

# ***The Vocation of Woman***

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## **Introduction**

The radical change to the roles and activities which women have come to occupy in the Church has not happened in a vacuum. Here “radical” is a deliberately chosen term, for it shares a common cause with the denial of the nature of the Law and of the Atonement of Christ in Radical Lutheranism. Both are dependent upon the existential philosophy which severs mankind from God and His intrinsic attributes. Both deny divine realism, and shift the entire focus, and even definition of theology to the experience of the individual. Radical Lutheranism denies the content of the Law and its origin in God’s own unchangeable nature, replacing it with the *effect* that whatever may be called “Law” has upon the individual. Experience trumps all. In the anthropology of woman, this philosophy results in a denial of any intrinsic nature, founded upon God’s creative Word, which can distinguish man from woman beyond their purely biological, i.e. existential, differences. But even the external realities of biology proved incapable of withstanding this existential tide. Once the experience of the individual becomes the defining ontology, the internal experience of the individual, as determined by the individual herself, necessarily supplants even the undeniable distinction between the biological sexes. When anyone objects with the clear statement of Genesis 1:27, “Male and female He created them,” the denial of the objective content of the Law steps in to the rescue, pitting Romans against Genesis, and proclaiming, “You are no longer under law, but under grace” (Rom. 6:14). And if anyone objects that this could not be what the Holy Spirit intended, they are promptly muzzled with Gal. 3:28: “There is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” In this way, every means of distinguishing between man and woman is eliminated. The first to go, under Kant and his successors, were any distinctions founded in God’s own nature, a nature considered to be forever inaccessible to man. The second was any transcendent reality capable of granting identity to whatever may be called man and women. The third were any distinctions founded on God’s explicit material creation. Thus it is no longer possible to assign roles or vocations to that thing which God created and called “man” and “woman,” for in truth, they such identities no longer exist as things in themselves at all.

It goes without saying that the *full* expression of this denial of divine realism is not found in confessional Lutheran churches as it has been realized among the apostate ELCA and her sister synagogues of Satan. Yet the underlying philosophy enabling such an eclipse

of reason is not only present in Confessional Lutheranism, but common. We do not deny that “God created them male and female.” Instead we ascribe the divine prohibition of women teaching and ruling in the church to a consequence of the Fall, that is, to an historical event which mankind is still experiencing. And because of this, the prohibition is no longer based in the intrinsic nature of man and woman, a nature which God creates good, but an accident resulting in a circumstantial prohibition supposedly remedied by the Gospel. The vocation of woman, and the corresponding commandments governing her vocation are thus not *real*. They become circumstantial and thus existential.

But just as we must maintain that the Law, as it is founded in God’s own nature, has an existence entirely apart from its effects upon the individual, so we must insist that the identity of woman, as distinct from man, is not merely a biological curiosity manifested in specific individuals, nor a circumstantial category, nor convenient nomenclature, but exists as a divinely created reality apart from its manifestation in any given female, and apart from any subsequent circumstance such as the Fall. Because of this, any given person is a woman for no other reason than that she was given this nature by God, and the nature of what she is is not contingent upon her individual existence, preferences, or whims.

All that we have said so far regarding “female” we can say just as much about “male.” Gen. 1:27 declares: “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” Notice that this statement can only be true if God first created the difference between male and female as a thing in itself before He created the first man and woman. For God creates nothing without purpose, and any distinctions he makes exist in His will before they are manifested in His creations. Otherwise we would have to say that God is discovering His own mind as He creates, a distinctly pagan idea. Because male and female are two divinely distinct though intrinsically related realities, the distinctions between them and their exclusive properties are likewise of no human invention, but are created by God such that they cannot be changed.

Much ink has been spilled on the question of what a woman is or is not to do in the Church. Likewise a great deal has been written concerning male headship as it applies to the Church, to the family, and to society. However, we have been gifted with an opportunity that none of our fathers have had in examining these issues. We live in a society that denies truths that are so self-evident that there was previously no need to state them. Just as no one would imagine denying that fire is hot, so in previous eras there was no need to argue that woman bears and nurses the children which the man fathers and protects and for which he provides. But because the eclipse of reason has proceeded to its final stages, we now have the opportunity to return to first principles and in the process to discover that in the last few generations in which the question of women’s role in the Church has come into controversy, we have unwittingly overlooked the root of the problem. Though Matt Walsh popularized the question “What is a woman,” the answer not only resolves the battle

concerning gender fluidity and identity, but explains the divinely established vocation of “woman” in the family, in society, and in the Church. It is God’s creation that determines what a woman may and may not do, and it is no mere arbitrary commandment, but intrinsic to what God has created, even before any woman or man existed. It is part of the creation which He has called “very good.” To deny God’s prohibition regarding the role of women in society, the family, and the Church is to deny not only a woman’s vocation, but her unique identity. It is to call evil what God has made good.

We cannot view the vocations of woman and man as auxiliary concerns. This question strikes directly at the heart of the Gospel. For if it is true that the right relationship between man and woman as determined by their vocations prefigures the relationship between Christ and His Bride, then any denial or deconstruction of these vocations is a ploy of the enemy to deny the atonement itself, where Christ lays down his life for His Church, redeems Her with His Blood, cleanses Her in His death and resurrection, and sanctifies Her by joining Her to His own Body.

### **The Unique Vocation of Woman**

Perhaps some might consider it novel to use the term “vocation” when speaking of things that are normally attributed to identity. After all, the nature of woman is derived from the nature of man and corresponds to man’s nature even if it is not identical to it. But does this mean that there is a unique and singular vocation common to all women? Indeed it does.

When we examine Genesis 2:18f., we learn that the vocation of a woman is *not* derived from her nature, but actually precedes and determines it: “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” The word “helper” defines woman’s purpose or role, i.e., her vocation. “Fit for him,” that is, for man, describes her resulting nature. God determined the need for a specific vocation, and seeing that there is no fitting creature to fill it (cp. v. 20), He creates woman, imparting to her a nature unique from all other creatures, unique even from that of man but still corresponding to man so that both man and woman can be referred to by the word “man” and both share in the image of God: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” Thus the vocation of woman comes first, and determines the nature of woman which God creates. The vocation and nature of woman are inseparable. Indeed her vocation determines her nature, even as her nature, reciprocally, confirms her vocation.

Several consequences of this should be obvious. First, that the vocation of woman cannot be filled by a man, because a man does not have a nature fit for this purpose. Second, that this vocation is universal. It is true of all women at every time and in every place. It is not a function of the individual abilities of any particular woman. Nor can it be set aside because some woman are better “helpers” to man than others. Third, that which we call the

“order of creation” is not some arbitrary commandment of God, nor a matter of cardinality, but is intrinsic to the nature of the man and the woman. To deny their singular vocations is to call God a liar or a bumbler. Fourth: The natures and vocations of man and woman cannot stand alone, but are reciprocal. Each is “fit” for the other, and just as neither can take the place of the other, neither is complete without the other.

What then, is the woman’s distinct vocation as compared to that of the man? We consider Genesis once more, where we must begin, not with the creation of woman, but of the vocation of man. In Genesis 1:28, God gave man and woman together the task of bearing children, and subduing the earth and everything living in it. In Genesis 2, God puts a specific ordering to this vocation.

It is first to the man that God gives the task of working and keeping the Garden of Eden (2:15). This is the beginning of man’s domination over the earth. God then immediately adds worship to man’s vocation in the form of a commandment concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (2:17). From the beginning man is given the vocation to work the earth and be its master, and to worship the God who created him by keeping His commandments in fear, love, and trust.

Adam begins this vocation by naming all the creatures that God created, and when God makes the woman from Adam’s side, this right extends also to his naming the woman. It is no coincidence that the giving of names and the creation of women are directly linked in Gen. 2. Names are not arbitrary collections of syllables, but are descriptions of the creature itself. In that sense the name of a creature describes its function or purpose. In giving animals their names, none of these names revealed any creature that was a fitting companion for Adam. There were none he could name “helper,” for none were comparable to him. And so God creates the woman from Adam’s side, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh. Yet, when Adam completes his naming, he does not call her עֲזָרָה (helper), but אִשָּׁה the feminine form of the noun אִישׁ. This is significant, for Adam does not identify Eve as merely one more animal like the others, completely subject to his whim and will like any beast of burden, but instead he identifies her as the one who is of his own body. She is “bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh.” Her worth and dignity rises far above all other creatures that Adam named. Indeed, she is no creature like them at all. She is of himself, his own bone and flesh, and shares in his nature, and in the divine image which they together bear.

This then is the vocation of woman at its core: She is taken from the man to be the helper to the man. She is inseparably joined to the man in his vocation of subduing and filling the earth. Unlike all the other creatures, woman is not created apart from the man in a separate act of creation, but is explicitly created from the man. Thus, she is not an independent creature unto herself anymore than the man is an independent creature from God who created him. Without her man is incomplete and incapable of fulfilling the

vocation given to him by God. Neither man nor woman can fulfill their vocations without the other.

Nothing that happens thereafter in the history of the world changes this essential vocation of woman: She is always to depend upon the man, and be a helper to the man in his task of ruling over the earth, and the bearing of children is an essential part of this rule. This does not make her in any way a lesser creature than the man, for both of them are created in the image of God. Yet there is an ordering of all things in God's creation. And that ordering is not a matter of power dynamics and hierarchy, but of function, purpose, and comportment.

Of necessity, this means that men are designed by God to rule and lead, and women to assist them in their ruling and leading. This is just as true in the spiritual realm as well as the temporal. Genesis 2 establishes the spiritual authority of man. As we saw above, Gen. 2:17 establishes not only God's spiritual authority over Adam, but the manner in which Adam is to worship God. He places the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden, and forbids Adam to eat of it. Adam is not given any reason for this, but must trust in the goodness of God. By not eating of the tree, Adam worships God in faith, trusting in His goodness. There can be no doubt that Adam instructs his wife, leading her in this worship.

From the very beginning, before man sinned, this order and calling of man and woman is established in a world that is "very good" (1:31). Included in this "very good" is not only all that God has created, but the specific vocations of the man and woman that God gave to them.

The full expression of the vocation of woman is found in the family: To be a wife, helper to her husband, to bear his children, and to care for them. All of this is plainly revealed not only in Scripture, but in nature. The man is equipped with the greater strength and speed, and a mind able to separate emotional and rational concerns, exercising each in measure as the situation requires. A woman is specially equipped physically to bear and nurture, and mentally to prioritize the safety of her children over all other concerns. This is why the "traditional" roles of men and women are universal throughout the world, and throughout time. Some might object with specific historic examples of women going into battle or ruling a nation or tribe. Ignoring the tenuous evidence to support such examples, these are notable precisely because they are exceptionally rare, and not the normal course of affairs. Even the pagan world recognized women as a cherished and protected resource for they are the very future of the people, without whom any nation or tribe perishes.

The Fall does not remove these vocations, but only makes them more difficult. The man still works to subdue the earth, tilling the fields, fighting the thorns. The woman still bears children, only now in great pain, and she still submits to her husband, though now she does

so contrary to her corrupted desire to rule over the man.

A woman's vocation does not mean that her sphere of activity is strictly curtailed to her children and house, but encompasses activities of every sort in the support of her husband and her household. A consideration of the "virtuous wife" in Prov. 31 sees her purchasing property, engaging in commerce, farming, distributing charity to the poor, and speaking wisely. In Paul's epistles there are references to virtuous women of whom we know little other than their names, but that the engaged in acts of service in the churches, such as Phoebe in Rom. 16:1. Yet in none of these cases do we see Paul or the other Apostles praising women who have forsaken the life of service to their husbands, family, or the saints. Rather they are honored for their service, and particularly the help that they give to the Apostles.

### **Virgins and widows**

The obvious counter to the concept of a universal vocation of woman is the case of virgins and widows. Here we are specifically referring to the continent, who remain chaste without or after marriage. Concerning the others, Paul's command is plain: "To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion" (1 Cor. 7:8,9).

But if a woman is unmarried or widowed, can she still be said to have the vocation of helper to the man? Concerning widows, consider Paul's instruction regarding the enrollment of widows in the lists of those supported by the Church, 1 Tim. 5:9-10: "Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband, and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work." (1 Ti 5:9-10). There we see that the widow is supported in honor of the work which she has done, and if she is able, which she continues to do in her old age. Even if she is not able, due to her frailty, to continue in such works in full measure, her support is in honor of her previous labors, and further she continues to serve always in her prayers. Such is the case with all vocations which God gives, including the Office of the Ministry, where a man, in his old age, may no longer be able to take the chief role in his congregation, but nevertheless, even until his death, can speak the word of God, encourage, exhort, admonish, teach, and pray. In all the vocations which God gives to men, we honor the aged for their faithful service to God, the family, the Church, and society at large.

In the case of younger widows who are able to marry, Paul instructs that they be married, specifically because otherwise they will no longer be serving in their vocation: "But refuse to enroll younger widows, for when their passions draw them away from

Christ, they desire to marry and so incur condemnation for having abandoned their former faith. Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not. So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander. For some have already strayed after Satan” (5:11–15). Note that Paul gives this instruction because the younger widows, lacking any husband to serve as a helper, instead makes herself in a sense a matriarch, one who takes upon herself the role of judge through her gossip, and becomes a busybody, a *περίεργοι*, literally a meddler in the affairs of others. Meddling is by its very nature a sin against one’s vocation. Such a woman is taking for herself responsibility and authority that God has not given her.

Note that there is no third option presented. The widow, if she can still bear and raise children, does not have the option of taking on a position of authority over others. To do so is a sin against her vocation and makes her a meddler.

What then of those who truly are “widows indeed”? These are women who have no children and no grandchildren, and who are too old to remarry. Paul explains their vocation thusly: “She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day” (5:6). We see just such an example in Anna, who at the age of eighty-four “did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day” (Luke 2:38). Lacking the physical ability or opportunity to be helper directly to her husband, she remains a helper in the only means left to her: in her prayers.

If a widow does not forsake the vocation of woman in her widowhood, then neither does a virgin avoid this vocation in her virginity. A virgin in her father’s household remains under the authority of her father, and is a helper to both father and mother. The question that Paul takes up in 1 Cor. 7 is whether it is sin if she remains a virgin in her father’s household, or rather should she marry? It is important to note, that when considering 1 Cor. 7:25f.,<sup>1</sup> the context is the particular challenges which the Church endured under a period of persecution, which Paul calls the “impending pressure” (*ἐνεστῶσαν ἀνάγκην*) specifically that of Nero who had only just taken the throne. The advice to, if possible, remain unmarried, must be viewed in that light. Nevertheless, the case of virgins here is still instructive because once more the options available to the virgin are to marry or, just as in the case of widows, to be “anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit.” There is no significant difference between Paul’s directives concerning virgins and widows. Her status as a virgin does not change her vocation as a helper, whether in her father’s household, or in her prayers. Nor of course can she become a meddler.

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1. For some reason, the ESV here renders virgins as “betrothed,” a very unhelpful translation.

## Sins against vocation

In order to determine what authority a woman may or may not have in the Church, one might limit his consideration to the specific and well-known qualifications of the incumbents of the Office of the Holy Ministry in 1 Tim. and Titus, as well as the prohibitions concerning a woman exercising authority over men in the Christian congregation, or of teaching in a public capacity. But here we are considering in what way a woman obeys or sins against her vocation.

All transgression of the Law can be considered as sins against vocation. When viewed in this way, sins of both commission and omission are easy to see. All people by virtue of their creation as the image bearers of God owe fear, love, trust, honor, and worship to their creator. To omit or refuse such honor to God sins against their vocation as human beings. The fourth commandment reveals the honor due to parents in the vocation of children or subjects of the various earthly authorities. The sixth commandment does not forbid sexual intercourse but rather forbids it outside of the vocation of husband and wife. This vocation is violated not only when one commits adultery, but also when one refuses due benevolence to one's spouse, or through the practice of birth control prevents the conception of children. The fifth commandment does not forbid killing or other forms of bodily harm in itself, but rather forbids such killing or harm outside of the vocations of the earthly authorities whom God has given the duty to carry out vengeance upon him who does evil. All the duties one owes to his neighbor: the protection of his property, his good reputation and name, and even rejoicing in his success and property (the opposite of coveting) are included in man's vocation as man.

Notice that once we view the transgression of the Law as sins against vocation, it becomes obvious that there are two categories of vocation: those which a person has by virtue of his nature, and that which a person has by virtue of a divine call (in the general sense) into a vocation which he previously did not have. The former is universal, and the later contingent.

The Ministry is an example of the latter. When Article XIV of the Augsburg Confession states that no one may publicly preach or teach in the Church without a rightly ordered call, it is asserting that outside the divine vocation of the Office of the Ministry, a person sins when they exercise the functions of a vocation which they have not been given, just as surely as a vigilante sins when he kills another, even if that "other" is guilty of murder. And yet at some later time, God might call that man into the Office of the Ministry. Thereafter that man would sin if he did *not* exercise the duties of his office.

Until a person is given such a vocation by the various "masks of God," he sins if he takes up such vocations on his own authority. No one can decide to be king, prime minister, or president, unless it is given to him through the established authorities and means. But



some vocations cannot be sought, but are gifts of God which are bestowed by an act of His divine sovereignty. So it is with the vocations of man and woman, parent and child. They cannot arbitrarily be taken up by any given person, but are gifts of God, bestowed by means of the biological processes of conception. God himself created the means of human reproduction, and in the case of every single child, God alone determines its result. The material nature of conception does not deny that God Himself bestows not only the biological sex of the child, but also the child's corresponding vocation. The vocation of man and woman is a divine reality, entirely outside of the control of God's creatures.

Such painfully obvious questions of identity, such as whether a man can claim to be a woman, or a woman a man, are answered not only by manifest reason but by the God-given vocations of man and woman. No man can be a mother and no woman a father. Even if some dystopian future were ever realized in which technology enabled a man to bear children in some artificial womb, or a woman to mix her DNA with that of another woman so as to be the "father" of a child, this would still be an outrageous sin, a violation of the divinely established vocations of husband and wife. Even if it were possible, a man cannot, without sin, take up the vocation of woman and mother anymore than a woman can take up the vocation of man and father.

Sins against vocation are not matters of arbitrary prohibitions from a capricious God. If sin is the transgression of the law, and the law is good, then so also serving faithfully in one's vocation cannot ever be oppressive or detrimental except insofar as one is in rebellion against the will of God or their own vocation and nature. Every vocation of God is given for the good of all mankind, and the vocation of woman is no exception. But that which God makes good becomes a curse when it is abrogated. Instead of fearing God and serving our neighbor, when we sin against our vocation we despise God's Word, and hurt and harm our neighbor. This is the inevitable result when a woman abandons her vocation as helper to man, and attempts to supplant him and take what is neither hers to have, nor man's to give. The chaos of fatherless children, broken families, crime-ridden neighborhoods, mental illness, and theologically bankrupt churches bear witness to this truth.

### **Woman's vocation in the Church**

And this brings us to the crux of the matter regarding the role of women in the Church and the exercise of authority. It is simply not in the vocation of woman to exercise authority over her husband, over other men, or over the Church, because what God created is good. Any other arrangement, no matter how well intentioned, can only cause discord and harm, not only to others, but to the woman herself. And because, as we considered at the beginning, the vocation of woman is not an arbitrary convention, but a divine reality entirely apart from any man-made ontology, no man-made convention can circumvent this reality, or make a curse into a blessing.

What God creates exists. Before the advent of the Enlightenment and its nominalistic materialism, this was obvious. To the common man, it is still obvious when we are speaking of material things. But not all that God creates is material. Even immaterial things which God creates exist. The vocation of woman exists just as surely as any particular woman exists. No system of taxonomy or title (such as deaconess, lay-reader, voter, or auxiliary office) can unmake what God has made. There are no loopholes to the vocations which God has created, even more so with a vocation that precedes and determines the woman's nature.

Therefore the woman's vocation in the Church is likewise not subject to the whims of society, the changing opinions of men, the approval of ecclesiastical supervisors, the vote of convention assemblies, or the official statements of commissions on theology and church relations. When a woman takes up positions of authority in the Church she sins against her vocation just as surely as when a man takes up the teaching office without a call into the Office of the Holy Ministry, an office that likewise exists as a gracious creation of God. The distinction between women taking authority in the church and transgenderism is only one of degree. And when we redefine the Office of the Holy Ministry to partition off its essential duties, or imagine that there is a public teaching of the Word that is not in itself an exercise of authority that women may do, we sin not only against the vocation of woman, but against the vocations of the ministry and of man, all of which are divine creations and gracious gifts by which God serves His Church, the family, and all the world.

But likewise a woman sins against her vocation when she abandons the duties which God has given her in the vocation of woman. Thus when a congregation, in Christian liberty, establishes a voter's assembly to govern the eternal affairs of the congregation, and a woman casts a vote contrary to that of her husband, her father, or the other men in the congregation, she is no longer serving as helper to man, but as his adversary. She may express her desires, but she has no authority to attempt to subvert those whom God has called to rule in His church. Likewise the man himself sins when he grants this authority to woman to oppose the man with her vote. If any one would argue that a vote is not an exercise of authority in the Church, he argues in vain against the reality of the vocations which God has established, for the reality of what God has created is impervious to pragmatism and the tortuous permutations of human reason.

### **Conclusion**

What God creates is good. The vocation of man and of woman are good creations of God. So good are they that they prefigure the relationship between Christ and His bride, the Church. This is true whether the woman is joined to the man in marriage, or if she remains a virgin in service to her Lord. It is no mere happenstance that Satan has, from his temptation of Eve in the Garden, to his present abominations of feminism and

transgenderism worked tirelessly to deny the vocation of woman. He always passes off his abominations as liberation and freedom, when in truth they are designed to enslave the entire human race in sin and death and sever it from Christ in whom alone there is true liberation, freedom, and life. Every attempt to alter the vocation of woman is an echo of Satan's "Has God really said?" by which he brought sin and death upon all mankind.

But thanks be to God, what God creates exists. Christ is the Bridegroom and the Church is His Bride, and nothing Satan and his human accomplices, whether witting or unwitting, can do can unmake what God has made, or make evil what God has created good. Let us boldly and fearlessly rejoice in the good vocations of man and woman which God has created.

S.D.G.

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