



## Fokus / Focus

# Response to *Male and female in the church – gender in the ordained ministries* by Douw G. Breed, Fika J. van Rensburg, and Gert J.C. Jordaan

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### Abstract

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*“Male and female in the church” (2008), by Breed, J. van Rensburg and Jordaan, is reviewed as to its treatment of the regulative principle and its exegesis of 1 Timothy 2-3. The reformed and puritan version of the regulative principle, reflected in the writings of John Calvin and in the major reformed confessions, implies that proponents of women in the ecclesiastical office must do more than question the traditional exegesis of key passages used in the debate. They must provide Biblical warrant for the practice. “Male and female in the church” outlines an option that defends the traditional exegesis of 1 Timothy 2-3. It also provides another option that seeks to explain 1 Timothy 2:8-15 in terms of the marriage-relationship rather than male and female in the church. The exegesis in the latter option is found to be tenuous. Similarly, the option that views 1 Timothy 3:11 as referring to ordained deaconesses is found to be unconvincing. No clear Biblical warrant is found in these passages for the practice of ordaining women in the ecclesiastical office.*

## Opsomming

**Respons op *Man en vrou in die kerk – geslag binne die ampelike Woordbediening* deur Douw G. Breed, Fika J. van Rensburg, Gert J.C. Jordaan.**

*"Man en vrou in die kerk" (2008) deur Breed, J. van Rensburg en Jordaan, is beoordeel wat betref hulle hantering van die regulerende beginsel en die eksegetiese van 1 Timotheus 2-3. Die gereformeerde en puriteinse weergawe van die regulerende beginsel, soos gereflekteer in die geskrifte van Johannes Calvyn en die vernaamste gereformeerde belydenisse, impliseer dat voorstanders van die vrou in kerklike ampte meer moet doen as om net die tradisionele eksegetiese van sleutelgedeeltes wat in die debat gebruik word, te bevraagteken. Hulle moet Bybelse gronde vir die gebruik verskaf. "Man en vrou in die kerk" skets 'n voorkeur wat die tradisionele eksegetiese van 1 Timoteus 2-3 verdedig. Dit voorsien 'n verdere opsie wat poog om 1 Timoteus 2:8-15 in terme van 'n huweliksverhouding te verduidelik eerder as manlik en vroulik in die kerk. Die eksegetiese van laasgenoemde opsie oortuig egter nie. So ook word die opsie in 1 Timoteus 3:11 wat na bevestigde diakonesse verwys as onoortuigend bevind. Geen duidelike Bybelse bewys is in hierdie gedeeltes gevind vir die praktyk om die vrou in kerklike ampte te bevestig nie.*

## 1. Introduction

The recent work, *Male and female in the church* (Breed *et al.*, 2008), is a helpful addition to the "women in office" debate. It is very thorough both in its depth and its discussion of exegetical detail. The book is also well-written and it is easy to follow the argumentation.

There are, however, two main areas of the study on which I would like to reflect: the understanding and application of the "regulative principle", and the exegesis of 1 Timothy 2-3.

## 2. The regulative principle and its application to the question of women in the ordained ministries

### 2.1 The definition of the regulative principle

Section 3.2.3.1.1 of the book evaluates the claim that since there is no explicit Scriptural prohibition against women in ordained ministries, it should be decided on practical or contemporary social grounds. It is rightly concluded that such a view fails to allow for broader redemptive-historic and inferential arguments. The authors

of the study also rightly reject the Lutheran-Anglican form of the regulative principle, that something is permissible if the Scripture does not explicitly prohibit it.

However, the reformed-puritan form of the regulative principle is also rejected – that something is *not* permissible unless the Scripture explicitly *commands* it. Both forms of the principle are rejected as *biblicist*, a proof-texting approach that fails to allow sufficiently for the “overall Scriptural context”.

This evaluation, in my view, misconstrues the historic regulative principle – at least on the side of the reformed-puritan version. The debate about what is now called the regulative principle came to the fore in the time of the Reformation because of the need for Reformational churches to decide how much Roman practice needed to be jettisoned. This is seen in the frequency with which Calvin (1984d; 1984a; 1980; 1992) raises the subject of the regulative principle in the context of objecting to Roman Catholic practice (*Commentaries* on Leviticus 10:1; Jeremiah 7:21-24, 31; 19:4-5; Colossians 2:22-23; *Sermons on 2 Samuel*, 6:6-12). Calvin tended to go back to the first principles with every aspect of worship. Those practices that lacked Scriptural warrant were abandoned. The Lutheran church was more concessive, as can be seen in the *Augsburg Confession* (1530: Part 1, Art. 7 and 15; Part 2, Art. 5). Allowance was made for human traditions instituted by men, which are “neither enjoined nor forbidden in the Word of God” (*Formula of Concord*, 1516: Art. 10). Here, too, the context is that of debating Roman Catholic practice.

## 2.2 Calvin's view of the regulative principle

Calvin's discussion of this issue shows that he took a different view than what is found in *Male and female in the church*. In Article 17 of his *Confession of faith* (1562), we find the following explanation:

If we would render a well-regulated and acceptable sacrifice, we hold that it is not for us to invent what to us seems good, or to follow what may have been devised in the brain of other men, but to confine ourselves simply to the purity of Scripture. Wherefore we believe anything which is not derived from it, but has only been commanded by the authority of men, ought not to be regarded as the service of God.

1 Samuel 15:22 is cited in this context.

In *Harmony of the gospels* (Calvin, 1975: Matt. 15:9), Calvin states:

God wishes to be worshipped according to His will alone. He will not at all permit new forms of worship to be invented. Therefore, as soon as men allow themselves to wander outside God's Law, all their effort and care in worshipping Him will only bring them greater judgement, since religion is profaned by such figments.

*The Commentary on Isaiah 29:13* (Calvin, 1984) contrasts the commandments and inventions of men with worship that is "regulated by the rule of His Word". Again, "God disapproves of all modes of worship not expressly sanctioned by His Word ... plainly abominates whatever we undertake from zeal to His worship, if at variance with His commands (1 Samuel 15:22, Matthew 15:9). Every addition to His Word ... is a lie. Mere 'will worship'... is a vanity" (Calvin, 1554:198).

Many more examples can be found in Calvin, as indicated by Schwertley (s.a.:143-171). It is clear that Calvin was willing to use the language rejected by *Male and female in the church* – that what God does not command is not permissible. It is also clear, from Calvin's practice, that by *command* he meant any kind of *sanction* or *warrant* from Scripture. For example, Calvin argues inferentially from the Scriptures, rather than from a direct command, in respect of credal language about the Trinity (Calvin, 1960; *Institutes* 1.8.3, 4.8.16). Admittedly this has to do with the doctrine of God rather than with worship as such. Perhaps even more telling is Calvin's objection to musical accompaniment in worship, despite the Old Testament warrant for Levitical musicians performing in worship services (Calvin, 1984c; *Commentary* Ps. 81:3; 92:1). Calvin's argument is of a general, redemptive-historic nature: that the use of various instruments in worship was suited to the old dispensation. In its original intention, the reformed-puritan version of the regulative principle was not narrowly legalistic or Biblicist.

The same principle is also applied by Calvin to church polity. In the *French Confession* (1559: Art. 29), it is observed that the church ought to be governed according to the policy Christ established. In Article 32, it is stated that those elected to superintend the church should devise among themselves what means should be adopted for governing the church, yet "they should never depart from that which was ordained by our Lord Jesus Christ". Significantly, the article adds that this does not prevent there being special ordinances in each place, as convenience may require. This supplies further evidence that Calvin did allow for adiaphora beyond that derived from a proof-texting approach to Scripture.

### 2.3 The regulative principle in the reformed confessions

The same view is expressed in the reformational confessions. *The Heidelberg Catechism* (1563: Lord's Day 35, Question 96) asks, "What is God's will for us in the second commandment? That we in no way make any image of God nor worship Him in any other way than He has *commanded in His Word*." Leviticus 10:1-7, the usual example cited by those committed to the reformed-puritan regulative principle, is given as a proof-text.

*The Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647 1:6) takes the same approach, referring to the "whole counsel of God", "the general rules of the Word", "good and necessary consequences ... deduced from the Scripture", as well as that which is "expressly set down in Scripture". The clearest formulation lies in 21:1, "On Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day". There it is stated:

But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men ... or in any way not prescribed in the Holy Scriptures.

Significantly, the *Belgic Confession of Faith* (1661) employs similar language in the section on church polity. Article 29 states that the true church may be known by the fact that in it "all things are managed according to the pure Word of God". Article 30 adds that the true church "must be governed by that spiritual polity which our Lord has taught us in His Word" regarding the form of its government and selection of office-bearers. Article 32 allows for the church to make local ordinances for maintaining good order, "yet they ought studiously to take care that they do not depart from those things which Christ, our only Master, has instituted". The article rejects all human inventions.

It is likely that throughout history some have applied this principle in a narrow, Biblicist manner. However, they depart from the historic doctrine. The reformed-puritan regulative principle should not be *defined* in a Biblicist manner. It should be seen in terms of not permitting that which lacks Biblical warrant – where *warrant* is understood as including explicit command, good and necessary consequence, or general redemptive-historic argument.

## **2.4 Opposition to the regulative principle in *Male and female in the church***

As the authors of the book are with no doubt aware, the definition accepted could well influence the outcome on the issue of women in ordained ministry. The matter of the regulative principle does, in fact, become important in the conclusions reached in this study. "Option 1" (section 16.2.3) allows the possibility that the deacon's ministry could be modified to remove all managerial tasks, thereby removing the chief objection to ordained deaconesses. This idea is also an "invention", since ordained deacons without management-authority are not clearly warranted in Scripture. This is shown by the earlier discussion on the nature of the diaconal office. It was accepted (section 1.1.3.3.2.3.2) that the criterion of good management of the home (1 Tim. 3:12; cf. Acts 6:3) indicated authority in the diaconal office. In fact, it was also accepted that ordination and office imply authority (1.1.3). To remove the aspect of management to allow the church to ordain deaconesses would seem not merely contrary to the regulative principle, but to the earlier conclusions of this study.

## **3. Exegesis of 1 Timothy 2**

Chapter 12, on the exegesis and hermeneusis of 1 Timothy 2:8-15, is one of the most important sections of the book. "Option 2" argues that 1 Timothy 2:8-15 deals with home-life rather than church-life. A number of arguments are used to justify this interpretation.

### **3.1 The theme of marriage in 1 Timothy**

To reinforce the view that 1 Timothy 2:8-15 concerns home-life rather than church-life, "option 2" in Chapter 12 makes marriage a significant sub-theme in the epistle. Evidence for that view is gleaned from speculation about the nature of the false teachers against whom the apostle writes. It is no speculation to say that these false teachers forbade marriage (1 Tim. 4:3). But how can it be proven that they also encouraged the women to usurp authority, as 12.4.3.3 suggests? Option 2, which removes 1 Timothy 2:12 as an argument against women in office, appears to take one *possible* explanation of the heresy involved, and make it a guiding principle.

In order to support this thesis, it must be plausibly shown that 1 Timothy 2:1-8 and 1 Timothy 9-15 concern home-life rather than public worship. The study concludes that this is exegetically tenable, though obviously supporters of "option 1" would feel it is not very convincing.

The theme of marriage is certainly present in 1 Timothy, directly or indirectly, in 1 Timothy 3:2, 12; 4:3; and 5:9. However, “option 2” tries to bolster the case for marriage as a guiding principle by making more than is warranted of 1 Timothy 3:2, 12. However, the focus of these two verses is not so much marriage, as purity. It is not that deacons and elders must be *married* in order to serve, but that if they are married they must be *faithful*. The major theme in 1 Timothy 3:1-13 remains that of church-life, not marriage, as the term *pastoral epistle* indicates. Hendriksen (1976:408) states the theme of the book in terms of “directions for public worship and for the proper organization of the church”. The letter as a whole deals far more with the ecclesiastical sphere than with marriage and family. The broader context of 1 Timothy gives more weight to the view that 1 Timothy 2:8-15 is about church-life than about marriage.

In addition, the criterion of monogamy does not give any particular weight to the theory that the false teachers were stirring up rebellion among women in the churches. The stipulation of monogamy in 1 Timothy 3:2 and 12 could easily be explained by the rampant immorality present in this gentile city. One does not need to resort to the explanation that the apostle is guarding at that point against false teachers who disparaged marriage and fomented rebellion among the women.

“Option 2” argues that if 1 Timothy 2:8-15 is not about marriage, there is no counter-weight to the false teachers’ heresy concerning marriage. That argument is a two-edged sword. Might we not say that, since there is no counter-weight to this possible heresy in 1 Timothy 2:8-15, this particular heresy is not functioning as a guiding principle here at all?

It is suggested that 1 Timothy 2:9 constitutes a further example of instruction about home-life. The apostle supposedly urges women not to dress in a sexually provocative manner at home. Presumably this observation is intended to explain why Paul would be concerned enough about a woman’s adornment in the *home* to write these words – something that does warrant explanation. However, it seems far more likely that provocative clothing would be a problem in the church than in the home.

### **3.2 The good works of the women**

Another argument used to justify the view that the home is in view in verses 9-15 is that the godly behaviour and good works of women go beyond the context of public worship. Three possible answers to

this might be suggested. Firstly, the good behaviour of women functions as a proper background against which they attend worship services – it is preparation for worship. Secondly, it might indicate that Paul had in mind the life of the church as a whole when he forbade women from exercising authority over men, not just the worship service. Thirdly, it is possible that Paul is encouraging the women with the assurance that while they may not exercise any special role in the services, they can still concentrate on general godliness (v. 9-10) and on their God-given role as mothers (v. 15).

### **3.3 Parallels with 1 Corinthians 11, 14 and 1 Peter 3**

Parallels with 1 Peter 3 are also used to reinforce the view that 1 Timothy 2:8-15 concerns the home. Of course there are parallels, since both passages are applying the creation-principle of male headship. For the same reason there are strong parallels with 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 as well. If only the similarities between 1 Peter 3 and 1 Timothy 2 are considered, then one might conclude that home-life is in view in both passages. However, 1 Corinthians 14, a passage written by the same author as 1 Timothy 2, is clearly about church-life. "Option 2" seems to give more weight to the similarity with 1 Peter 3 than with 1 Corinthians 14, without any justification of this bias.

#### **3.3.1 The meaning of *ejh panti; topw/***

The parallels with 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 are also not sufficiently taken into account in the discussion about *ejh panti; topw/* in 1 Timothy 2:8 (sections 12.4.2.2 and 12.4.3.4). "Option 2" concludes that the phrase means "in every respect", rather than "in every place". The latter would seem to reinforce the view that Paul is talking about conduct in worship services everywhere. The former would allow the possibility that conduct in the home is being considered. 1 Peter 3 has no expression resembling *ejh panti; topw/*. However, in 1 Corinthians 11:16 the apostle, after speaking about a woman praying with her head uncovered, warns "... we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God". Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 14:33-34 the apostle makes it clear that he is not just speaking about the home, but about order and decency "in all the churches". Given the many other parallels between these passages, it should come as no surprise to find 1 Timothy 2:8 regulating practice "in every place", meaning "in every church".

#### 4. The structure of 1 Timothy 2

“Option 2” argues that the flow of Paul’s argument in 1 Timothy 2 favours the idea that he is addressing home-life, not church-life, in verses 8-15 (section 12.4.3.2). It is argued, in effect, that the stated aim of reaching the gentiles (1 Tim. 2:1-7) is better served by the godly witness of men and women in their homes, than the godly witness of men and women in church. For gentile unbelievers would seldom be present during church services.

This argument probably underestimates the extent to which accounts of church-practice were spreading among unbelievers in the first few centuries after Christ. Pliny the Younger certainly reported on Christian worship practices to Trajan (Pliny, 1980; *Epistles* 10.96). Athenagoras (1980; *Legatio pro Christianis* 3) defends Christians against charges of “atheism, Thyestean feasts and Oedipodean intercourse”, based in part on suspicions about Christian worship practices. The secretiveness with which Christians had to meet in times of persecution may have added fuel to the fire. Justin Martyr (1980; *Apology* 1 61-17) sought to explain some of the Christian ceremonies to dispel ignorance. Moreover, it could be argued that the universal scope of 1 Timothy 2:1-7 is better served by verse 8-15 referring to the conduct of all believing men and women, rather than just those who are married. Prayers are to be made for “all people” (παντων ανθρωπων; v. 1), because God desires all types of people to be saved (παντα ανθρωπου; v. 4). Therefore – because of this universal mission – the Lord wants all males (ανδρα; v. 8) in every place, married or single, to pray without anger; and all females (gunaika; v. 9-15) to accept their God-given role in relation to men in church-life. The women may not teach or exercise authority over the men. But they can still set a godly example by being adorned with good works rather than by excessive ornamentation and by carrying out the calling of motherhood.

My conclusion is that “option 2” is exegetically tenuous. It appears to be a novel interpretation. It relies on a certain amount of speculation as to the context. It adopts an unlikely interpretation of a key phrase, εν παντι; τοπω

#### 5. The exegesis of 1 Timothy 3:11

Chapter 13 of *Male and female in the church* deals with the exegesis and hermeneusis of 1 Timothy 3:1-16. The most important part, for the issue of women in office, is the discussion of verse 11. Three options are considered: that this verse refers to the wives of

deacons, that it refers to a category of non-ordained women who assist the deacons, or that it refers to ordained female deacons.

### **5.1 The managerial function of the deacon**

Earlier in the book (section 1.1.3.1; 1.1.4, footnote 19), the point was made that the office of a deacon involves leadership, a managerial function (Acts 6:3 with 1 Tim. 3:4, 12). It is therefore understandable that the criteria for both elder *and* deacon should include good management of family. Deacons, like elders, must be able to demonstrate their ability to manage the household of God. The proponents of "option 3" (section 13.4.3) argue that the requirements for female deacons in 1 Timothy 3:11 differ from that of the male deacons (v. 8-10, 12-13) because having a husband and being able to manage the household well would not apply to women. However, if management is a necessary part of the diaconal office, as the earlier chapter concluded, then the difference in requirements here would suggest that these women are not being considered for the office of deacon. To put it another way, if a woman under consideration for the office of deacon may not rule in the home, how can she do so as a deacon in the church? It is suggested by some that the management-aspect of the diaconate be removed, in order to deal with this problem (Breed *et al.*, 2008; 16.2.3.4 (1), 2). However, the earlier section of the book argued that managerial aspect of the diaconal office is fundamental.

It might be argued that there is no conflict between an ordained deaconess' managerial authority and the prohibition against a woman exercising authority in the church in 1 Timothy 2:12. The authority of deaconesses – especially where they are not part of the full consistory – is, after all, restricted to that of the distribution of food. However, as noted, there is authority in the very nature of office and ordination. The conflict with 1 Timothy 2:12 is only adequately dealt with if women serve in a non-ordained capacity and avoid exercising authority over men at the functional level.

### **5.2 The structure of 1 Timothy 3:1-13**

Chapter 13 points out an important structural feature of 1 Timothy 3:1-13. Verse 2 takes the form, *dei* ... accusative noun ... *ei hai*. Verses 8 and 11 build on this structure, using the accusative noun followed by *wšautw~*. This pattern suggests three parallel groups in ministry – elders, deacons and "women". If the "women" are female deacons, why would Paul provide a separate "heading"? The parallelism suggests a ministry of women that is *distinct* from the office of

deacon, though the position of the verse suggests that they are *connected* with the diaconal office in some way – perhaps as non-ordained assistants (“option 2”).

Chapter 13 lists some other problems with the alternative interpretations. Against the view that the “women” of verse 11 are deacons’ wives (section 13.4.1), it is pointed out that the expected pronoun *aujtwñ* is not found after *gunaika-*. Moreover, there is no mention of *elders’* wives in verse 11. If deacons’ wives merit attention for their assistance in the ministry of their husbands, why not the elders’ wives as well?

Against the view that the “women” are ordained deaconesses (section 13.4.3), it is pointed out that the criteria in verse 11 differ somewhat from those of the deacons. These differences cannot all be explained simply by the difference in gender. We would expect, for example, that an ordained deaconess should also be required to be not “fond of sordid gain”. It might be replied that verse 11 simply *adds* criteria for female deacons. However, the use of *wšautw-* does not indicate *additional* material. It suggests a *separate* group that has similar, though not necessarily identical criteria. In addition, the trial period for men (1 Tim. 3.10) is absent for the women of verse 11. These objections leave “option two,” the view that the “women” are non-ordained diaconal workers (section 13.4.2), as the most viable.

## 6. Conclusion

I believe that the material found in *Male and female in the church* will add greatly to the discussion on the subject of women in the ordained ministries. The depth and breadth of the exegetical material is of great benefit. However, at least some of the options – those favouring women in the ecclesiastical office – face the difficult task of proving that the Biblical prohibition of women teaching or exercising authority (particularly in 1 Tim. 2:12) does not apply to church-life. In my view, the proponents of women in the ecclesiastical office have not convincingly demonstrated that 1 Timothy 2:12 applies to home-life. However, even if it should be granted that the exegesis on which these options are based is *tenable* (17.2.2), the most that can be said is that there is no clear prohibition against women in ordained ministry. The regulative principle requires more than that: the provision of Scriptural *warrant* for women in office. *Male and female in the church* has not demonstrated that warrant. There is insufficient evidence for changing the historic view of the

reformed churches, that women should not be ordained to the ecclesiastical office.

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1 Timothy 2-3, exegesis of ecclesiastical office: women in regulative principle

**Kernbegrippe:**

1 Timoteus 2-3, eksegese kerklike ampte: vroue in regulerende beginsel

