first one to function with respect to having dominion over creation. Consideration number three is that Scripture speaks of the woman as being man's help-meet, or "a helper fit for him" (Genesis 2:18).⁵ The sense of this is that the woman is to assist the man and to complement him so that the office and calling which he first had alone, but which they now both have, is properly fulfilled.

In bringing these considerations to the fore we do not mean to imply in any way that the woman is inferior to the man. It is rather that her position and role is not exactly the same as his. She was made to stand beside him, helping him to fulfill his calling in life.⁶

You could say that they are "equal but different." This difference comes out in their respective characters, their physical and psychological and emotional make-up, and in their roles with respect to each other. The creation account reveals that Adam was made first and functioned first and that Eve was made to complement him and to help him to function even better. He led her in a spirit of love and consideration and she followed him in a spirit of love and obedience.

V. Women after the Fall

Nevertheless, such a state of affairs did not continue indefinitely. In the Fall — that wilful act of disobedience — the relationship between male and female as established in creation, is reversed. Satan approaches the female and leads her astray. The female in turn leads the male into disobedience (Genesis 3) and so infringes on what is really his divinely ordained role, namely, to lead the female.

As a consequence of this infringement, disharmony comes into their relationship. Within the *marriage* relationship the male no longer leads with love and consideration, rather he *rules* over the female, often without any consideration.

The female is now placed in *subjection* to the male (Genesis 3:16)⁷ Within the *church*, the Fall also has consequences for this relationship. It is one of the reasons why she is not allowed "to teach or to have authority over men" (I Timothy 2:12-14).

VI. Women in the Old Testament

The matter of the rulership of the male over the female in *marriage* is further developed in the Old Testament after the Fall. The wife calls the husband *ba'al* meaning master and *adon* meaning Lord (cf. Genesis 18:12; Judges 19:26; Amos 4:1), thereby recognizing him as the dominant figure in the household. This is also evident in the reading of such Scripture passages as Numbers 5:11-31 (the law of jealousy), Numbers 30 (the validity of a woman's vow), Deuteronomy 24:1-4 (the bill of divorcement), etc.

This, however, is not to say that the wife did not have a very important place in the Old Testament family. Through the begetting of children she built a "house" for her husband. She received just as much respect from the children as her husband (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16; Leviticus 19:3). She supervised the day-to-day operation of the household, which included such responsibilities as buying and selling, etc. (Proverbs 31).

As for the matter of females in the Old Testament church, there is no doubt that they were involved members. They participated in the Old Testament worship service. They were present at the times of prayer, at the feasts, at the offerings and at the reading of the law (Deuteronomy 31:12; Nehemiah 8:3, 4). They shared in the passover meal. They served at the door of the tent of meeting (Exodus 38:8; I Samuel 2:22). They took part in the great choirs and processions of the Temple (Psalm 68:25; Ezra 2:65; Nehemiah 7:67; I Chronicles 25:5-7). They could take the vows of a Nazarite (Numbers 6:2, 13-21). They were even granted theophanies — Hagar (Genesis 16:7; 21:17), Sarah (Genesis 18:9), Manoah's wife (Judges 13:3-5, 9, 22).

Nevertheless, from all this we may not draw the conclusion that the role of male and female (husband and wife) in the Old Testament church was similar and interchangeable. No female (wife) ever served as priest or high priest or performed Levitical duties in the Old Testament. Exodus 27:21, 28:1, Numbers 4:2, 3 indicate that priests or those performing Levitical duties had to be *sons of Aaron*.

Still, it cannot be denied that certain women figure prominently in the history of the Old Testament. Some even occupied a leading and prophetic role. We think here of Miriam, Deborah, Huldah and others.⁸ In Exodus 15:20 Miriam is called a "prophetess." In Judges 4:4 Deborah is given the name "Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time." In II Kings 22:14-20 and II Chronicles 34:22-28 Huldah is called a "prophetess" as well.

These cases present us with the question, "Do these prophetesses not prove that women are permitted to rule and to teach in the church?" In answering that question we would warn against making any general rules from these instances for each has its own peculiarities. That Miriam is called a "prophetess" we cannot deny, but we would add to that the question "What kind of prophetess?" Numbers 12 would lead us to conclude that she was certainly not of the same rank and standing as Moses. In fact, to the questions "Has the Lord indeed spoken through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?" (verse 2), the reaction is that the Lord's anger flares and Miriam turned leprous. Thus while Miriam has a certain official prophetic position in Israel, she must realize that it is a position subordinate to that of Moses.⁹

As for the case of Deborah, there also we meet a "prophetess" but a "judge" as well. Yet once more we seem to be faced with a special situation. Deborah was active in Israel during a period of great deformation. Real leadership was lacking. The men in Israel, Barak included, were devoid of courage, initiative and faithfulness. In part to shame them the Lord calls upon a woman to take up the

reins of leadership in Israel.¹⁰ He installs her as a prophetess, a predominantly male office, and as a judge, also a predominantly male office (cf. Deuteronomy 17:9). Hence by selecting Deborah the Lord confronts Israel with its corrupt and shameful state.

Then, too, there is the case of Huldah. Five of the leading citizens of Judah went to her during the reign of King Josiah and she passed on to them a revelation that she had received from the Lord. As to why the Lord used her, we cannot say with absolute certainty; however, it is possible that once again, in the absence of faithful male prophets, the Lord uses a woman as an instrument to reproach Judah.

Thus, the LORD at certain points in the history of the Old Testament not only permits prophetesses to function, He also calls and ordains them. In part He uses them as vivid reminders that the men are not faithful and obedient, also in terms of their office. Yet they are the exceptions to the rule.

At the same time, it seems entirely possible that the calling of women to the office of prophetess is not at all in conflict with the New Testament injunction forbidden women to teach and rule. An extended study of the Old Testament and the New Testament words for prophecy indicates that this activity is the result of the Spirit's acting in and through a person to produce a revelation and that as such this activity is quite different from teaching and ruling. In Israel it was common for the priests to teach and rule in the church (from this office women seem to have been completely excluded). The prophets proclaimed God's Word, especially in times of apostasy. They seemed to have acted as instruments who brought the word at certain crucial times and moments in Israel's history, rather than as those who taught the Word in a systematic way to the people on a regular basis. In addition there is no evidence to suggest that the prophetic office functioned as a regular ruling office in the church. The prophets were more often at odds with the church leaders of Israel, warning and chastising them, than in agreement with them.

VII. Women in the New Testament

B. *The Gospels*

Between the Old and the New Testament dispensation there is no radical difference in teaching regarding the position of the woman. We see this almost immediately in the way that our Lord viewed the opposite sex. He never considered women to be inferior to men. Whereas in His days some expressed themselves to the effect that they were grateful that they had not been created as women, the Christ had females among His closest friends and followers (John 11:5).¹¹ He upheld the sanctity of marriage and expressed His disapproval of the convenient way that men divorced their wives in the times of Moses (Mark 10:1-12). He healed a number of women from their infirmities (Matthew 8:14-17; Luke 13:10-17; Mark 5:25-34). He even went out of His way to converse freely with the Samaritan woman, something which official Judaism of those days considered a scandalous thing (John 4:7-38). He also made mention of the fact that due to the resurrection women as well as men would be like "angels in heaven" (Mark 12:25).

As for the role of women in the church, the Gospels do not contain any statements that bear directly on the issue of women ruling, teaching or voting.

B. *The Acts of the Apostles*

Acts 1:15-26

That women had a place in the New Testament church, and an important place at that, is evident also in Acts. In chapter one we are informed that when the apostles "devoted themselves to prayer" they did so "together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus" (Acts 1:14). Immediately following that we are told about the replacement of Judas Iscariot in the verses 15-26.

Now there are a number of details in these verses that require our attention.

In the first place, verse 16 informs us that Peter began his speech with "brethren" or literally "men and brethren." This has led some to assume that at this particular meeting only men were present; however the word "brethren" can also include women.¹² That it were mainly the men who were being addressed by Peter may be the case seeing that the literal expression is "men and brethren" and seeing the customs of the time. As to whether or not women took an active part in the meeting, there is no way of determining that, although it seems doubtful.¹³

In the second place, it is noteworthy that this passage continues to maintain that the apostolic circle must be male. Our Lord chose twelve males as apostles, and here, when a replacement is sought for Judas Iscariot, the choice is quite clearly between two males — Justus and Matthias.

In the third place, there is verse 26 which states "and they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was enrolled with the eleven apostles." It is especially the phrase "and they cast lots" that calls for our attention. Some have tended to interpret these words as if a vote was held among the members present — males only or males and females — and that the leading candidate won. We would, however, point out that the translation "and they cast lots for them" is not totally accurate. Literally, it says "and they gave lots to them."¹⁴ This raises the question of *who* gave lots to *whom*. Did the members give lots to the apostles concerning these men? Did the apostles give lots to the nominees? Did the nominees pass them back to the apostles? We cannot be certain. Indeed we have to admit that on the basis of the scanty description which Acts gives, we are unable to reconstruct the actual procedure of selection. Was it by the casting lots or otherwise? How were the lots cast? Was it a majority vote that prevailed, a vote taken among the apostles only or the apostles and the other male (and female) participants? We cannot say. What we can say is that this passage of Scripture does not allow us to make any direct inferences regarding voting for office-bearers in general or voting by women in particular.

(ii) *Acts 2:16-18*

The same can be said of Acts 2. There the followers of Christ are all together and the Holy Spirit is poured out upon them. What is particularly noteworthy here is that the Holy Spirit filled them *all* (verse 4), women included. Peter also makes special mention of this fact by citing Joel 2:28-32 and stating,

"your sons and *daughters* shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions
and your old men shall dream dreams
yea, and on My menservants and My *maidservants* in those days
I will pour out My Spirit, and they shall prophesy."

Previous to Pentecost the Holy Spirit confined His operations to the narrow limits of Israel and then only to certain people in Israel, but now the Spirit's power and influence is bestowed on believers generally, both young and old, male and female. What a gift this is! Speaking in I Corinthians 14, the apostle Paul states that prophecy is the best and highest gift of the Spirit. The execution of the prophetic task may be done by all — male and female (cf. Acts 21:9). At Pentecost Moses' wish came true, "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his spirit upon them" (Numbers 11:29).

But now does the fact that women may prophesy entitle them as well to ruling and official teaching in the church? Does it do away with all restrictions also as these pertain to the offices in the church?¹⁵ We think not. As we have mentioned already, we maintain that prophecy is an activity to be distinguished from ruling and teaching. The Lord uses all kinds of believers to prophesy, to witness, to testify today, but He does not allow all kinds of believers to *rule* His church.

(iii) *Acts 6:1-5*

Another passage in Acts which deserves our attention is found in chapter 6:1-5, the selection of the seven "deacons." Here we may say that it is even more likely that women were present at the gathering. Again there is no direct proof of

this; however, the phrases "body of the disciples" (verse 2), "brethren" (verse 3) and "the whole multitude" (verse 5) seem to indicate this very strongly. This is especially true because the word "multitude" is used in chapter 5:14 and there it includes women.

With regard to the matter of selecting the seven, verses 3 and 5 indicate that the "multitude" did the choosing, although it was very definitely under the leadership and supervision of the Twelve. Did the women take part? There are some who answer "yes, because in verse 5 it speaks of 'the *whole* multitude.'" There are others who say "no." Lenski, a reputable Lutheran exegete, and one of the few who elaborates on this process of selection, states in his commentary on Acts,

"Luke does not need to say that only those who had attained the proper age took part in this meeting in accord with the spirit of the Fourth Commandment, Ephesians 6:1; Colossians 3:20; likewise, he need not mention the fact that only men voted in accord with the Jewish practice which was based on Genesis 2:18-23; 3:16, and was for this very reason the apostolic practice, I Timothy 2:12-14. This point has now become controversial, but exegetically neither the apostolic practice itself nor the grounds on which it rests, God's creation and thus nature and the condition produced by the fall, can be controverted."⁸

Lenski's point, and that of others as well, is that the expression "the whole multitude" can not possibly mean "whole" in the sense of everyone: men, women and children. It would be absurd to assert this. So the question becomes, "where must the line be drawn?" Lenski draws it at men, thereby excluding children and women, and would seem to regard the men as being the representatives of the whole multitude. What they did would automatically meet with the approval of their wives and children, seeing the position and standing the husband and father had in those days.

Needless to say, this point can be argued at great length. 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. Absolute deductions and applications for our modern situation cannot be derived from this passage.

(iv) *Acts 15:22*

In this verse we read the following: "Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas." Also in this passage, as with the previous one, the controversy swirls around the meaning of a certain expression, namely, "the whole church."

Yet here again the possibility exists for two different interpretations, the one arguing that it includes women and the other that it excludes them. Again your Committee cannot make an absolute choice for the one or the other; however, it feels that the "excluding position" is much more likely (see Lenski, quoted above). Also we would draw your attention once again to the fact that they are very clearly *men* who are delegated to go to Antioch.

C. *The Epistles*

(i) *Galatians 3:28*

Surely one of the most frequently quoted texts in this matter of women and the church is Galatians 3:28. There the apostle Paul says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." In response to this text there are those who argue that the apostle here abolishes all distinctions in the church of Jesus Christ as they relate to race, social standing and sexuality. The Jew is equal to the Greek, the slave to the free man, and the female to the male. Furthermore, this text is said to imply that within the church no distinction may any longer be made between what responsibilities are entrusted by the Lord to male and to female. They are equal participants in every facet of the church's ministry.

Nevertheless, we believe that such an interpretation of Galatians 3:28 is going to extremes, to say the least, and is actually a misinterpretation. The basic point that the apostle is intent on making is that ethnic, racial, social and sexual factors are not determinative in regard to one's spiritual standing in Christ.¹⁷ All believers are equal participants of the benefits bestowed by Christ. As inhabitants of this world we recognize the sad fact that our ethnic origin, our social standing, our sexuality may produce discrimination and inequality, but as children of God, as believers in Christ, we are to stand firm in the conviction that we are "all one in Christ Jesus."¹⁸ In our relationship to Jesus Christ there is no difference. He does not have different classes of followers.

But whereas our standing before Christ is equal, our roles and responsibilities in Christ's church are not all identical. The Lord continues to entrust different duties to males and females, husbands and wives, employers and employees, rulers and subjects. These must be recognized, respected and obeyed.

(ii) *I Corinthians 11:2-16*

Another Scripture passage that is very pertinent to our discussion is I Corinthians 11:2-16. We begin with verse 3.

Verse 3. In this particular verse the apostle Paul describes what may be called a "hierarchy of headships."¹⁹ That this concept of headship is not demeaning or insulting is established by the fact that Paul also refers to the headship of Christ over every man and the headship of God over Christ. It is noteworthy too that here an oft contested role relationship, that of man being the head of the woman, is sandwiched between two incontestable ones.²⁰

Still, the question may be asked, "What is meant by the word 'headship'?" The scholars are not unanimous on this point; however, your Committee believes that it refers to two basic ideas, that of *rulership* and that of *origin*. Man is the head of the woman and rules over her (cf. I Timothy 2) and man is the origin, the source of the woman. She was made from him (Genesis 2:21-23). Of the two ideas, we would give the greater emphasis to the concept of rulership. As Christ is the head (ruler) of every man, so man is the head (ruler) of the woman, and the Father is the head (ruler) of Christ (I Corinthians 11:3).²¹

Verses 4-6. From these verses we may digest the fact that both men and women are allowed to pray and prophesy in church. The bone of contention is *how* should they do this? It seems that in Corinth some ladies were not too pleased with the whole idea of headship and with the Biblical teaching on these points. Purposely they went about with their heads uncovered. This was to demonstrate their new found freedom, independence and equality.²²

The apostle Paul, however, is not in agreement with their attitude and approach. He admonishes them and tells them to veil themselves. "For," he says, "if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair, but if it is disgraceful for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her wear a veil" (verse 6).

Of course this raises the question "Why? Why must a woman go about veiled? Why may a man go about unveiled?" We would answer with the following quotation,

"The husband shows his dependence upon Christ (and thus his dignity) by worshipping unveiled (11:4), 'since he is the image and glory of God' (11:7). The expression of this dependence, which is his glory, lies in being bare-headed.

The wife's dependence upon her husband is reflected in her worshipping veiled (11:5). As it is shameful for her to be shaven or have short hair — signs of disgrace and excommunication from the community — so it is shameful for her to worship unveiled, since 'woman is the glory of man' (11:7) and symbolizes her dependence upon him through her veil (11:10). Thus she would be stepping out of the established order if she cast her veil

aside, like a prostitute or widow. This would be an abuse of her freedom in Christ."²³

Verses 7-10. Here in the verses 7-10 the basic argument of headship is continued. Only now the element of *origin* in headship begins to receive stress, specifically the *order* in this origin. Man is described as being created first and then the woman. Also Paul stresses that this order reveals a fundamental fact of life, namely, man was not created for woman but woman for the man. Closely linked to this is the fact that Paul states that man is "the image and glory of God," whereas the woman is "the glory of man." With regard to *origin* man is *directly* derived from God who breathed into him the *breath* of life. This makes him God's image and glory. As for the woman she is *directly* made by God from man and hence is described as man's glory. Does this mean that the woman is any less the image of God? We do not think so since the language of Genesis 1:27 is clear. Both man and woman are made in God's image.

With regard to the expression found in verse 10 "because of the angels," your Committee could not come to any firm conclusion as to its meaning. We would ask you to consider the following as a possible interpretation, namely, the angels serve as ministering spirits doing the bidding of the Lord and serving the needs of the believers. It would be insulting to them if God's created order, as this relates especially to man and woman, was negated and if thereby marriage was dishonoured. So the woman should wear a veil, not only because that is showing respect for God's creative work, but also because it pleases the angels.²⁴

Verses 11-16. In these verses the apostle argues that, although differences exist between man and woman, there is nevertheless a relationship of mutual interdependence between them. In addition he touches on the matter of hair and states that while short hair is honourable for the man, long hair is honourable for the woman. A woman's long hair is like a veil which acts as a covering.

Now there are those who state that today, for consistency's sake with I Corinthians 11, female believers ought to have long hair and covered heads, whereas men should have the opposite. This viewpoint is not shared by your Committee. We consider that the apostle's injunctions on these points cannot be isolated from the ideas, customs and mannerisms of this time. What is primary and binding for believers today is not long hair and veils (hats) but the underlying principle of headship and the fact that the wife should conduct herself properly in relation to her husband, to her married state and to the Lord. In addition she must not scandalize the world (if that is possible today) by her behaviour.

(iii) *I Corinthians 14:33b-36*

Even more pertinent than I Corinthians 11 to the point under discussion is I Corinthians 14:33b-36. It is a very controversial passage, not only because of what it says, but also because of how it relates to I Corinthians 11. In the latter it says, "Any woman who prays and prophesies" (verse 5) assuming that any woman is allowed to do these things in the worship services. Whereas I Corinthians 14 states, "Women should keep silence in the churches" (verse 34). Now it should be noted that in I Corinthians 11 the subject of women "praying and prophesying" receives only incidental mention; whereas I Corinthians 14 (and I Timothy 2) states quite clearly and emphatically that women may not teach or rule in the church. As such our interpretation of I Corinthians 14 and I Timothy 2 should govern our interpretation of I Corinthians 11 and not vice versa. In addition, various suggestions have been made as to how these two chapters can be reconciled with each other: (1) the praying and the prophesying did not occur in the official worship services.²⁵ (2) These activities did occur in the church; however, the apostle Paul does not condone them.²⁶ (3) Women may prophesy in the church because these activities are permissible according to I Corinthians 11.²⁷

Your Committee agrees that each of the above-mentioned interpretations has its merits; however, our preference lies with the third view. G.W. Knight III

sums up in an admirable way our reasons for leaning towards this interpretation, "If this is correct (the third view), then it must be recognized that the apostle regards praying and prophesying on the one hand and speaking which involves teaching (cf. again I Corinthians 14:34 and I Timothy 2:12) on the other hand as distinguishable and different activities. Praying publicly in the midst of others does not imply or involve any authority or headship over others. Likewise prophesying, an activity in which the one prophesying is essentially a passive instrument through which God communicates, does not necessarily imply or involve authority or headship over others."²⁸

With regard to the actual content of chapter 14, verses 33b-36, we would draw your attention first of all to the fact that this chapter deals with the use of spiritual gifts. Secondly, the last part of this chapter deals with speaking and silence. In verses 27 and 28 this is applied to the matter of tongue speaking, in the verses 29 and 30 it is applied to prophecy and in the verses 33b-36 it is applied to women. Regarding the latter, the apostle commands them to "keep silence in the churches" (verse 34) and adds that "they are not permitted to speak" (verse 35). The expression "to speak" is used here in connection with the worship services and it implies that women are not allowed to speak in the sense of teaching and that they are not allowed to ask all kinds of questions and to conduct themselves in the services as if they had no husband. To behave in such a way is a violation of "the law" (verse 34), which means the Scriptures. For a woman to reject the creation order of Genesis 2 (cf. I Timothy 2:11ff.; I Corinthians 11:1ff.) is "shameful" (verse 35).

Still, there are some commentators who regard I Corinthians 14 as referring to married women only.²⁹ They contend that in Corinth the married women were acting improperly in the worship services and generally flaunting the Scriptural teaching concerning marriage and submission. As a result, Paul here tells them to be silent and "to ask their husbands at home" (verse 35). As for single women, they were not bound by these verses.

Such a view, however, has its difficulties, especially if it is compared with what the apostle says in I Corinthians 11 and I Timothy 2. In addition, it is highly unlikely that, given the customs of those days, the apostle Paul would imply that single ladies could speak. In almost all cases these ladies remained part of the parental home and were even more under the subjection of their fathers than the wives were under the subjection of their husbands.

Finally, we would draw your attention to the fact that Paul is very emphatic in this matter. In verse 33b he states "as in all the churches of the saints" and in verse 37 he says that "what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord." Here obviously is a teaching that is universally binding on the churches.

(iv) I Timothy 2:11-15

Exactly how binding this teaching is and why is further explained in I Timothy 2:11-15. Here again we must realize that the apostle is referring to the church: her offices and their activities in particular (cf. I Timothy 3:14, 15). He states that a woman is to learn in "silence with all submissiveness" (verse 11) and adds, "I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent" (verse 12). Note, he very specifically forbids a woman to teach or to have dominion.³⁰ In stating this the apostle does not mean to imply that a woman is never allowed to teach a man or a male-child, but that within the church she must not teach or have authority over men.³¹

Once more the view is often presented here that Paul is referring only to married women. They are not allowed to teach or to have authority in the church. Yet it has to be said that there is no evidence which proves that the terms used here are meant to be restricted. In fact the verses 8-10 give the impression that the injunction of Paul in the verses 11 and following is general and not particular. The command has to do not only with those in the married state but with maleness and femaleness.³²

The basis for such a command is explained in the verses 13 and 14, "For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became the transgressor." Paul here draws our attention first to the order of creation and then to the cause of the subsequent disorder in creation. With respect to the order of creation, we have seen already that man was first chronologically and functionally, and that, although both are called upon to rule over creation, man is to guide and lead the woman and she is to follow and assist the man. 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. It is more correct to apply such an interpretation to the conditions and changes that came about as the result of the Fall. The most we are at liberty to state is that before that drastic event the man led and the woman followed. This was a harmonious relationship.

Nevertheless, it is a sad fact of history that the woman did not remain faithful to her God and to the role that He ordained for her. In listening to the Devil and in eating of the tree, she led and the man followed. Their roles were reversed and disaster resulted. If Eve had remained obedient, she would not have become the leading participant in that great disaster. But she was. And the lesson? Let the woman fulfill her original role and calling in life which is not to rule over the man but to be a help-meet to man in a spirit of "faith and love and holiness, with modesty" (verse 15).

D. Deaconesses

(i) *Romans 16:1, 2*

In the New Testament there are also a number of direct and indirect references which seem to indicate that women may be active in the church as deaconesses. *Romans 16:1, 2* is one of these references. There it makes mention of "our sister Phoebe, a deaconess of the church at Cenchreae" (verse 1). Upon reading this some immediately conclude that since Phoebe was a deaconess this office is open to women. However, your Committee would express the opinion that it is necessary to be somewhat cautious on this point. Phoebe is here called a *diakonos* (literally — servant) of the church at Cenchreae. This word is spelled in the Greek as a masculine form meaning "deacon" in the official sense, or "servant" in the general sense. Yet *diakonos* is not always a masculine noun. It is also a feminine noun even though it is spelled exactly like the other more common masculine noun. In other words, *diakonos* could mean simply that Phoebe was a servant of the church at Cenchreae and not necessarily a church deacon.³³

(ii) *Philippians 4:2, 3*

Another alleged reference to deaconesses is said to be in *Philippians 4:2, 3*, albeit an indirect one. There we read that Euodia and Syntyche worked side by side with Paul "in the gospel." It would seem that the labour of these ladies had some official character to it, but as to precisely what they did and what their position was in the church, we cannot say.

(iii) *1 Timothy 3:11*

We proceed next to *1 Timothy 3:11* where we find women mentioned in the middle of a passage that sets forth the qualifications of deacons. Some maintain that this verse addresses itself to female deacons.³⁴ But the word used for "women" can also be translated "wives." If that interpretation is followed, namely, that the wives of deacons are referred to here, then the passage makes sense according to the understanding of it that has prevailed for generations. Undoubtedly the last word has not been spoken on this verse.

(iv) *1 Timothy 5:9-16 (cf. Titus 2:3-5)*

Finally, we come to *1 Timothy 5:9-16* which passage suggests, along with *Titus 2:3-5*, that certain women did have an official position in the church. These widows were "enrolled" (verse 9) and may have received financial support. Yet it

is by no means clear that they held a church office or that they were involved in a ruling or teaching capacity.

In summary, even if a case could be made for the fact that women served as deaconesses in the New Testament church, it would not directly infringe on the Scriptural injunctions that women may not teach or rule in the church. The office of deacon, as Scripture describes it, is quite obviously a *servicing office* and not a ruling office.

In bringing this part of our treatment to a close, your Committee states that it is in full agreement with the following positive statement regarding the role of women in the church.

"The exclusion of women from the ruling and teaching offices and functions in the church does not mean that woman has no place of service in the church. The teaching and ruling offices and functions are not the only gifts, functions, or services in the church. Just as in marriage and the family, so also in the church the activities and functions of women are necessary and important. No part of the body of Christ (especially men, in this case) may say of another part 'I have no need of you' (I Corinthians 12:21). And no part of the body of Christ (especially women, in this case) may say that because they are not occupying the office or performing the function of a leader, they are not a significant part of the body (cf. I Corinthians 12:14-20). The truth of God through the apostle Paul is exceedingly important in our context: 'But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired' (I Corinthians 12:18).

The New Testament tells of women being involved in the ministry and the life of the church in various ways, but always in ways other than the teaching-ruling offices and functions. References to women granting Jesus assistance in His ministry and to His interaction with them are well-known and need no documentation. It is certainly noteworthy that women were present at the cross and empty tomb and that women are the first to announce the resurrection. A similar type of involvement and assistance to this is in view when the apostle Paul designates certain women as those 'who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel' and as 'fellow-workers' (Philippians 4:3). In Titus 2:3ff., Paul urges the older women to teach, within the church, the younger women, to exhort 'the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, that the Word of God may not be dishonoured.' (Titus 2:4-5). Older widows are to be enrolled in a special order in the church, apparently both to serve (cf. verse 13) and to receive care and remuneration; they are to be enrolled on the basis of their previous service in the church (I Timothy 5:9ff., especially verse 10). But at the same time Paul opposes such an order for younger widows, preferring that they return to the condition which expresses their basic inclination and need — namely, the marital state and its privileges and responsibilities. (Men and women who do not have the inclination and need to be married — namely, those who have a gift from God to be single — he encourages to be single as an avenue of service but not as a condition for church office (cf. I Corinthians 7)."³⁵

VIII. SUMMING UP THUS FAR

On the basis of the above we come now to the following conclusions:

- 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 a result of the Fall, the harmonious relationship between man and woman is destroyed and the Lord proclaims that the husband shall rule and the wife shall obey.
- d) In the Old Testament this rulership of husband (man) over wife (woman) is evident in marriage and in the church.
- 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 women 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) In the Scriptures we have no indication that voting, as we know it today, was used to determine which nominee was the most able to serve. Therefore we have no reason to conclude that women did or did not participate directly in the election process by using either voice vote, secret ballot, lot or some other means. Those passages in the book of Acts which indicate that the congregation was directly involved in the process of selection do not reveal how this was done.
- i) There is no Scripture passage that speaks directly to the subject under investigation, namely, may women vote in the church or not.

IX. Church History

We now turn our attention to another aspect of our mandate, namely, the evidence of church history as it relates to women in general and to women voting in particular.

To begin with it may be stated that not many of the early Church Fathers considered women in an ecclesiastical context. The subjection of women was frequently alluded to, but both Clement of Alexandria and Chrysostom considered this to be due not to any "created weakness" but because she abused her privilege. Writing on Genesis 1-3, Augustine makes clear that woman was made so that man should rule over her. He also states that this servitude is the direct result of sin.

Yet spiritually the Church Fathers considered women to be equal to men. Gregory of Nyssa, preaching on Genesis 1:26, bases this on the fact that both are created in the divine image. Earlier, Clement of Alexandria made clear that women were equal to men "In excellence of character" and in their capacity for spiritual progress.

As for women and church office, we find very little mention made of this in the writings of the early Fathers. Tertullian said, "It is not permitted to women to speak in church, or to teach, or to baptize or to offer, or to lay claim to a man's function or to the priestly office." Furthermore, he characterizes such behaviour as that of heretics. Irenaeus also refers to the iniquities of the Magus Marcus who led astray silly women, encouraging them to make "their own thank-offering in his presence" and to prophesy, as well as behave immorally with them. Chrysostom says that when the question is the care of the church and of souls "let the whole female sex retreat from such an office . . . and similarly the majority of men." Epiphanius says "never anywhere has any woman, not even Eve, acted as priest from the beginning of the world." In the *Apostolic Constitutions* women

are barred from teaching and priestly functions, but the deaconess has special tasks.

Needless to say, the testimony of the early Fathers is solidly opposed to women in office. As for the matter of women having the right to vote for those nominated to office, no reference has been found by your Committee.

Later church history indicates that the Reformers followed in this tradition of opposition to women in office. Luther declared himself solidly against a female ministry. Calvin does likewise. In commenting on I Corinthians 14:34, he says,

"For how unsuitable it would be for a woman, who is in subjection to one of the members, to be in an authoritative position over the whole body! It is therefore an argument based on incompatibilities; because, if the woman is under subjection, she is therefore debarred from having authority to teach in public."³⁶

Other reformers can be cited as well showing that they opposed the possibility of having women in office.

As for the matter of women's voting rights, the Reformers — as far as we are aware — say nothing on this subject, although it is an established fact that Reformed churches in different countries have taken different approaches to the matter. In Scotland, Switzerland, Germany, Hungary, and The Netherlands certain churches in the Reformed tradition have later adopted women's voting rights. Yet that practice is by no means universal; exceptions exist.³⁷ The main exception that we are interested in is the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland.

At its Synod of Utrecht 1923 the churches were warned not to introduce women voting so long as the matter had not been approved by Synod. It also appointed a committee of five members to bring out a report in this matter.

This committee submitted its report to the Synod of Groningen 1927; however, it included a majority and minority report. No consensus could be reached with the result that the Synod appointed another committee which was charged to pay special attention to the question of whether voting was "een daad van regeermacht of niet."³⁸

The following Synod of Arnhem 1930 finally took a stand on the matter. It considered,

"dat de verkiezing tot het ambt door de leden der gemeente niet het karakter draagt van advies, maar een daad van algemeene regeermacht is, wel te onderscheiden van de bijzondere regeermacht, welke door Christus aan het bijzondere ambt der opzieners is opgedragen; dat weliswaar ook de approbatie, waarvan de vrouwen niet zijn uitgesloten, tot deze algemeene regeermacht der gelovigen behoort, maar dan dit onderling verschil in karakter, dat de gemeente bij de verkiezing uitspreekt, wie zij als ambtsdragers begeert, terwijl de approbatie bestaat in het al of niet goedkeuren der gekozen personen; dat daarom uit het feit, dat het ambt der gelovigen aan de vrouw in de kerk evenzeer toekomt als aan den man, niet volgt dat zij ook aan de verkiezing tot het ambt mag deelnemen; dat voorts het overtuigend bewijs, dat de Schrift het vrouwenkiesrecht eischt, niet is geleverd, maar de gegevens, welke zij ons biedt, veeleer daartegen dan daarvoor schijnen te pleiten."³⁹

It *concluded* by saying, "aan de vrouwelijke lidmaten der gemeente het kiesrecht in de kerk niet toe te kennen."⁴⁰

The next Synod of Middelburg, 1933 received a number of appeals against the above-mentioned decision, but it decided that they did not contain sufficient grounds for revising or rejecting the decision of Arnhem.

The Synod of Bunschoten-Spakenburg 1958 was requested by the Churches at Amsterdam and Beverwijk to declare that the decision of Arnhem was no longer binding on the churches in the matter of choosing office-bearers. This Synod pronounced that (a) one of the appealing Churches had not proven that active women's voting rights also belongs to the women in the church in their capa-

city of belonging to the office of all believers; (b) the Synod of Arnhem 1930 did not restrict the freedom of exegesis since she admitted that Scripture gives not clear witness in these matters.

Thereafter, the Synod of Rotterdam-Delfshaven 1964 was asked to declare "dat het doen deelnemen aan de verkiezing van ambtsdragers door vrouwelijke belijdende leden reeds in de vrijheid der kerken *staat*, aangezien de *wijze waarop* de gemeente haar ambtsdragers verkiest niet nader in de Heilige Schrift, de belijdenis, of de kerkorde wordt aangewezen en geheel afhankelijk is van de varierende plaats, tijd en omstandigheden, welke door de plaatselijke ambtsdragers, onder opzien tot de Here in de wijsheid des Geestes, dienen te worden onderkend, eventueel met advies van de meerdere vergadering."⁴¹

Synod responded by stating that "de verkiezing tot het ambt gelijk voorheen als een zaak van de kerken in het gemeen beschouwd moet worden." It also declared that "er geen genoegzame reden is, om bij zulke stand van zaken te komen tot herziening van hetgeen in dezen besloten is."⁴²

The Synod of Hattem 1972, in response to an overture of the Church at Delft, decided to appoint a committee to study the matter of women voting. In this regard it stated that "het zeer gewenst is, dat de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland alsnog komen tot een met goede argumentatie uit de Schrift gefundeerd besluit inzake het vrouwenkiesrecht in de kerk."⁴³

The Synod of Kampen 1975 decided "opnieuw deputaten te benoemen om de materie van het vrouwenkiesrecht vanuit de Schrift nader te bezien en daarbij tevens aandacht te schenken aan het karakter van de verkiezing van ambtsdragers in al zijn facetten."⁴⁴

The Synod of Groningen-Zuid 1978 decided that "de regel die onder meer door de generale synode van Arnhem 1930 (Acta article 200, besluit 1) is gehandhaafd, niet gewijzigd dient te worden."⁴⁵

In conclusion, it may be stated that our Dutch sister churches continue to maintain that women may not vote, since that would involve them in an unscriptural activity, namely, governing the church.

X. Church Polity

With regard to our report, we now come to the matter of church polity. In other words, what does the Church Order say about the matter under discussion and do the principles that operate in the government of the church allow for the possibility of extending voting rights (privileges, responsibilities, etc.) to women. The article in the Church Order that has direct bearing on this point is Article 22 which states,

"The Elders shall be chosen by the judgment of the Consistory and the Deacons, according to the regulations that are in use locally or that are for that purpose established by the Consistory. In pursuance of these regulations every Church shall be at liberty, according to its circumstances, to give the members of the Congregation an opportunity to direct attention to suitable persons; and further to present to the Congregation for election as many Elders as are needed, in order that they, after being approved and agreed upon by the Congregation (and unless any obstacle arise) be installed with public prayers and stipulations; or present a double number to the Congregation and thereupon install the one-half chosen by it, in the aforesaid manner, agreeably to the Form in use for this purpose."

According to this article the following steps should be adhered to:

- (1) In every Congregation there shall exist regulations which govern the election of office-bearers;
- (2) The members of the Congregation are requested to submit the names of suitable candidates for office;

- (3) The Consistory and the Deacons shall nominate for the offices available certain suitable persons;
- (4) The Congregation (as presently represented by the male communicant members) elects as many office-bearers as are needed;
- (5) The Consistory with the Deacons appoints the brothers elected;
- (6) The approbation of the brothers who have been elected and appointed is held;
- (7) If no lawful objection arises, the brothers shall be ordained into office.

Now it is within the context of this entire procedure that the question arises as to whether female communicant members may also participate in the electing of office-bearers? On the one side (let us call this *position I*) you have those who say "YES." Why? Basically because they contend that

- a) electing is not governing, but indicating your preference or giving advice to the Consistory;
- b) the election is completely, from start to finish, under the supervision and leading of the Consistory which also appoints the brothers decided upon;
- c) to allow women to take part in the approbation and then to deny them electing responsibilities is inconsistent with these practices.

On the other side (let us call this *position II*) you have those who say "NO." Why? For some of the following reasons:

- a) electing office-bearers is a matter of governing and governing in the church is forbidden to women by Scripture itself;
- b) although the Consistory supervises the election, to vote is a matter of government;
- c) approbation is a different activity than voting, hence they can not be placed on the same line;
- d) it will lead to other things such as women in office.

In evaluating these points made by both sides, and others that are made as well, we offer the following for your consideration: Position II(d) is an assumption that may or may not be borne out. If one looks at the way of things in the world one will say, "This step will undoubtedly open the door to other more extreme things that are sure to follow." Whether that is also the case or trend in the church will continue to be a matter of debate. In so far as we sense "fear" as the motivating force behind II(d), we would state that Scripture, not fear, determines what practices are to be followed in the church. As such II(d) remains an unproven assumption.

With regard to the matter of points I(c) and II(c) which relate to the relationship between approbation on the one hand and election on the other, we would state that it is indeed true that these activities are to be carefully distinguished from each other. To charge that it is inconsistent that women can be involved in approbation but not election is to ignore the precise character of these two matters. In the procedure of approbation it is not the *source* of the objection that is fundamental, rather it is the truth or falsehood of the objection. Hence the emphasis is not on *who* brings the charge but on the *validity* of the charge or charges brought. As such it is even possible for a non-communicant member or for an outsider to bring a charge to the attention of the Consistory. Needless to say, to bring certain accusations against an appointed office-bearers-to-be is an activity that differs quite fundamentally from making a choice as to which of the nominated brothers is best qualified to rule and govern the church. The first act is an act of *transmitting* material or certain information that might render a person unfit to serve in the church. The second act is an act of *evaluation* in which a person's abilities are assessed.

Closely related to the above is also the matter of nomination by members of the Congregation. Here, too, there are some who see an inconsistency. They allege that allowing a woman to nominate but not to vote is to some extent a contradiction. But is it? We would state that here also the various elements in the election process have to be more carefully distinguished. To nominate someone

for office is an act whereby a person suggests to a Consistory that the following person (or persons) has certain qualities that make him worthy of serious consideration by that body. Yet the act is of a suggestive character. And here again it is the suggestion and the grounds given for it that take precedence over the person making the suggestion. Besides, the act is of a completely advisory nature. The Consistory is free to accept or reject whatever suggestions are received. Neither does it have to justify to the Congregation or members of the Congregation when a particular suggestion (nomination) does not appear on the final list of candidates.

So it is that we come to position I(a) and II(a) in which an evaluation is given as to the *character* of voting. Here the question must be faced as to whether or not voting is governing. The one side says "yes" and the other side says "no."

Your Committee is of the opinion that in a sense both positions are extremes and that the truth of the matter lies somewhere in between. To say that electing is not governing but rather indicating a preference or giving advice to the Consistory is to devalue the true character of the vote. It is true that the election of office-bearers, of which voting is a part, is under the leadership of the Consistory from start to finish. But then to allege that the voting is merely expressing a preference or giving advice is to ignore the fact that the Consistory has agreed to *bind* itself to the results of the election. The majority preference is binding. Ordinarily they will be ordained into office.

Naturally this does not mean that the word "binding" has to be taken in an absolute sense. No vote is ever absolutely binding. Irregularities in the voting or proof of unfitness to serve can nullify the vote and call for a repetition of the election process or lead the Consistory to appoint another brother. However, these possibilities are extraordinary. In normal cases the Consistory is legally and morally bound to respect the outcome of the vote since it has set the rules of the election and has allowed the vote to become determinative. Article 22 states that the Consistory shall "present to the Congregation for election as many elders as are needed, in order that they, after being approved and agreed upon by the Congregation (and unless any obstacle arise) be installed with public prayer and stipulations." These words indicate that the Consistory agrees to respect the outcome of the voting by the Congregation "unless any obstacle arise." Surely this indicates that the vote is more than simply expressing a preference. If anything, the vote is expressing a preference of which the majority is ordinarily binding and determinative on the Consistory. It may not wilfully and without good cause overturn the results or ignore the results altogether. At the same time, to regard the vote as being in a sense advisory is also neglecting the fact that the Church Order gives to the vote a determining character. Thus far our rejoinder to position I(a).

We now turn to position II(a) which asserts that election is a matter of governing (and hence forbidden to women since Scripture states that women may not govern in the church). We assess this viewpoint to be to a certain extent an exaggeration. It should be remembered that under the rules of Reformed church polity, it is quite clearly the Consistory — the gathering of the elders — which rules the church. In addition it is also a fact that those who elect someone to office are not, by that very fact, in the office themselves. To assert position II(a) is to assert too much.

How then must one look at the character of voting for office-bearers? The Committee presents the following observations and considerations to you: When the Consistory announces the candidates for election to the Congregation then it is stating that each one of the candidates is capable and worthy of entering into the office. It is never a question of asking the Congregation to choose between a capable man and an incapable one. In addition to announcing the candidates, the Consistory also announces the date on which the election of office-bearers will take place by the Congregation (as currently represented by the male communicant members).

Now at this point many assert that, technically speaking, the Consistory has the right to keep the power of election for itself. As long as nominations are asked for and the approbation follows, the Consistory has fulfilled its calling. Whether the voting itself is done by the Consistory or whether the Consistory asks for congregational involvement in this matter is up to the Consistory.

Be that as it may, it is sufficient to state that our Church Order hardly envisages a situation in which the Consistory does the voting alone. The accepted practice is that the Consistory calls upon the Congregation to participate in the election process. In other words, it requests the *cooperation* and *involvement* of the members of the Congregation in the matter of determining who is most qualified to serve. The outcome is then said to express the will of the Lord, since His guidance has been requested at the beginning of the meeting and His overruling is recognized at the end of the meeting through the medium of the ballots cast. Also this fact gives to the vote a certain weight and should prevent any Consistory from wilfully tampering with the outcome.

At this juncture we must examine closely the nature of the cooperation and involvement of the Congregation. The vote that is cast, we have said, is not simply giving advice or expressing a preference since the outcome is determinative for the Consistory. Neither is it a simple participation in the governing process. What is it then? We would say that *voting in the church for office-bearers by members of the Congregation is an involvement in governing the church. It is not an involvement in the sense of governing or ruling, but of electing those who are to govern.* As such there is, we maintain, a very close relationship between voting and governing. Your Committee felt itself *unable* to state categorically that voting has *absolutely nothing* to do with governing. The two cannot be totally isolated from each other. To say that because the Consistory afterwards appoints the brothers elected and that this nullifies any relationship or connection between voting and governing is to ignore the determinative character that the vote has on the Consistory, a character it has agreed to respect fully on recognizing and granting the Congregation's right of participation. Besides it ignores the simple fact that the Consistory's appointment is limited to the brothers elected by the Congregation. It cannot substitute other names after the election has taken place, names that were not on the ballot. It has bound itself to certain limitations in this regard.

Now at this point the question arises, "Where does this leave us in the matter of women's voting rights? Is it in harmony with Scripture to say that we should recognize that women should be involved in this way or not? Is it more in harmony with Scripture if we continue to exclude women from exercising this privilege (right, duty, responsibility)?"

In response your Committee chooses for the latter, namely, that *it is more in harmony with Scripture if women are not called upon to be involved in the voting for office-bearers.* Voting "rights" should *not* be extended to the women in the Congregation. We take this stand after having studied and examined the role of women from creation to the New Testament, from the early Church to the Church today. Especially the former, for it is the basic authority, makes clear that the woman has been given a supportive role in marriage and not a leading one, and that the same applies in the church. She is to keep silent and may not rule in the church. She is excluded from the office of the elder who preaches and teaches and the elder who rules. In light of this it is inconsistent to say that she may *not* teach, may *not* rule, may *not* hold office, but *may vote* or "have a say" in determining who will teach, who will rule and who will hold office.

In addition, the fact that the voting in the church cannot be totally separated from governing, since there is a link and relationship between the two, would seem to point much more to her exclusion from this responsibility than to her inclusion. We use the qualification "seem" here to alert you to the fact that no Bible text deals directly with this issue and gives a clear command which denies

women this privilege; however, the teaching of Scripture and the testimony of church history clearly assert that women are not to exercise privileges that include official ruling and teaching, or for that matter, we would add, that are linked to official teaching and ruling in the church, such as voting.

XI. Conclusion

A. Considerations

1. With regard to voting for office-bearers as we have it today, there is no clear evidence in the Scriptures that such a practice existed in the Church of the Old or New Testament (see: p. 21, h, i).
2. The role relationship between man (husband) and woman (wife) under the Old Testament dispensation does not give any reason to assume that the woman in the congregation had an active part in a form of decision-making as takes place in the voting for office-bearers in the Church today.
In the New Testament we do not find evidence that the role relationship between man (husband) and woman (wife) in the Church has changed in principle (see: page 21, g).
3. When the Church Order in Article 22 speaks about the choosing out of a double number of candidates by the congregation, it does not prescribe that all members, including women, must take part in the voting.
4. The procedures prescribed in Article 22, Church Order, include a form of decision-making (or, an involvement in governing) with respect to the electing of office-bearers, and thus voting by women would be in conflict with the role relationship of male (husband) and female (wife).
5. The history of De Gereformeerde Kerken in The Netherlands indicates that the General Synods in their decisions abide by the conviction that "convincing proof that the Scriptures demand women's voting rights has not been supplied, but the data which they do present to us seems to plead more against than in favour" (Arnhem 1930, see: page 24) and accordingly, did not change the practice of excluding women from voting.

B. Recommendations

1. Neither the stipulations of the Church Order nor Reformed Church History indicate that women had a right to vote in the election of office-bearers;
2. That such a right cannot be deduced from the Holy Scriptures.

C. Decision

Synod therefore decides that the Churches should refrain from introducing the practice of women voting in their elections for office-bearers.

Submitted for your consideration
this ninth month of 1980,

The Committee:

J. DEVOS

J. HENDRICKS

D. VANDERBOOM (convener)

M. VANDERWEL

J. VISSCHER (secretary)

- ¹ Some would argue that only the male was created in the image of God (cf. I Corinthians 11:7).
- ² K. Schilder in his *Heidelbergse Catechismus I* wants to describe the image of God, not in terms of nature or qualities, but only in the sense of calling. We do not quite agree with him here so as to exclude qualities altogether, cf. G. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God* (1962), pp. 54ff.
- ³ J. Calvin, *The Pentateuch*, p. 24.
- ⁴ K. Schilder, *De Heidelbergse Catechismus I* (1947), pp. 233ff.
- ⁵ Literally it says "a help as opposite him," i.e. as corresponding to him.
- ⁶ See C.J. Vos, *Woman in Old Testament Worship*, p. 19. He remarks that "Genesis 2 introduces woman to us as a creature on an equality with man. She is man's help (*ezer*), a term also used of God as man's help. But she is a help, corresponding to him (*kenegdo*), a creature taken from his side, and the two, though very dissimilar, ever return to become one flesh. The conclusion of K. Dronkert, 'de man neemt dus in het scheppingsbeeld wel een andere plaats in dan de vrouw, maar in geen geval een hogere,' appears to be justified."
- ⁷ J. Calvin, p. 43. On Genesis 3:16 he writes, "She had, indeed, previously been subject to her husband, but that was a liberal and gentle subjection; now, however, she is cast into servitude." H.C. Leupold, *An Exposition of Genesis I* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House), 1942, p. 172, writes "man's position in reference to the woman is fixed: he bears the rule. When all is done in the spirit of Christ, such rule is not harsh or unnatural; nor is it cancelled. There it expresses itself in such a way that it is not to be felt as a burden."
- ⁸ Among the others are Noadiah (Nehemiah 6:14) and the anonymous Prophetess (Isaiah 8:3). One can also point to Ezekiel 13:17ff.; Joel 3:1ff.
- ⁹ Calvin, p. 553. He says "But although Moses honours his sister by the title of 'prophetess,' he does not say that she assumed to herself the office of public teaching, but only that she was the leader and directress of others in praising God." See also J. van Bruggen, *Emancipatie en Bijbel* (Amsterdam: Ton Bolland) 1975, p. 82, 83.
- ¹⁰ van Bruggen, p. 83.
- ¹¹ Jewett refers to this and quotes Rabbi Juda ben Elai (c. A.D. 150) as saying "One must utter three doxologies every day: Praise God that he did not create me a heathen! Praise God that he did not create me a woman! Praise God that he did not create me an illiterate person!" Cf. P.K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans) 1975, p. 92.
- ¹² F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans) 1951, p. 76, states "The word is otiose, and does not necessarily exclude women."
- ¹³ E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell), 1971, p. 159, note 5 states "Though the women are probably thought of as present, they have no part in the proceedings." Unfortunately, he does not supply any proof for this statement.
- ¹⁴ Bruce, p. 80.
- ¹⁵ There are many theologians today who argue that since Pentecost, the Holy Spirit has been given equally to men and women and that therefore there should be no hesitancy to ordain women into all the offices in the church. The special gifts of the Spirit are then said to be the basis for female ordination. Needless to say, this viewpoint leads to extreme interpretations of I Corinthians 11, I Corinthians 14 and I Timothy 2.
- ¹⁶ R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House) 1934, p. 242.
- ¹⁷ G.W. Knight III, *The New Testament Teaching on the Role Relationship of Men and Women* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House) 1977, p. 19.

- ¹⁸ D.C. Arichea Jr. and E.A. Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies) 1976, p. 85.
- ¹⁹ Knight, p. 33.
- ²⁰ Knight, p. 33.
- ²¹ C. Brown, (ed.) *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan) 1976, p. 160 (vol. 2). This Dictionary goes in the same direction as does 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.'" Whereas Arndt and Gingrich in their *Greek-English Lexicon* state that *kephale* (head) is used "in the case of living beings, to denote superior rank . . . the divine influence on the world results in the series: God the *kephale* of Christ, Christ the *kephale* of the man, man the *kephale* of the woman" (p. 431).
- ²² F. Zerbst, *The Office of Woman in the Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House) p. 40. He states "The arguments of Paul will be rightly understood and appreciated only when the attempts of Corinthian women to lay aside the headcloth are recognized as an attack in general upon the relations between man and woman as established in creation."
- ²³ D. Williams, *The Apostle Paul and Women in the Church* (Los Angeles: BIM Publishing) 1977, p. 65. Another author quotes from the Tamud to the affect that "The following married women are to be divorced without the marriage portion: Such as go out with their heads uncovered . . . It is a godless man who sees his wife go out with her head uncovered. He is duty bound to divorce her." R.C. Prohl, *Woman in the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans) p. 28.
- ²⁴ Zerbst, p. 43.
- ²⁵ C. Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Carter) 1857, p. 305.
- ²⁶ A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *I Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T.T. Clark) 1914, pp. 324-325.
- ²⁷ Knight, p. 46. (cf. J.B. Hurley, "Did Paul Require Veils or the Silence of Women? A Consideration of I Corinthians 11:2-16 and I Corinthians 14:33b-36." *Westminster Theological Journal* 35 (1973), p. 203.
- ²⁸ Knight, p. 46. This preference is to some extent a foregone conclusion, especially if the reader has taken note of what has been said already regarding Old Testament prophetesses and Acts 2.
- ²⁹ cf. K. Deddens, *De Dienst Van De Vrouw in De Kerk* (Groningen: De Vuurbaak) 1978, pp. 45, 46.
- ³⁰ The Greek word for "authority" is *authentain* which means to "have authority . . . over someone" (cf. W. Bauer, W.F. Arndt and F.W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) 1957, p. 120.
- ³¹ Knight, p. 30.
- ³² Knight, pp. 30, 31.
- ³³ J.J. Mitchell, "Was Phoebe a Deacon — Yes?," *The Presbyterian Guardian*, Vol. 42, No. 8 (October 1973), pp. 120-121. Also by the same author, "Was Phoebe a Deacon — No?," *The Presbyterian Guardian*, Vol. 42, No. 9 (November 1973), pp. 134-135.
- ³⁴ Cf. R.M. Lewis, "The 'Women' of I Timothy 3:11," *Bibliothecasacra*, Vol. 136, No. 542 (April-June 1979), p. 167ff.
- ³⁵ Knight, pp. 47-48.
- ³⁶ J. Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co.) 1960, p. 306.
- ³⁷ H. Bouwman, *Geretormeerde Kerkrecht I* (Kampen: J.H. Kok) 1928, p. 388.
- ³⁸ Translation: "An act of authority (government) or not."
- ³⁹ Translation: "that the election to office by members of the congregation does not have the nature of advice, but is an act of general authority, which is surely to be distinguished from the special authority which is entrusted by Christ to the special office of overseers; to be sure, also the approbation, from which the

women are not excluded, belongs to the general authority of believers, but there is then this common difference in character: that with the election the congregation expresses who they want as office-bearers, while the approbation consists of the positive or negative approval of the chosen persons; that therefore from the fact that the women have a right to the office of believers as much as the men, it does not follow that they also may participate in the election to office; that moreover the convincing proof that the Scriptures demand women's voting rights has not been supplied, but the data which they do present to us seems to plead more against than in favour."

⁴⁰ Translation: "not to grant the right to vote in the church to the female members of the congregation."

⁴¹ Translation: "that the act of participation of female communicant members in the election of office-bearers is already in the freedom of the churches, since the method whereby the congregation elects her office-bearers is not specified in the Holy Scriptures, the confession, or the Church Order; and is completely dependent on the varying place, time, and circumstances which, through the local office-bearers, acknowledging their dependence on the Lord in the wisdom of the Spirit, needs to be distinguished, eventually with the advice of the major assembly."

⁴² Translation: "the election to office must be regarded, as it has been in the past, as a matter of the churches in common" . . . "there is no sufficient reason, in such a state of affairs, to come to a revision of that which has been decided."

⁴³ Translation: "it is very desirable that with respect to the right of women to vote in the church, the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland yet come to a decision which is supported with good argumentation based on the Scriptures."

⁴⁴ Translation: "to again appoint deputies to look more closely at the material about women's voting rights from the viewpoint of the Scriptures and at the same time to pay attention to the character of the election of office-bearers in all its facets."

⁴⁵ Translation: "that the rule which among other things has been maintained by the General Synod of Arnhem 1930 (Acta, Article 200, decision 1) does not need to be altered."