"IN THE IMAGE OF GOD CREATED HE THEM": THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE WOMEN-IN-MINISTRY DEBATE

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Abstract

The debate over women in pastoral ministry has, within evangelical and Baptist churches, too often allowed the question of what women may do in the church to eclipse the prior and more fundamental question of who women are before God. This article argues that, whatever position one takes on differentiated leadership functions, the debate must not proceed at the cost of a sound theological anthropology. Drawing on Genesis 1:26–27, it contends that the *imago Dei* is given equally, fully, and without derivation to male and female alike, and that sexual differentiation is a real distinction within, not a modification of, a shared ontological dignity. Galatians 3:28, read in light of Paul's Adam–Christ typology, is shown to establish a common theological-anthropological foundation that should underwrite both sides of the debate. Appealing to the historic Baptist understanding of leadership designations as functions rather than ontological states, the article identifies the slide from functional complementarianism to "ontological subordinationism," including its appeal to an eternal hierarchy within the Trinity, as theologically unjustified and pastorally damaging. It concludes with a word to and for the women of our churches concerning the full, equal, and unmediated personhood that is theirs in Christ.

Keywords: *imago Dei*; theological anthropology; women in ministry; Galatians 3:28; 1 Corinthians 11; complementarianism; Baptist polity

Introduction: The Hidden Cost of the Debate

The question of women in pastoral ministry has occupied evangelical churches, including those of the Fellowship Pacific Baptist Churches of British Columbia (BC) and Yukon, with considerable energy for several decades. It was the very first issue I was asked to address in my current role as holder of the Pickford Chair of Theology,

for the Fellowship Prairies churches in 2002. It then receded into the background and has simmered there ever since, until now. Recently, within our broader Fellowship, the question has moved from background conversation to foreground controversy, with real ecclesial consequences: congregations have departed, relationships have been strained, and significant pastoral and theological energy has been consumed. These are not trivial concerns. Important convictions about the interpretation of Scripture are at stake, and it would be unwise to pretend otherwise.

However, such controversies have costs that go well beyond the obvious ones. The women-in-ministry debate, for all the heat it generates around texts and traditions, has produced a subtler and more serious theological problem than the exegetical disagreement over the ecclesial role of women itself, in that it has begun to significantly erode the church's affirmation of what and who women are before God. Regardless of what side of the debate we are on, in the effort to defend or contest the criteria for leadership, both sides have sometimes allowed the question of what women are commissioned to do and not to do in the church to crowd out the prior and more fundamental theological question of who women are as human beings who were created, together with men, in the image of God. Thus, this article is not a contribution to the exegetical debate about leadership roles *per se*. It is, rather, a call to ensure, whatever position one takes, that the debate does not proceed at the cost of our theological anthropology, which traditionally has covered both men and women under one master theological doctrine.

The Ontological Foundation: Made in the Image of God

The starting point for any Christian account of human personhood, and therefore for any account of women's personhood, is the first chapter of Genesis. "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion...'" (Gen 1:26 NRSV).[1] The text is unambiguous in its scope: the

[1] Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). The Hebrew terms are צֶלֶם (*ṣelem*, "image") and דְּמוּת (*dĕmût*, "likeness"), rendered in the LXX by εἰκών (*eikōn*) and ὁμοίωσις (*homoiōsis*). *Ṣelem* ordinarily denotes a concrete representation, a statue or carved figure, and is used elsewhere of idols (Num 33:52; 2 Kgs 11:18; Amos 5:26); *dĕmût* denotes resemblance or likeness (cf. Ezek 1:5, 26). The two terms are best read as mutually interpreting rather than as naming two separable endowments, as Irenaeus's distinction between image and likeness was later taken to imply (*Against Heresies* 5.6.1). The pairing of the cognate Aramaic terms for a royal statue in the ninth-century BCE inscription from Tell Fakhariyeh lends support to the royal-

image of God is given to humankind as such, and the dominion mandate that accompanies it is extended to both male and female without qualification. "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27).[2]

Three theological principles deserve attention in this foundational text. First, the *imago Dei* is not a graduated attribute in which we have status before God by degrees, as it were. It is not given in greater measure to the male and in lesser measure to the female. Both bear the image equally, fully, and from the moment of their creation. Anthony Hoekema, whose account of the image of God remains one of the most careful in evangelical theology, distinguishes between the structural and functional dimensions of the image.[3] The structural dimension, those capacities and properties that constitute human beings as image bearers (rationality, moral agency, spiritual responsiveness, relational capacity), is equally constitutive of both male and female. There is no indication in the text, nor anywhere in the biblical canon, that women bear the structural image in diminished form or by derivation from their male counterparts.[4]

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representative reading developed below. Neither term, in Hebrew or in Greek, carries any marker of sex; both are predicated of *ʾādām* as "male and female" (Gen 1:27; 5:1–2), and the image is reaffirmed of humanity as such after the fall (Gen 9:6). See Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, s.v. "צֶלֶם" and "דְּמוּת"; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC 1 (Waco: Word, 1987), on Gen 1:26–28; and Middleton's discussion cited in n. 5 below.

[2] It may be objected that the second creation account, in which the man is formed first and the woman afterward from his side (Gen 2:7, 18–23), introduces an order of priority that qualifies the unqualified "male and female" of Gen 1:27, and that Paul himself appeals to this sequence (1 Cor 11:8–9; cf. 1 Tim 2:13). Two observations are in order. First, Gen 1:27 contains no sequence at all: male and female are created in a single act and receive the image and the commission together. Whatever the order of Gen 2 signifies, it is narrated within the anthropology already established in Gen 1, not in competition with it. Second, the woman of Gen 2 is an *ʿēzer kĕnegdô*, a "helper as his partner" (2:18), and *ʿēzer* is used most often in the Hebrew Bible of God himself as Israel's help (e.g., Exod 18:4; Ps 33:20; 121:1–2), so that the term implies neither inferiority nor derivation of being. Supporting the reading put forward here see**:** Richard S. Hess, "Equality with and without Innocence: Genesis 1–3," in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (Downers Grove: IVP, 2005), 79–95; Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978). Representing the opposing position are the following commentators**:** Raymond C. Ortlund Jr., "Male-Female Equality and Male Headship: Genesis 1–3," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem, rev. ed. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), 95–112, who reads the creation order of Gen 2 as establishing male headship, while nonetheless explicitly affirming the equality of man and woman as bearers of the divine image.

[3] Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 66–101. Hoekema's distinction provides a useful framework in this paper for separating ontological constitution from enacted capacities.

[4] The principal canonical objection to this claim is 1 Cor 11:3–12, and above all v. 7: a man "is the image and reflection [*doxa*, glory] of God; but woman is the reflection [*doxa*] of man." Some have taken this to imply a gradation of the image, in which the woman images God derivatively, through the man. The text, however, will not yield to that interpretation, for at least four reasons. First, Paul conspicuously does not say that the woman is the *image* of man; he

Second, the functional dimension of the image, the exercise of dominion over creation, is assigned to both male and female together, as is clear from the admonition, "let them have dominion." Richard Middleton, in his account of the *imago Dei* as royal metaphor, notes that Genesis 1 democratizes that which in ancient Near Eastern contexts was a status exclusively reserved for the king: all human beings, regardless of sex, status, or origin, are invested with the royal dignity of the image.[5] As the commission is equally shared, so also the dignity is equally shared, and in this text the human ontological status before the Creator is most certainly equally shared, as Paul makes clear in Galatians when he proclaims that in Christ "there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one" (Gal 3:28), which we shall take up shortly.

Third, and crucially, sexual differentiation is established within this shared dignity,

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says only that she is man's *doxa*, so that the parallelism is deliberately broken at precisely the point of the mention of image. Second, the argument of vv. 3–10 concerns honour and shame in the matter of head-covering in public worship, not the constitution of the human being in essence. Third, Paul himself immediately qualifies the creation-order argument of vv. 8–9: "Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God" (vv. 11–12). Whatever priority vv. 8–9 assert is thus explicitly relativized "in the Lord" and grounded in God, not in the man. Fourth, the passage presupposes, rather than contradicts, women's full participation in the worship of the assembly, since they pray and prophesy (v. 5). That a derived or diminished image is not what Paul teaches is affirmed even by many who read the passage as establishing male headship; the Danvers Statement of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (1987) affirms that "both Adam and Eve were created in God's image, equal before God as persons and distinct in their manhood and womanhood" (Affirmation 1). Augustine already wrestled with this tension, insisting that with respect to the rational mind, in which the image properly resides, the woman is no less the image of God than the man (*De Trinitate* 12.7.10), though his own resolution introduces difficulties of its own. In support of this reading see: Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 491–530; Judith M. Gundry-Volf, "Gender and Creation in 1 Corinthians 11:2–16: A Study in Paul's Theological Method," in *Evangelium, Schriftauslegung, Kirche: Festschrift für Peter Stuhlmacher*, ed. Jostein Ådna, Scott J. Hafemann, and Otfried Hofius (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), 151–71; Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 800–848; Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1997); Philip B. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul's Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009); Cynthia Long Westfall, *Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostle's Vision for Men and Women in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016). For the contrary reading see: Thomas R. Schreiner, "Head Coverings, Prophecies, and the Trinity: 1 Corinthians 11:2–16," in Piper and Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 124–39; Wayne Grudem, "Does κεφαλή ('Head') Mean 'Source' or 'Authority Over' in Greek Literature? A Survey of 2,336 Examples," *Trinity Journal* 6 NS (1985): 38–59; David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003). These read vv. 3 and 7–9 as establishing a created order of male headship; they do not, however, generally infer from v. 7 that the woman bears the image of God in diminished form.

[5] J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), 88–90. Middleton develops the "democratization" of royal imagery in Gen 1 in contrast to ancient Near Eastern parallels, where image language was applied exclusively to kings.

not as a modification of it. Male and female is a creaturely distinction that occurs within a common humanity. It is a distinction of "genus" (kind) within a unity of being with equal ontological status before God. God does not create two different "grades" of image bearer, one in which the ontological status is derivative from the other. Rather, God creates equal image bearers who are also sexually differentiated, and indeed have assigned to them certain functional capacities relative to their sexual identity as male and female. As such, the distinction between male and female is real and significant, but it is a distinction within an over-arching ontological equality, and thus is not to be understood theologically as a "hierarchy of being." It is a fact that too often in the debate on the role of women in the Church such an "ontological" gradation of being has been invoked on the complementarian side of the debate. However, this is certainly theologically mistaken and ultimately detrimental to our view of women as an ontologically equal other, regardless of calling, function, and role.

The Anthropological Substance of Galatians 3:28

As noted above, the Apostle Paul's declaration that "there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28) is frequently cited in the women-in-ministry debate, and frequently contested. Complementarian interpreters typically confine its force to the soteriological domain: it speaks of equal standing before God in justification, they argue, but says nothing about differentiated roles within the church or the household.[6] Egalitarian interpreters tend to extend its application to all structures of ecclesial life. Neither side is entirely wrong, but both sides often miss the text's deeper anthropological foundation.

The three pairs Paul names, Jew/Greek, slave/free, male/female, are not merely social categories in Paul's social context. They are the constitutive distinctions by means of which ancient Greco-Roman society organized the concept of personhood as a socio-political category itself.[7] To be "no longer slave or free" was not just a

[6] For the soteriological-only reading see the relevant essays in Piper and Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*; and Thomas R. Schreiner and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Women in the Church*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016).

[7] The tripartite pairing has well-established parallels in both Jewish and Greco-Roman sources, which suggests that Paul is deliberately overturning a recognized formula of social and religious ranking. On the Jewish side, the morning benediction attributed to R. Judah gives thanks that God did not make the worshipper a Gentile, a woman, or an

soteriological equalizing, however true that may be. Rather, it was a declaration that the social ontology by which the slave was defined as less than fully a person before the gods in Roman society was unequivocally abolished in Christ. Christ himself, the last Adam (1 Cor 15:45) and the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15), not societal roles, distinctions, or even genders, was the proto-ontological original, and now under the Gospel, the original and final ground of the being of human persons, and the destiny of the image that God intends them to bear.[8] The same theo-logic applies to the ethnic distinction and, vitally, to the sexual one. To be clear, Paul is not by any means saying that sexual differentiation is eliminated in Christ. Indeed, very much to the contrary, male and female remain male and female. However, in Paul's understanding of the Gospel, the ontological force these categories carry, as markers of a differentiated position before God, in his time, in our time, and for all time, is removed, Greco-Roman social positions notwithstanding. In Christ, what women are

uneducated man (t. *Ber*. 6.18; cf. y. *Ber*. 9.1; b. *Menaḥ*. 43b, where "slave" appears in the list). On the Greek side, Diogenes Laertius records the saying attributed to Thales (and by others to Socrates) giving thanks for having been born a human being and not a beast, a man and not a woman, a Greek and not a barbarian (*Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 1.33). Aristotle grounds the order of the household in the natural rule of master over slave and of male over female and treats barbarian and slave as by nature the same (*Politics* 1.2, 1252a24–1252b9; 1.5, 1254b10–15). Roman law, finally, made the slave/free distinction the principal division of the law of persons: *summa divisio de iure personarum haec est, quod omnes homines aut liberi sunt aut servi* (Gaius, *Institutes* 1.9), while women, even when free and of age, ordinarily remained under guardianship (*tutela mulierum*, 1.144). For secondary sources supporting this reading see: Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 181–201; Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, WBC 41 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 154–59; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 187–90; Wayne A. Meeks, "The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity," *History of Religions* 13, no. 3 (1974): 165–208. For the alternative view see also: Troy W. Martin, "The Covenant of Circumcision (Genesis 17:9–14) and the Situational Antitheses in Galatians 3:28," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122 (2003): 111–25, who argues that the pairs derive from the categories of the circumcision covenant rather than from Greco-Roman constructions of personhood; and Ben Witherington III, "Rite and Rights for Women—Galatians 3.28," *New Testament Studies* 27 (1981): 593–604, who reads the verse chiefly against the background of baptism and the Judaizing controversy. Even on Martin's reading, however, the pairs mark the boundaries of full belonging to the people of God; they remain, that is, categories of standing before God, and it is precisely that standing which Paul declares relativized in Christ.

[8] The theological ground of this claim is Paul's Adam–Christ typology. Christ is the "last Adam" (1 Cor 15:45–49), the head of a new humanity in whom the condemnation of the first Adam is reversed (Rom 5:12–21), and "the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15; cf. 2 Cor 4:4), into whose image believers are being conformed (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18). Notably, the one place outside Galatians where Paul repeats the formula, Col 3:10–11, joins it explicitly to the language of the image: the new self "is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!" (though, it must be acknowledged, without the male/female pair); cf. Eph 2:15, "one new humanity." The patristic tradition developed this as recapitulation: Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.18.1; 5.16.2; Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 13–14. For the modern development of a Christologically grounded anthropology, see Karl Barth, *Christ and Adam: Man and Humanity in Romans 5*, trans. T. A. Smail (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1956); Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/2, §§43–44; Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001); and Marc Cortez, *ReSourcing Theological Anthropology: A Constructive Account of Humanity in the Light of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017).

before God is not determined by their sex. It is determined by their union with Christ as the eternal decision of God from eternity to eternity.[9]

One must agree with the complementarian insistence that this passage, with its distinctions, does not resolve the question of leadership roles, which is a separate issue in Scripture. But, and here the complementarian position is rather silent, it does establish a common theological-anthropological foundation that should underwrite the debate. In such a debate, any account of women's place in the church that effectively subordinates their theologically grounded personhood, not just their function, but their standing as full human persons before God, has moved beneath and/or beyond the foundation that Genesis and here, Paul, establish as a proper theological anthropology. True, these texts do not settle the exegetical question of pastoral roles as it relates to eldership, but they do and should settle the anthropological question of the equality of all human beings (regardless of sex) before God. It is critical, therefore, that in the debate we distinguish between functions related to sexual difference and the question of whether such functions are ingredient in ontological standing, as follows.

Functions Are Not Ontological Categories: A Critical Distinction

Here the polity of our Fellowship Baptist tradition offers an unexpected and, in our opinion, underused theological resource. In the founding statements of faith and

[9] It may be objected that Gal 3:28 speaks in the first instance of the unity and status of believers as adopted children and heirs of God in Christ (3:26–29; 4:4–7), not of the *imago Dei per se*, and that many complementarian interpreters, while affirming soteriological equality, would not extend it to an equality of being, appealing instead to 1 Cor 11 (see n. 4 above). Three considerations speak against confining the verse to a soteriological status that leaves an ontological hierarchy intact. First, for Paul, adoption and heirship are not extrinsic to what a human being is before God; they constitute the restored humanity of the new creation (Gal 6:15; 2 Cor 5:17), and Paul elsewhere states the same relativizing of these categories in explicitly image language (Col 3:10–11; see n. 8). Second, an equality before God that coexisted with a lesser creaturely standing for women would require a distinction between soteriological and creational standing that Paul nowhere draws, since redemption in Christ is the restoration, not the bypassing, of the created image (Rom 8:29). Third, as noted above, the principal complementarian statements themselves affirm women's full and equal bearing of the image (n. 4), so that the reading opposed here is not in fact required by the complementarian position as such, which is the burden of this article. For the above approach see also, D. Fee, "Male and Female in the New Creation: Galatians 3:26–29," in Pierce and Groothuis, *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 172–85; Klyne R. Snodgrass, "Galatians 3:28: Conundrum or Solution?" in *Women, Authority and the Bible*, ed. Alvera Mickelsen (Downers Grove: IVP, 1986), 161–81; Judith M. Gundry-Volf, "Christ and Gender: A Study of Difference and Equality in Gal 3,28," in *Jesus Christus als die Mitte der Schrift*, ed. Christof Landmesser, Hans-Joachim Eckstein, and Hermann Lichtenberger, BZNW 86 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997), 439–77; Longenecker, *Galatians*, 154–59. For the contrary reading see: S. Lewis Johnson Jr., "Role Distinctions in the Church: Galatians 3:28," in Piper and Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 154–64; Richard W. Hove, *Equality in Christ? Galatians 3:28 and the Gender Dispute* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1999); Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013).

polity of the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches in Canada (and thus of Fellowship Pacific), as in the wider congregationalist and Baptist streams elsewhere, leadership designations such as elder, deacon, pastor, teacher, and evangelist are understood as functions rather than offices in the formal, hierarchical sense that is associated with the Catholic and other episcopal traditions.[10] The elder who serves a congregation does not thereby acquire a different ontological standing before God as the facilitator of God's grace through sacramental rite, as with the Catholic priesthood, for instance. Rather, he merely exercises a function in the body, as a stewardship of service, in a particular ecclesial context. The title, elder, deacon, etc., names what one does, not what one is.

This hermeneutical rule, long embedded in the earliest Baptist ecclesiology, indeed as far back as the London Confessions of the seventeenth century, has significant anthropological consequences when brought to the women-in-ministry debate. If we are consistent about treating leadership designations as functions rather than as an ontological status, then the question of who may or may not exercise a given function says nothing about the ontological dignity of those who do not or are not permitted to exercise a certain function.[11] A woman who does not serve in the function of

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[10] For the Baptist polity background, see James Leo Garrett Jr., *Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2009), 51–73. Garrett writes: "The 1677-89 confessions greatly expanded the Westminster's chapters on the Church from six to fifteen chapters, thus incorporating Baptist teachings on membership, polity, elders and deacons and discipline" (73). The question of gender is nowhere raised, since it was commonly assumed that men would give leadership. The language of "office" does appear in the historic confessions, though in a congregational and non-sacerdotal sense. See the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689), 26.8: "A particular church, gathered and completely organized according to the mind of Christ, consists of officers and members; and the officers appointed by Christ to be chosen and set apart by the church…for the peculiar administration of ordinances, and execution of power or duty, which he intrusts them with, or calls them to…are bishops or elders, and deacons." Such officers are chosen "by the common suffrage of the church itself" (26.9), and nothing in the confession attributes to them a distinct sacramental or ontological character. The "office" names a stewardship conferred through the congregation, not a change in the being of the one who holds it, and it is in this sense that the term "function" is used here.

[11] It may be objected that the argument runs the other way: that ontology determines acceptable function, so that a restriction of function is the consequence, not the cause, of an ontological difference. The objection only enhances the point. If the ground of a functional restriction is sexual differentiation as such, a real but non-gradational creaturely distinction within a common humanity (as argued above), then the restriction is a matter of vocation and order and implies nothing about women's standing before God, which is the position defended here. If, however, the ground is held to be a difference in standing, a lesser or derivative mode of being human, then the restriction rests on precisely the ontological gradation that this article contests, and which the leading complementarian statements themselves disavow (see n. 4). See also: Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, "The Danvers Statement" (1987), Affirmations 1–2; Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than 100 Disputed Questions* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004). For those contesting that the distinction can be maintained see: Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, "'Equal in Being, Unequal in Role': Exploring the Logic of Woman's Subordination," in Pierce and Groothuis, *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 301–33, who argues from the egalitarian side that a permanent, sex-

senior elder is not thereby diminished in her standing before God. The function is not the theological measure of the person as such. This is precisely the logic the polity already applies (historically, in FEB National/International and in FEB Pacific) to men and women who do not exercise leadership functions: a man who is not an elder is not less than a man who is, and the same theological principle applies to women.

In the current debate, the failure to apply this logic consistently, treating functional restriction as if it carried ontological implication, is one of the most pastorally damaging moves and has been a source of much suffering for many women in churches. When functional complementarianism digresses into "ontological subordinationism," it does not merely say that women lead differently or in different spheres. Rather, it implies that women are somehow differently constituted as persons and that their humanity is somehow derivative, mediated, or incomplete without the covering of "male headship." Some theologians (often invoked in both FEB Pacific and FEB National) writing within the complementarian tradition have moved precisely in this direction, arguing not merely for functional differentiation in pastoral leadership but also for an "ontological ordering" of women under men that reflects an eternal hierarchical ordering within the Trinity itself.[12] Whatever one

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determined subordination cannot coherently remain merely functional; and Kevin Giles, "The Subordination of Christ and the Subordination of Women," in the same volume, 334–52.

[12] The position, commonly designated "eternal functional subordination" (EFS) and more recently "eternal relations of authority and submission" (ERAS), argues from texts such as 1 Cor 11:3 ("the head of Christ is God") and 1 Cor 15:28 that the Son is eternally subordinate to the Father in role, though equal in essence, and that this eternal order furnishes the pattern for the relation of women to men. The most prominent examples of this move include Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 256–61; Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005), 70–85; Bruce A. Ware and John Starke, eds., *One God in Three Persons: Unity of Essence, Distinction of Persons, Implications for Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015); and Owen Strachan and Gavin Peacock, *The Grand Design: Male and Female He Made Them* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2016). The economic obedience of the incarnate Son (Phil 2:6–8; John 5:19) is not in dispute; the question is whether it may be read back into the immanent Trinity as an eternal hierarchy of authority. On pro-Nicene premises, will belongs to nature rather than to person, so that the one God has one will, a principle confirmed Christologically at the Third Council of Constantinople (681). An eternal subordination of the Son's will to the Father's therefore implies either a plurality of wills in God or a difference of nature between Father and Son. Moreover, a relation of authority and submission that obtains necessarily and eternally is no longer distinguishable from a property of the Son's being, which is precisely the move from role to being contested in this article. For careful theological critique, see Kevin Giles, *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2002); Giles, *The Rise and Fall of the Complementarian Doctrine of the Trinity* (Eugene: Cascade, 2017); Millard J. Erickson, *Who's Tampering with the Trinity? An Assessment of the Subordination Debate* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009); Thomas H. McCall, *Which Trinity? Whose Monotheism? Philosophical and Systematic Theologians on the Metaphysics of Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); and Michael F. Bird and Scott Harrower, eds., *Trinity without Hierarchy: Reclaiming Nicene Orthodoxy in Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2019).

makes of the exegetical arguments for differentiated leadership roles, this move, from function to ontology, from role to being, is theologically unjustified, unorthodox with respect to the Trinity, and pastorally dangerous where the ontological well-being of women is concerned.

When Roles Become Natures: The Theological Problem

To be sure, the deviation from functional complementarianism to ontological subordinationism is not merely a theological error or unfortunate corollary to the complementarian position. It has concrete pastoral consequences. What women absorb, as they inevitably do in ecclesial contexts where this theology is taught, is the underlying message that their subordinate status reflects a subordinate and somehow incomplete nature, without the male counterpart. The consequent effects on their self-understanding as fully and independently human persons before God can be deeply dysregulating when that self-understanding is partially negated on theological and biblical grounds. When a woman has heard, repeatedly and sometimes vehemently, that she is theologically under "male headship," not merely within church leadership structures but in the very ontological constitution of her being before God, she does not experience this as a call to a particular form of subordinated service. Rather, she inevitably experiences it as a significant diminishment of her personhood before God.

To his credit, Karl Barth, whose account of the relationship between male and female was not without its own complexities and contradictions, nevertheless established an important anthropological principle that is worth applying here: human being is always a "co-humanity," a "being-with-and-for-the-other."[13] The relationship between male and female is, as such, "an I-Thou relation," in which it is an encounter between two fully personal beings, neither of whom is reducible to the other's need or ultimately defined by the other's functional authority. To confine a woman's personhood primarily in terms of her relationship of "subordination" to her male counterpart is to fail to take her seriously as a human subject in her own right. It defines the "I" by the "Thou's" authority over it, which is precisely the theo-

[13] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/2, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960), §45, 285–316.

logic that the Christian doctrine of the image of God resists.

The theological error here is what we might call "role-essentialism": the mistake of treating a contingent and, within creation, a functional arrangement as if it were constitutive of personal being. The Church has historically resisted this move in other contexts. For instance, the Church does not argue that a man who does not exercise the function of elder is therefore constituted differently as a human being. It does not argue that a man in a season of illness, incapacity, or disqualification, and thus not able to exercise his leadership function, is thereby less than fully human as an image bearer. In short, it does not argue that the function is the person. This being so in respect to the man, the rule must apply with equal force when the person is a woman.

A Final Word to and for Women in Our Churches

The vast majority of the faithful in our churches would agree that there are many women in their midst who are gifted, faithful, theologically formed, and deeply committed to the mission of the Gospel, and yet who have absorbed, year after year, a debate whose undertone implies that somehow their standing before God is conditional, mediated by men, or incomplete. Many women have sensed, even if they are not always able to articulate it, that they were being treated as persons whose humanity required male headship to be fully recognized as persons created in the image of God.

I remember well from my own pastoral experience (of over fifteen years) how often I encountered deeply committed and very gifted women serving in many capacities, with many clearly God-given gifts, without whom the Church would likely not be able to function. I have often been reminded by them that "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom 11:29 KJV). Given that pastoral experience, it has always raised the question in my mind as to where the church would be without their sacrificial service as teachers, administrators, counsellors, caregivers, and the list goes on. This is especially so in an age where men have, for reasons we cannot discuss here, often abdicated their roles in such capacities in our churches. I remember thinking, when I was a pastor at Port Colborne Baptist Church in Ontario, that we would be in serious trouble were we to lose even a fraction of the

women then involved in our ministry in that community.

To those women and all who serve within our churches, a word is owed; not a word about pastoral roles first, but a word about their status as persons: You are made in the image of God. That image was not given to you through your husband, your father, your elder, or your pastor. It was given to you directly, by the Creator, in the act of your creation, as the Genesis passage above makes clear. It was pre-determined, restored, and secured in you through your union with the Second Adam, who is the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15), and in whom there is neither male nor female in respect to your ontological standing before the Father. Your dignity, ontological perspicuity, and individuality as a human being before God do not depend on the function you hold or are or are not permitted to hold. They are theologically prior to every ecclesial functional arrangement, every confessional tradition, and every debate about leadership structures in theological history. Christ is the ontological ground on which you stand prior to any word you speak, any service you render, and any question of role or office that may arise. That ground is not given to you by any man and cannot be taken from you by any man. It is the free gift of God guaranteed for all humanity in the humanity of Jesus Christ.

A word is also needed for the laymen, pastors, and elders who stand with these women, and who have watched gifted persons navigate this debate with a dignity that shames the debate itself. The word to you is the same. Your convictions about ministry leadership roles and your commitment to the full and independent ontological dignity of every woman in your congregation need not be viewed as principles in tension. You can hold a confessional position on differentiated leadership functions (whether complementarian or otherwise), and still insist, with theological conviction, that the women who serve under whatever structure are your full equals before God, your "co-heirs" in the grace of God (1 Pet 3:7), and therefore persons whose personhood requires no male mediation.[14] That insistence is not a

[14] Two further texts are frequently adduced against the argument of this article. The first is 1 Pet 3:7 itself, where the wife is called the "weaker sex" (lit. "weaker vessel," *asthenesterō skeuei*). Yet the same sentence names her a co-heir (*synklēronomos*) "of the gracious gift of life" and commands that she be shown honour. The comparative "weaker" is most naturally read of physical and social vulnerability within the ancient household, which is precisely why honour is enjoined, and not of a deficiency in her standing before God, which the co-heir clause expressly denies. The second is 1 Tim 2:11–15, which grounds a restriction on teaching and exercising authority in the order of creation ("Adam was formed first, then Eve," v. 13) and in the narrative of the deception (v. 14). Whatever the force of this passage for the ordering of ecclesial functions, a question this article has deliberately left open, it argues for a functional directive

concession to egalitarianism. It is axiomatic in the historical witness to Christian theological anthropology.

Conclusion: What Christian Unity Requires

Finally, the statements of faith and polity of the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches in Canada do not anywhere require that every exegetical question about leadership roles is resolved before all treat one another theologically as "full persons before God." They do require that all absolutely do not allow their disagreements about "function" to become disagreements about the fullness of "human being." Churches can hold differentiated positions on women in leadership (and the Fellowship does so), while continuing to insist with one theological voice that every woman in every one of those churches is a full and independent image bearer, and thus a full heir of salvation, a full member of the "body of Christ," whose standing before God is not in any way conditional on any other human authority.

This paper is not a call to abandon our local ecclesial convictions about ministry leadership. It is a call to ensure that those convictions are held within a theological anthropology that is worthy of the Gospel we preach. Whatever members of churches believe about who leads, they confess together that in Christ there is one new humanity created in God's image, the image of his dear Son. It is neither reduced to its social categories nor ranked by them, but rather gathered under one Lord, one faith, one baptism, in whom that image is perfectly restored. It is that theological confession, more than any resolution of the ministry roles debate, that will determine whether the women in churches, and by extension the men who serve

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and says nothing of the image; and v. 15 remains among the most disputed verses in the Pauline corpus. Neither text, in other words, teaches a derivative or diminished image. See further: I. Howard Marshall, in collaboration with Philip H. Towner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999); Craig S. Keener, *1 Peter: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021); Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives: Marriage and Women's Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1992), 101–32; Linda L. Belleville, "Teaching and Usurping Authority: 1 Timothy 2:11–15," in Pierce and Groothuis, *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 205–23; Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005). See also for the alternative view: Douglas J. Moo, "What Does It Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority Over Men? 1 Timothy 2:11–15," in Piper and Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 176–92; Thomas R. Schreiner, "An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9–15: A Dialogue with Scholarship," in Schreiner and Köstenberger, *Women in the Church*; Wayne Grudem, "Wives Like Sarah, and the Husbands Who Honor Them: 1 Peter 3:1–7," in Piper and Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 194–208. These read 1 Tim 2:13–14 as a transcultural creation-order argument for male eldership; none, however, infers from the argument that the woman bears the image of God derivatively.

alongside them, experience the church as a community in which their full humanity as the image of God is honoured.

There is no doubt that the debate about women in ministry will continue. By all means, let it. But let it proceed on the only foundation that is worthy of the Gospel: the full, equal, unmediated personhood of every human being made in the image of God.

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