

**Kevin Giles**  
**replies to the Melbourne**  
**Hierarchical-Complementarians.**



*I believe a woman's place is in the congregation*



## **Kevin Giles replies to the Melbourne Hierarchical- Complementarians**

On Saturday afternoon 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2010 I attended the advertised, ‘Equal and Complementary: men and women in ministry’ conference held at Holy Trinity, Doncaster. Somewhere over a hundred people were present, many young, I suspect university students from AFES groups. Peter Adam was listed as the first speaker but unfortunately he had to withdraw for health reasons. In his place a Presbyterian minister, Neil Chamber spoke. The other speakers were Martin Pakula, lecturer at the Bible College of Victoria and a part time lecturer at Ridley College and Fiona McLean, a well-informed Anglican laywoman. This conference was organised to counter the impact of the very successful and well attended, ‘Better Together’ conference organised by Christians for Biblical Equality in June, 2010. Sadly, almost all hierarchical-complementarians from Melbourne avoided this gathering, thereby implying they believed they had nothing to learn from the forty or so speakers who gave input. In contrast, the Melbourne evangelical egalitarians encouraged other egalitarians to attend the ‘Equal and complementary’ conference and many did. Egalitarians are willing to listen to, and weigh the arguments from, alternative positions.

What the three speakers wanted to impress on those present was their conviction that the Bible forbade women from teaching the Bible in Christian communal gatherings where men were present and from holding positions of authority in the church; they were to be subordinate and quiet, and in the home women were to submit to their husband’s

authority. This was what the Bible taught, we were told time and time again. It was not one *interpretation* of what the Bible said, but what the Bible ‘plainly’ said, and thus to disobey what was being taught was to disobey God himself. Evangelical Christians such as John Stott, Gordon Fee, Leon Morris, Barbara Darling, Mary Evans, Graham Cole, Howard Marshall, F. F. Bruce, Tom Wright along with most of the scholarly evangelicals on the world scene, who teach that spiritual *and* social equality is the biblical ideal, were to be ignored and castigated because they had led other evangelicals into ‘liberalism.’ No questions or comments from the floor following each speaker were allowed. It seemed from the beginning that we were there to be told what the speakers wanted to tell us, and not to interact with them. Questions could be written down to be selectively answered after three hours of input. Many people had left before this took place.

The ordination of women hardly got a mention. This observation makes it crystal clear what is central and fundamental in this intermural evangelical conflict. One side is arguing that the Bible makes the subordination of women the God-given unchanging and unchangeable *ideal*; the other side that the Bible makes the spiritual *and* social equality of the two differentiated sexes the God-given *ideal*. Ordination is a side issue. Some may put one or the other position more gently and graciously but there is no middle ground. The choice is absolute and clear cut, either the Bible teaches that God has given men authority over women or it does not. It is true that those who argue today for the subordination of women want to apply this hierarchical ordering only to the church and the home, and not to society in general, but at the same time they claim their position is the historic one and this exemption of ‘society’ was not known before the late nineteenth century. What is more, if women’s subordination is grounded in the creation order,

as all evangelicals who adopt this position emphatically insist, then it subordinates women to men in *all contexts*. What is based in creation should apply to all of creation, society, the church and the home.

There were three foundational assumptions held by each of the conference speakers that came to the fore time and time again.

1. What ‘we’ teach is what the Bible teaches. It is not one interpretation of what the Bible says, it is its ‘plain’ meaning of scripture.
2. What ‘we’ are saying on the man-woman relationship is what Christians have believed from the time of the apostles.
3. Egalitarian evangelicals, denigrated as ‘evangelical-feminists,’ have a ‘liberal hermeneutic’ (way of interpreting the Bible) in which they ignore the bits they do not like; their ultimate authority is the culture of the day, and even if many of the better known and most respected evangelicals leaders argue for the egalitarian position they are not to be listened to. They are wrong.

None of these assertions stand up when examined. They are all objectively false. Their aim and purpose is to exclude the egalitarian position before it is even considered. By dogmatically claiming first of all that evangelical-egalitarians are in fact liberals who do not stand under the authority of the Bible, they are put out of court before they get a hearing. On this basis nothing they say has to be taken seriously or examined. Such an approach has nothing to commend it. People with a mind of their own should see it for what it is and commit themselves to critically examine both positions as their best exponents put them.

The organisers of this conference went to the trouble of arranging it because they are convinced that getting right what the Bible says

on the man-woman relationship is of huge importance. I have heard people of this persuasion say more than once that for them, apart from preaching the Gospel, this is the most important issue of our day for Bible-believing Christians. For them it separates those who believe what the Bible says on this central matter and those who do not; or in other words those who let God's word rule their beliefs and those who let culture rule their beliefs. I have even been told personally that I have put my salvation in jeopardy by directly disobeying God's word. (I of course do not believe I am doing this. I am only disagreeing with a wrong, and in my view an androcentric, *interpretation* of the Bible.)

Most egalitarians likewise think that the matter of what the Bible teaches on the male-female relationship is of huge importance. On this both sides are agreed, even if for different reasons. This is a very weighty issue. We are talking about the dignity, status, ministry and leadership potential of half the human race, a matter that has huge practical outcomes for millions of women. It cannot be compared with differences over baptism or what will happen on the last day when Christ returns. For me, a Gospel that is not good news for women is not really good news for anyone.

Before I comment on what each speaker said, I would like to say something on the title of the conference: 'Equal and Complementary: Men and Women in Ministry.' Most people would take these words in their dictionary sense and think the speakers would be affirming 1. gender 'equality' in a social setting, in this case in the church and the home; 2. 'complementarity,' in the sense that men and women make up the whole of what it means to be human (i.e. neither man alone nor woman alone is the fullness of humanity), and, 3. the words, 'men and women in ministry' would refer to men and women ministering

side by side. In no instance was this case. Each word had a hidden meaning with a sting in the tail for women. The ‘equality’ affirmed was entirely spiritual and heavenly, and the complementarity was that of the benevolent master and the servant or the teacher and the pupil. In the home wives were to be under the authority of their husbands and in the church men were to lead and to teach. It was almost as if the language chosen was chosen to obfuscate what was really being argued on the day and further this agenda by making it all sound innocuous.

I find a lot of people in the diocese are quite puzzled as to why those who insist on male leadership in the home and the church speak of themselves as ‘complementarians.’ It is certainly confusing because the Bible makes it quite clear that the two sexes make up the fullness of humanity – they ‘complement’ each other (Gen. 1:27-28). Since 1975 when I first wrote affirming gender equality I have spoken of the complementarity of the sexes as have most other evangelical egalitarians who have written after me. God has made us men and women, differentiated us, so that each brings something distinctive to the whole of life. It was only in 1990 that for the first time those who had been calling themselves ‘traditionalist’ or ‘conservatives’ began calling themselves ‘complementarians’ for apologetic reasons. Because all Christians are ‘complementarians’ I refer to my debating opponents in this paper as ‘hierarchical–complementarians’ to seek to overcome the confusion, and I encourage them to use this name as self-designation to avoid confusing the church.

In what follows I hope nothing I say is ambiguous. I put to my debating opponents some very hard questions for them and some very well supported evidence that is difficult for them. If they are committed to establishing what the Bible actually says on the man-woman

relationship, they cannot ignore what I say. If they are convinced that what I say is not true, not factual, then they need to show me the counter evidence. If they can do this in a convincing way I will gladly change my mind and apologise for what I have said. If on the other hand they cannot come forward with any evidence to support their assertions, I would hope they would cease making them and reconsider their position.

I only take up the more important issues raised by the three speakers on the day. If I sought to take up every doubtful aside or critical comment about evangelical-egalitarians this paper would be considerably longer. Because this essay is a reply to many untrue and negative caricatures of egalitarian-evangelicals and the consistent dismissal of their interpretative work, it is somewhat negative in tone. It is one loud ‘no’ to most of what was said. If you would like to read my positive and fully biblical outline of the evangelical egalitarian position then please see *Better Together: Equality in Christ*<sup>1</sup>.

After writing this response I sent my work to the three speakers and to four other leading hierarchical-complementarians in the Melbourne diocese, seven people all told, giving them freedom to pass it on to anyone else who might help them to check out what I had written. I agreed to correct any misquoting of what the speakers said, delete anything that was not factually correct and consider any criticism. I had four replies and in almost every case I made the correction requested, or rewrote any sentences or paragraphs that were thought to be problematic. I thank my respondents for their input.

Martin Pakula and Fiona McLean’s talks can be found on [www.equalandcomplementary.org](http://www.equalandcomplementary.org). Neil Cameron’s talk did not record.

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1 (Melbourne: Acorn, 2010).



## **The speakers and what they said.**

Before I consider what each speaker said, I want to highlight one common thread. All of the speakers argued, subtly at times, less subtly at others, that what sharply separated hierarchical-complementarians and egalitarian-complementarians was acceptance or not of biblical authority. All the former were said to submit to what the Bible ‘plainly’ said on the man –woman relationship, the latter not: for them their ultimate authority was claimed to be culture. This is absurd. Does anyone really think that evangelicals of the stature of John Stott, Leon Morris, F. F. Bruce, Howard Marshall, Tom Wright, Mary Evans and Gordon Fee and countless other evangelical leaders, men and women, can be so easily dismissed because they affirm co-equality? Let’s be quite honest, this is a debate about the *interpretation* of scripture. The fact is that a very large number of the most respected evangelical exegetes profoundly disagree with the hierarchical-complementarian interpretation of scripture on the male-female relationship.

The culture argument is of course a two edged sword. The three speakers may accuse their opponents of giving way to post 1970s culture, but in turn we egalitarians could accuse the hierarchicalists of seeking to find texts to uphold pre 1970s cultural norms. Accusing other evangelicals for giving into culture, however, is only a crowd pleaser. I would believe this argument if Neil and Martin had turned up in a toga and spoke in Hebrew or Greek (language is the most profound aspect of any culture). We are all bound up in our culture. It is, to use a metaphor, the water the fish swims in. How we dress, what we eat, our modes of transport, our government, our education etc., all reflect our culture. We are called to be Christians in a given culture. We rightly accept most of our given culture. It cannot be otherwise.

Nevertheless as Christians we are to be wary of or reject aspects of our culture that undermine our faith or are morally unacceptable. However, believing that men and women should be equally valued and given equality of opportunity to express God-given gifts of leadership is not immoral! It is a noble ideal, pleasing to Christ, the Gospels would suggest. Men and women are equal in sin and salvation. Women are not more sinful or less human than men. Homosexual practice certainly raises moral issues, but the Bible never equates or parallels homosexuality and the status and dignity of women, and we should not do this either. What the Bible parallels is slavery, racism and women's subordination (Gal. 3:28).

### **Neil Chamber.**

Neil Chamber was the first speaker. He spoke charitably of his opponents but took it as an axiom that if one believed the Bible one would be a hierarchical-complementarian. I saw his talk divided up into four sections.

First, he stressed the need to study the Bible carefully and to respect the great confessions of the faith. He handed out a long section from the Westminster Confession on the Bible. In this part of his talk he argued that those who held a high view of scripture should understand that governance of the church by presbyters was prescriptive. Most of this part of his talk I basically agreed with. I am, however, not convinced that governance of the church by presbyters is prescribed by the Bible. His view of what the Bible says on this matter is only one possible interpretation of a few texts that mention presbyters, and one that convinces few but dogmatic Presbyterians. Could it be his view on women is also only one possible interpretation of a few selected verses?

Second, he respectfully outlined the three hermeneutical rules I set out in my book, *The Trinity and Subordinationism*, for reading the Bible rightly on the man-woman relationship. Insightfully, he concluded that if he followed my rules for interpreting the Bible he would be an egalitarian. I set out these guidelines for reading the Bible because when Christians are divided on what the Bible says on some important issue the first matter to be addressed is how we are to read the Bible. My solution is that we should start where the Bible starts, Genesis chapter 1, and then read progressively until we come to the book of Revelation. This is how we would study the Bible on any issue; why a special approach that begins and ends with 1 Tim 2:11-14 in this one instance? I also argue that in reading the Bible the eschatological or forward looking dimension of scripture should be acknowledged. Christ actually inaugurated something new, a movement forward in divine revelation (2 Cor. 5:17), and in his resurrection he brought into this world a foretaste of end time existence for believers. Neil noted that Gordon Fee also raised the issue of the need to openly examine the hermeneutic used to study the Bible on the man-woman relationship.<sup>2</sup> From my and Fee's comments, Neil drew the conclusion that egalitarians had concocted a way to read the Bible, a *hermeneutic*, that got around the 'plain' teaching of scripture on the subordination of women. He inferred that in contrast, hierarchical-complementarians simply opened the Bible and obeyed what they found in scripture.

Neil is entitled to disagree with me and Fee's proposed hermeneutic, but to imply that hierarchical-complementarians simply take the Bible as it is, and that they do not have a hermeneutic, is an insult to

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<sup>2</sup> Martin referred to Fees essay, 'Hermeneutics and the Gender Debate', in R. Pierce and R. Groothuis, *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005) 364-381. This is a brilliant essay and should be read.

intelligence. Neil did not spell out his alternative way of reading the Bible (his hermeneutic) because he was suggesting that he and his fellow travellers had no agreed hermeneutic. They simply read the Bible as believing Christians.

Neil, however made it clear that he thought the right place to begin was 1 Tim. 2:11-14, and from this vantage point the whole Bible was to be read. This is the hermeneutic espoused by all the hierarchical complementarians I have ever heard or read. This is exactly the hermeneutic Martin Pakula adopted in the next lecture at this conference. The two monumental problems with this are:

1. This is not the approach taken by those doing biblical theology on any other matter. It is agreed that to hear rightly what the Bible says on any issue - faith, sin, salvation, homosexuality, the man-woman relationship etc, - the biblical theologian should start with what Genesis says, move through the OT, then study the Gospels, then Paul and finally the general epistles and Revelation. This hermeneutic recognises that there is significant diversity in scripture on any matter and the whole is what is of greatest importance. I ask, how can a unique hermeneutic be justified when it comes to the man-woman relationship?
2. The second monumental problem with beginning with a selected single verse is that something exceptional, speaking to a specific situation, may be universalised and the whole scope of scripture negated. One of the most important biblical theologians in the post Second World War years was the Reformed scholar, Oscar Cullman. In his book, *The State in The New Testament*<sup>3</sup> he wrote in criticism of the German Christian supporters of the Nazis

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3 (London: SCM, 1963)

who claimed the state was an order of creation, established by God to be obeyed, quoting Rom 13:1-7 as proof as if this one text finally settled the matter. In reply Cullman argued that this one text must be read in the light of what whole NT says on the state. One text taken in isolation and interpreted in one way proves nothing. The overall teaching of scripture, he finds, does not unreservedly validate the state and its ruler. Jesus limited the domain of the state (Mk 12:17) and said many negative things about rulers and the Roman state. Revelation chapter 13 depicts the state as demonic because it has overstepped its domain and is persecuting Christians. So Cullman concludes that the NT makes the state something provisional in God's plan, a reality ever tempted to overstep its God-given mandate. Cullmann concludes that if Romans 13:1-7 is read to sum up all that the Bible teaches on the state, then this one verse stands in 'flagrant contradiction to the teaching of Jesus. It would also contradict the opinion of the other New Testament authors as well, chiefly that of the author of the Johannine apocalypse. Above all, moreover, Paul would contradict himself'.<sup>4</sup> To avoid such a stark contradiction within scripture Cullmann argues that an alternative reading of Rom. 13:1-7 must be established. This is found first, by placing the text in its specific historical context. Paul is endorsing the rule of Rome which *at that time* was promoting peace and stability in the empire and so making possible the advance of the Gospel. And second, by interpreting this one text so that it does not contradict what scripture says elsewhere. Only by adopting such a hermeneutic, he insists, can a holistic biblical theology of the state be given. When this

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4 *Ibid*, 46.

approach is not adopted, and all attention is given to one verse, then the Bible is made the servant of our political agenda. Its voice is silenced. Human presuppositions prevail. This he sees as a perennial danger for conservative theologians. Indeed, Cullmann goes so far as to argue that *'the fountainhead of all false biblical interpretation and all heresy is invariably the isolation and absolutising of one single passage.'*<sup>5</sup>

What Cullman says on this matter *perfectly matches* the error basic to the contemporary hierarchical-complementarian position. One text, 1 Tim. 2:11-14, is absolutised with the result that scripture is brought into conflict with scripture. We thus are left with the clear hermeneutical alternatives:

1. *To begin where the Bible begins on the man-woman relationship, Gen 1:27-28, and read forward following the story line of the Bible itself, listening particularly carefully on the way to what Jesus's says on the male-female relationship and on leadership before moving to Paul and the other New Testament writings.*
2. *Or, to begin with one text, 1 Tim 2:11-14, a verse, with no direct parallel in the rest of scripture, and then read the whole Bible through this lens.*

Both sides in all honesty have a hermeneutic, a thought out approach to reading the Bible. What each of us must decide is which one we will adopt to do justice to what the Bible as a whole says on the man-woman relationship. Pretending or claiming that we do not have a hermeneutic is not an option.

Third, Neil rejected the universal argument by egalitarian-evangelicals that the apostolic exhortations to women, slaves and children set in

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 47. Italics added

parallel in the Bible are parallel practical advice to people living in a culture that took women's subordination, slavery and the lifetime obligation of children to parents as cultural norms. They speak to that age and culture; they are not binding norms for all times. In contrast, along with all hierarchical-complementarians, Neil asserted a strong 'contrast' had to be made between the exhortations to women and slaves to be subordinate. Yes, he said, the exhortations to slaves are simply practical advice to masters and slaves living in a culture that took for granted slavery, they are not theologically grounded and permanently binding directions. But this is not true of the exhortations to women to be subordinate. These exhortations to women are 'all' grounded in the order of creation which makes them transcultural and unchangeable, the ideal. Not one word of supporting evidence was given and none can be given – not one scrap. No one has ever argued for such a contrast in the history of the church prior to about 1975; the modern scholarly studies on these exhortations to members of the ancient household do not find this contrast;<sup>6</sup> there is nothing in these exhortations to suggest this contrast. And Gal. 3:28 parallels women and slavery, not making this contrast.

These parallel exhortations to members of the extended family are given in their fullest form in Col. 3:18-4:1 and Eph. 5:22-6:9 where three paired groups are addressed: husbands and wives, masters and slaves, fathers and children. In 1 Peter 2:18-3:7 masters disappear from view as they do in the Pastorals where fathers and children are also not mentioned (1 Tim. 6:1-2, Tit. 2:1-10). In the Pastorals the reciprocal element is missing. Women and slaves are addressed, not

<sup>6</sup> The only scholarly exception I have seen is in the work of the Moore College lecturer, P O'Brien in his commentaries on Ephesian and Colossians. I have read his arguments carefully and am not convinced and I note the more detailed and specialised studies on the household codes discount his case.

their counterparts. Not one of these exhortations base subordination on anything said in Genesis chapters 2 and 3. To claim that they are based on the pre-Fall subordination of women is an assertion without any basis. Appeal to Eph. 5: 33 does not prove otherwise. Here Paul quotes Gen. 2:33 not to support the subordination of women/wives but rather the oneness of man and women in marriage.

*My point is either true or false. If true then the exhortations to wives to be subordinate are simply practical advice to women living in a culture where the subordination of women, like slavery, was a cultural norm and are thus not binding today. If false then the evidence for the position taken by hierarchical-complementarians needs to be offered.*

We would not expect the subordination of wives to be predicated on a pre-Fall subordination of women taught in Gen 2 and 3 because nothing in these chapters suggests this idea. Genesis teaches rather that women's subordination is entirely one consequence of the sin of man and woman (c.f. Gen 3:16). It is true that for centuries in a patriarchal and androcentric world male commentators found at least eleven hints<sup>7</sup> to indicate a pre-Fall subordination of women, but one by one they have all collapsed, having been shown to be special pleading. It would be hard to find a recognized Old Testament scholar supporting any one of these arguments today.<sup>8</sup> And very significantly, in 1987 Pope John Paul II in 7 Philip Payne, *Man and Woman: One in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009) 41-54 lists these arguments, some of which are quite amusing.

8 See, W. Brueggemann, *Genesis: A Bible Commentary for Teachers and Preachers* (Atlanta, John Knox, 1982) and R. S. Hess, 'Equality with Innocence: Genesis 1-3', in Pierce and Groothuis, eds, *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 79-95. A very significant observation is that Gordon Wenham, a hierarchical-complementarian, in 1987 commentary, *Genesis 1-5* (Waco, Texas: Word) found the subordination of woman before the Fall only hinted at in the naming of the animals by Adam alone. In his 2007 commentary on Genesis in *The Eerdmans Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 39-47, he finds it nowhere in Gen 2 and speaks of the change in the man-woman relationship after the Fall.



his encyclical, *Mulieris Dignitatem*,<sup>9</sup> on the advice of the best Roman Catholic biblical scholarship, broke with centuries of tradition ruling that there is no pre-Fall subordination of women. Women's subordination is entirely due to the Fall and thus should be opposed by Christians.

*The now almost united scholarly consensus that women's subordination is entirely a consequence of the Fall is the most fatal blow to the contemporary hierarchical position imaginable. Their case is predicated entirely on this thesis.*

Four, Neil finally spoke sharply against Gordon Fee's point that there is on some matters in scripture 'ambiguity.' Fee gives the examples of the nature of the resurrection body and church order. His chapter, 'Hermeneutics and the Gender Debate' in the book, *Rediscovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, in which he makes this point, is very thoughtful and helpful; a must read. On the issue of women in leadership, Fee points out the obvious. Texts can be quoted that speak of women leading house churches, prophesying and taking other active ministries and at least one text, 1 Tim. 2:11-14, can be quoted to say women should not lead or teach in church. We would not have debate, he says, if there were not some 'ambiguity.' What of course is difficult for Neil as a Presbyterian is that Fee also points out that how the church in general is ordered is also not clearly defined in scripture. It would seem that the Bible does not prescribe elders. Most Christians accept this ambiguity on church order and allow that how the church is structured is not dictated by scripture.

In summing up, I note that Neil gave no exegetical basis for anything he asserted. It was as if he knew God had subordinated women to men, and he assumed the Bible must teach this. All his friends believed this: how

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9 (Homebush, St Pauls. 1988)

could anyone think otherwise? I cannot recall him quoting a single verse or opening the Bible once.

After Neil had spoken there was a fifteen minute break and he and I spoke to each other for most of this time. I thanked him for his civility and fairness in dealing with my work. He in turn thanked me for my writings, saying how much he valued my book on the church.

### **Martin Pakula.**

Now to Martin's talk. I will be quite frank. I found his language offensive and his appeal to scripture special pleading at best or disingenuous at worst. He depicted his evangelical debating opponents as disobedient Christians who had led the church into liberalism and summarily dismissed any counter evidence to his ideas. Sitting at his feet knowing that much of what he said so authoritatively and dogmatically was simply untrue was painful. His thesis was that the issue in question could be answered by a careful study of 1 Tim. 2:11-14. This one text was clear and unambiguous and what it said should settle the matter once and for all for Bible believing Christians. Time and time again he said he was giving 'the plain meaning of the text.' What the Bible says on women is not ambiguous, he insisted, it is simply that some evangelicals are not willing to obey what scripture 'plainly' says. He named the highly respected evangelical leaders and biblical scholars, John Stott, Gordon Fee and Howard Marshall as three explicit examples of men who denied what the Bible 'plainly' taught. Why the godly and gifted exegete John Stott, whom Martin called, 'the greatest evangelical teacher of the Bible in the twentieth century' got the biggest bucketing puzzles me. Admittedly, Stott argues that 1 Tim. 2:11-14 does not forbid women from teaching in church in all ages and that women may be ordained, but he was not a consistent egalitarian. In

the 1970s and 80s he tried to keep evangelicals together by not taking a clear cut position. In the end this pleased neither side.

In essence Martin's argument was, "What I am telling you 1 Tim. 2:11-14 is saying is what the Bible says, it is not an interpretation. If you disobey what I say you are not disobeying me but God himself!" In other words, he equated *his interpretation* of this one passage, and by implication of the whole Bible, with the text of the Bible and thus suggested that his words were as much the Word of God as the Bible itself. His was divinely inspired speech. In contrast, he argued, some of the best known and most respected evangelical leaders have simply given their very human interpretation of the Bible dictated by cultural norms. In doing so they have led other evangelicals into 'liberalism.' The possibility that the careful study of the Bible might have determined the beliefs of these evangelical leaders, or that their interpretation of the Bible was more compelling than his, was not considered. Their competing interpretation of this verse and much else in the Bible was ruled out of court as 'liberal' and culturally determined before it was considered.

Martin followed exactly the hermeneutic condemned by Cullman in relation to the state. He absolutised one text, 1 Tim. 2:11-14, and ignored all else in the Bible. Jesus' positive stance towards women and the fact that not once did he ever say anything to suggest he believed in authoritative male 'headship' never got a mention. Martin completely ignored the primary rule for a right *theological exegesis of scripture*, namely the whole of scripture should determine the meaning of individual texts. As a result, as Cullman warns, he ended up contradicting the teaching of Jesus (Matt. 20:26-28, 23:11, Mk. 9:35, 10:43-45, Lk. 9:48, 22:25-27, Jn 13:4-20), rejecting Paul's theology of ministry that

insists that the Spirit gives gifts of leadership alike to men and women (Rom. 12:4-8, 1 Cor. chapters 12 to 14, Eph. 4:11-12, c.f. Acts 2:17-18) and gave no explanation of how Paul can be so affirming of women's leadership in other epistles, even of a woman apostle (Rom. 16:7).

We have already considered the profound problem that one text theology raises in responding to Neil. With Martin I want to concentrate on two other profound problems his reasoning and talk raised.

First, it is hard to believe that a supposedly scholarly evangelical would stand up and claim that his exposition of 1 Tim. 2:8-14 was *not an interpretation* of the Bible but what the Bible teaches – its 'plain meaning.' After 30 years of evangelical study of hermeneutics, the science of interpreting and applying scripture rightly, it is now universally recognised that communication is an interpretative event. When one person speaks or writes another has to give meaning to the words, that is interpret them. Speech or text by necessity has to be interpreted by the recipient. That is what the brain does when it hears patterned speech and when the eye sees signs on a page. There is only good, partial, poor or erroneous interpretation. This means that *everyone* who seeks to expound 1 Tim. 2:8-14, or any other text, is giving their *interpretation* of the words written on the page. There is no other possibility. Thus despite his lofty claims to be virtually speaking for God, Martin Pakula on Saturday afternoon the 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2010 was not speaking for God; Martin was giving *his interpretation* of this one text in scripture that made it say things which directly contradict much else in scripture. Our responsibility, once we recognise this fact, is to ask, "Is what Martin said a good, poor or mistaken interpretation of 1 Tim. 2:8-14?"

In reply to one of those I sent this paper to before releasing it, may I say my understanding of hermeneutics (the Greek word it transliterates

simply means interpretation) is not post-modern, or liberal, or uninformed. I am not saying words or texts can mean anything or that the meaning of texts is given entirely by the interpreter. What I am saying is that all communication has to be interpreted and the interpretation given can be good, bad or indifferent. The concept of uninterpreted communication is as meaningful as a round square. No one can claim that what they say or think a communication means is the only possibility: they alone know the fullness of meaning of what was said or written. If anyone wants to study this issue in greater detail they should read the evangelical Kevin Vanhoozer's book, *Is Their meaning in the Text?*<sup>10</sup> strongly commended on the back cover by Professor Don Carson.

The second major problem Martin's lecture raised is that in seeking to give his *interpretation* the very highest authority Martin repeatedly claimed (10 times I think he said this) that his exposition of 1 Tim. 2:8-14 exactly matched what all Christians have believed this text is saying 'until very recent times' or for 'the last two thousand years,' until 'evangelical feminists' – his emotive and dismissive designation for evangelical-egalitarians – came up with their 'novel' interpretation without any merit.

Thus the two pressing question's Martin's talk raises are:

1. *Is his interpretation of 1 Tim. 2:11-14 compelling, or even the most likely? This is a question on the plausibility of his exegesis. At this point all we can say is that Martin acknowledges that some of the most competent and godly evangelical biblical scholars disagree with him.*
2. *Is his explicit claim that his interpretation of 1 Tim 2:11-14 is exactly how Christians have understood this passage from the time of the apostles true? This is a straightforward historical question, open to validation or falsification.*

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10 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

## **Martin's exposition of 1 Tim. 2:11-14.**

Martin began his *interpretation* of 1 Tim 2:11-14 well by setting the passage in its literary and textual context, the whole epistle of 1 Timothy. He pointed out that Paul wrote to Timothy primarily to instruct him how to deal with the heretical teachers that were dividing the church (c.f. 1 Tim 1:3-7, 3:14-15). What he failed to mention, that is so important for a right interpretation of this passage, is that women were involved in this heresy (4:7, 5:3-7, 9-16) and that the same accusations against the false teachers are made against the women. Indeed, there are more negative comments about women in 1 Timothy than any other writing in the NT.<sup>11</sup> Surely this fact is also background information needed to rightly interpret 1 Tim. 2:11-14?

Martin also correctly pointed out that the text in question needed to be interpreted in the context of the section beginning at 1 Tim 2:8. However, what he said on vv 8-10 was not very profound. I would have hoped he might have commented on why Paul commands men in general 'in every place' to 'pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or argument.' It seems the general principle Paul enunciates is that *all men* in all contexts should pray with hands held high and the specific instruction, alluding to the division in the church, is not to do so in contention and anger. This text thus raises two questions, 1. Were all the men praying in anger or only some of them? And, 2. Why is this seemingly universal command to men to pray with lifted hands not taught in most evangelical churches? When it comes to Paul's instruction to 'the women' (v 9) we have again the question, was Paul speaking to all women in general or only to some women in Ephesus at that time who were ostentatiously wearing gold and

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<sup>11</sup> On all this see Payne, *Man and Woman in Christ*, 299-304.

braided hair. Since poor women do not wear gold and braid their hair, Paul must be addressing *some* women, wealthy women who were social elite in the church, and thus possibly the ones causing the problems this passage addresses

His discussion of v 11 that gives the one imperative in this whole section was also inadequate. Why, we must ask, does Paul command women and *women alone* to learn in quietness? Surely Paul believed men *and* women should learn quietly? It must be that in this specific situation some or all of the women were in need of instruction for a reason. In a normal church situation both men and women should be encouraged to learn. Why does Paul only address the women in this text? Martin offered no explanation.

Verses 12-14. These are the crucial verses. Repeatedly Martin told us that he was giving ‘the plain meaning’ of what Paul wrote, not an interpretation, and what he was outlining was how all Christians from the first century have understood these verses. He stressed repeatedly that nothing in this passage teaches that women are ‘inferior’ to men; they simply have different ‘roles’.

V 12. Martin insisted that Paul here is forbidding *all* women *at all* times from doing two things, to teach the Bible in church and to exercise authority in the life of the church. He appealed to two 1995 studies by very prominent hierarchical-complementarians, Andreas Kostenberger and H. Scott Baldwin,<sup>12</sup> on this text, telling us their conclusions are definitive and final. Either Martin is more than 10

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12 In the book, *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15* (Grand Rapids, 1995). Reprinted and revised 2005. I published a 12,000 word critical review of this book in the *Evangelical Quarterly* in 2000. See ‘A Critique of the Novel Contemporary Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9-15, Given in the Book *Women in the Church*’, *E Q*, part 1, 72/2, 151-167, par 2, 72/3, 195-215.

years behind in his reading or he was not willing to admit that high level scholarly responses to these two essays have seriously called into question their conclusions.<sup>13</sup> The evidence would seem to be that two Greek words linked by the Greek particle *oude* can relate one activity where something positive is mentioned, this case ‘teaching,’ to something considered negatively, in this case acting in an *authentain* way.<sup>14</sup> And second, the evidence would suggest that in the first century, the Greek word *authentain*, which Martin wants us to believe simply means ‘authority’ in a positive sense, is in fact a very negative word, speaking of an improper exercise of authority.<sup>15</sup>

What this means is that both sides need to admit that the force of the Greek in this text is highly disputed. Where Martin fails is in telling his audience that his view is *certain*.

Martin’s argument that the exceptional Greek word *authentain* is a synonym of the usual Greek word for authority (*exousia*) is not only semantically doubtful at best but disastrous for the hierarchical-complementarian position he is seeking to put in his own way. On seven occasions, in varied wording, Jesus told his disciples not to concern themselves, as unbelievers do, with who is first, who has *authority over* whom,<sup>16</sup> who is to be most honoured, but rather to concern themselves with humble, costly service for others (Matt. 20:26-28, 23:11, Mk. 9:35, 10:43-45, Lk. 9:48, 22:25-27 and by example, Jn 13:4-20).

13 See L. Bellville, ‘Teaching and Usurping Authority: 1 Tim. 2:11-15’ in Pierce and Groothuis, *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 205-223, Payne, *Man and Woman in Christ*, 291-460.

14 Bellville, 217-219, Payne 337-359.

15 Bellville, 209-217, Payne, 361-397.

16 In my comments on Fiona McLean’s talk later in this paper I point out that the word ‘authority’ can refer to something intrinsic or extrinsic to a person. People recognised Jesus’ intrinsic authority; it evoked respect and awe. Pastors and husbands may by costly service and love earn such authority. What Jesus forbade his disciples from doing was seeking to exercise extrinsic authority, that is power, over others.



Luke tells us that while Jesus was eating his last meal with his disciples before his arrest, trials and crucifixion, ‘a dispute arose among the disciples as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest’ (Lk 22: 24). In reply to them Jesus says, ‘The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority (*exousia*) over them are called benefactors. But it shall not be with you; rather the greatest among you must become as the youngest, and the leader like one who serves (Gk *diakoneo*)’ (Lk. 22:25-26). If *authenthein* is a synonym of *exousia* in the *power over* sense, then in 1 Tim. 2:12 Paul is directly contradicting Jesus. Here we recall Cullmann’s warning that absolutising and isolating one text can easily lead to making scripture contradict itself.

In this case we have the situation where hierarchical-complementarians are pre-occupied with asking, can women exercise *authority* in the church and the home, while Jesus is preoccupied with warning his disciples about seeking to exercise *authority over* others. Martin and his friends ask, “Can women exercise authority?” Jesus asks, “Who is willing to put aside authority over others and serve?” So the right question is not whether women exercise authority but whether they can *serve*? It seems they can, perhaps even better than men!

Who, we might ask, to use Martin’s phrase is ‘the more biblical’? The Christian who thinks pastors are called to exercise authority over others or the Christian who thinks pastors are called to serve?

So what can we say with certainty on 1 Tim. 2:12?

- Paul’s *theology of ministry* envisages the Spirit giving men and women gifts of leadership in the church (Rom 12:4-8, 1 Cor. 12-14, Eph. 4:11-12, c.f. Acts 2:17-18). Reading 1 Tim. 2:12 as a blanket ban on women teaching/preaching in church

is almost impossible to reconcile with Paul's own enunciated theology of ministry.

- Paul's *practice of ministry* generally matches his theology of ministry. He speaks of men and women as 'fellow workers' in Gospel ministry, he allows that women can be house church leaders, almost certainly missionary apostles (Rom. 16:7) and that they can lead the gathered church in prayer and prophecy, etc. 1 Tim. 2:12 stands in stark contrast to Paul's normal affirmation of women in leadership.
- Paul near the end of his life forbids women at Ephesus to teach in church and/or exercise *authentein*. This command has no direct parallel in the whole Bible and Paul in particular says nothing like this anywhere else. What is undisputed is that the Greek word, *authentein*, used here is nowhere else found in the Bible. Its use is exceptional. A very plausible conclusion from this fact is that an exceptional situation is envisaged.
- This command is located in an epistle to a situation where heresy is rampant and women are involved. A very plausible explanation of this exceptional command defined by an exceptional word is that the command is contextually specific.
- The force of the *oude* construction and of the exceptional word *authentein* is hotly disputed, with the evidence as it stands at the moment not favouring the hierarchical-complementarians.
- The case that *authentein* has a negative meaning, speaking of a kind of teaching that is to be rejected whether men or women do it, is what Christians have generally believed the word meant.

This is the historic understanding of the word (I will substantiate this point below).

- If Paul is here teaching that ministry involves *authority over* those taught, then at this point he would seem to directly contradict one of the most important principles in Jesus' teaching. Ministry in his name is about giving up *authority over* others to serve.

The most likely interpretation of this verse is that Paul is rebuking the women at Ephesus, and only at Ephesus at that time, who are giving false teaching in a domineering way (*authentain*), usurping authority, and putting themselves first. He does this by reminding them that in the Genesis creation story, Eve was created second and it was Eve who was deceived, just as the women in Ephesus have been deceived. Paul would not have approved of men domineering and usurping authority in the church and in his age women doing this was very problematic. This exceptional command is entirely context specific and this is why it stands in stark contrast to Paul's clearly stated theology of ministry and usual affirmation of women in leadership.

One exceptional command on its own forbidding something that elsewhere is endorsed would not necessarily be problematic. What makes this command weighty for hierarchical-complementarians, and Martin in particular, is their belief that in verses 13 and 14 Paul is predicating this command on the ordering of the sexes in the Garden of Eden, before the Fall. They thus speak of women's exclusion from teaching in church and their exclusion from exercising *authentain* as being based on 'the order of creation' – by which they mean the *hierarchical social ordering* of the sexes given before the Fall. This is

a very difficult argument because the text itself of Gen. 2-3 does not suggested that being created second or the fact that Eve sinned first indicates women's subordination. All Roman Catholic commentaries now reject any hint of the subordination of women before the Fall in the Genesis narrative, and most scholarly Protestant commentaries today come to the same conclusion.<sup>17</sup> A far better explanation of vv 13 and 14 is that Paul refers to the creation story to back up his exceptional command to the exceptional situation at Ephesus at this time, where women are putting themselves first and it is they who have been deceived like Eve of old. So how does Martin deal with these verses?

V13. For Martin this verse firmly grounds women's subordination in the created order, before the Fall. It gives the ideal that can never change. Woman was created second and thus second in rank, under the man's authority. The problem with this as I have just mentioned, is that most modern scholarly commentaries on Genesis do not find this idea in the text of Genesis 1-3. In Genesis chapter 1 man and woman are created last and reign supreme. Why, we must ask, does being created second imply subordination? Often something created second is superior. What is more, if woman's subordination is based in creation, then *all women* are subordinated to men *in all situations*, the home, the church and the world – the whole of creation- as most Christians believed until late in the nineteenth century. So for Martin, if he is consistent and adopts the historic position, this text proves too much. If he followed his own theology he would need to campaign against women in leadership in society not just in the church. A better exegesis finds the meaning of these words not in the Genesis text but in the Ephesian church where some women are improperly putting themselves first and had been deceived.

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<sup>17</sup> See note 8 on this.

V14. Martin clearly and unambiguously says several times that Paul is not teaching that women are more easily deceived or more prone to sin. Fiona McLean in her later teaching session at this conference says exactly the same thing. She emphatically denies 1 Tim. 2:14 teaches that women are more easily deceived. The problem with this interpretation for Martin and Fiona is as follows:

1. If this verse universalises Paul's prohibition on women teaching and exercising authority in church, as the hierarchical-complementarians insist, then the comment must speak of why women cannot teach and exercise *authentein* in church as a general principle.
2. Virtually all commentators until the 1960s interpreted this verse to be one of the two reasons why Paul forbade women to speak or lead. They should not do this because they were created second and thus second in rank, and they are more prone than men to sin and deception.
3. In opposition to Martin and Fiona, many hierarchical-complementarians today in the end tell us the verse must indicate that women are more prone to sin and deception than men. Mark Driscoll is one of the best known and most followed hierarchical-complementarians. This is his interpretation of v 14.

'Without blushing, Paul is simply stating that when it comes to leading in the church, women are unfit because they are more gullible and easier to deceive than men. While many irate women have disagreed with his assessment through the years, it does appear from this that such women who fail to trust his instruction and follow his teaching are much like their mother Eve and are well-intended but ill-informed. . . Before you get all emotional like a woman in hearing this, please consider the content of the

women's magazines at your local grocery store that encourages liberated women in our day to watch porno with their boyfriends, master oral sex for men who have no intention of marrying them, pay for their own dates in the name of equality, spend an average of three-fourths of their childbearing years having sex but trying not to get pregnant, and abort 1/3 of all babies – and ask yourself if it doesn't look like the Serpent is still trolling the garden and that the daughters of Eve aren't gullible in pronouncing progress, liberation, and equality.<sup>18</sup>

A more androcentric view of the world is hard to imagine. Surely much the same could be said about men if we looked at men's magazines in a newsagency. Nevertheless, Driscoll is at least accurately reflecting the historical interpretation of 1 Tim. 2:14 and giving the interpretation of Paul's words that is commonly held by hierarchical-complementarians. Here we should note something. How we must ask, can Martin's understanding of 1 Tim. 2:14 not be just *one possible interpretation* of these words? In this instance his dogmatic explanation of the 'plain' meaning of Paul's words is opposed not by supposedly culture-bound, 'liberal' evangelical-egalitarians, they are happy with it, but by Bible-obeying hierarchical-complementarians!

Finally, it must be mentioned that in *emphatically denying* that v 14 speaks of *all* women's proneness to deception and sin, Martin and Fiona paradoxically fully embrace the evangelical egalitarian interpretation of this verse. Paul is *not* saying all women are more easily deceived and prone to sin and thus should not teach or exercise *authentein* in church. Rather, he is telling *some* women, the women at Ephesus addressed in this epistle, and them only, not to do these things because they specifically have been deceived by the devil like Eve

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18 Mark Driscoll, *Church Leadership: Explaining the Roles of Jesus, Elders, Deacons, and Members at Mars Hill*, Mars Hill Theology Series (Seattle, WA: Mars Hill Church, 2004) 43.

of old. Martin and Fiona have only two options, this verse speaks of *all* women or only some women, namely those in the Ephesus church to whom Paul speaks. I am glad they agree with me in seeing this comment as context specific.

### **Prophecy and teaching.**<sup>19</sup>

To round off his argument Martin has to explain how Paul could affirm women and men *leading* the church in prayer and prophecy, as long as women covered their heads and men did not cover their heads, as was culturally and contextually appropriate for each sex at Corinth in the first century (1 Cor. 11:3-16), and yet forbid women exclusively from teaching the Bible in church at Ephesus some years later.

Martin adopts the standard post 1970s hierarchical-complementarian explanation first put by W. Grudem in the 1970s. Women may not teach the Bible in church because teaching/preaching is an authoritative ministry, whereas prophecy is not. It has to be judged by the hearers. This argument is so weak it is hard to believe intelligent men (or women) *continue* to make it

- Does not teaching/preaching also need to be assessed? So much I have heard in sermons is entirely a reflection of human concerns and perspectives.
- Does not the authority of what is said lie in the degree to which it reflects the mind of God revealed in scripture, whether it be in prophecy or teaching?

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<sup>19</sup> I have published several times on this matter. See Kevin Giles, *Patterns of Ministry Among the First Christians* (Melbourne: Collins-Dove, 1989) 99-124, 125- 151 and R. Marin and P. Davids, *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and its Development* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997) ‘Prophecy, Prophets, False Prophets’, 970-977.

- How is it that women may prophecy but not teach in church when Paul sets prophecy over teaching (1 Cor. 12:28) and makes it the most important ministry in communal meetings (1 Cor. 14)? What is more he also speaks of the church as being founded on the apostles and prophets, not the teachers (Ep. 2:20).
- True, twice Paul mentions teaching and prophecy as separate ministries (1 Cor. 12:28, Eph. 4:12) but balancing this fact is the observation that in the Bible in general and in Paul in particular these two ministries overlap. The OT prophets are often depicted as the teachers of Israel; Jesus is called both a prophet and a teacher; the leaders of the church at Antioch are alike called ‘prophets and teachers’ (Acts 13:1), Paul says that when the prophet speaks people ‘learn’ - what happens hopefully in teaching, and Jezebel the false prophet is condemned for giving false teaching (Rev. 2:20).
- We might be convinced just a little by this argument if egalitarian-complementarians actually opened up possibilities for women to prophesy in church, but they do not. They simply say women may prophesy but not teach the Bible in church to safeguard their interpretation of 1 Tim. 2:11-14, but in practice exclude women from all proclamation in church. Their practice does not match their rhetoric.

However, it is not just that the Bible consistently speaks with approval of women leading in prophecy. Paul almost certainly speaks of an exceptional apostle called Junia, a woman (Rom 16:7). She is not one of the 12 apostles but one of the larger group of missionary apostles like Barnabas, Apollos and Timothy.<sup>20</sup> Even strong hierarchical-

20 See further Payne, *Man and Woman*, 65-67 and E. J. Epp, *Junia, the First Woman*



complementarians like Moo are forced to admit that Junia was a female apostle.<sup>21</sup> Paul holds that apostles are ‘first’ in the church, on them and the prophets the church is founded (Eph. 2:20) and apostles certainly taught. This reference to a woman apostle, the ministry that is ‘first’ in precedence in the church, on its own completely undermines the hierarchical case that God does not want women to lead in the church.

### **The historical interpretation of 1 Tim. 2:11-14.**

As I noted earlier, Martin, in seeking to give his *interpretation* the very highest authority, repeatedly claimed that his exposition of 1 Tim. 2:8-14 exactly matched what all Christians have believed this passage is saying ‘until very recent times’ when ‘evangelical feminists’ came up with their novel interpretation. I have now outlined his interpretation of these verses so we can check the veracity of his much repeated assertions. Because we have a large body of written commentary on these verses across the centuries, there is no little debate on how these texts have been interpreted historically. I give this information in more detail with full documentation in my book, *The Trinity and Subordinationism*.<sup>22</sup> No one has contested the facts I set out.

V 12 was taken to mean women should not speak *in public*, particularly in church, and not exercise authority. God had made men ‘superior,’ women ‘inferior.’ This interpretation of this text reigned until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and was common until the 1960s.

Martin in contrast teaches that women may exercise authority anywhere but the home and the church and they can speak in public but not teach in mixed Christian gatherings. He also

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*Apostle* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005).

21 *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 921-924.

22 *Ibid*, 145-155.

insists that women are not ‘inferior,’ even if this word carries no substantial content in everyday life in his usage.

V 13 ‘Adam was created first.’ Paul’s factual observation that in Gen. 2 Adam was created first, woman second, was understood across the centuries to mean that men are first in rank, women second in rank. The argument was what is created first in *chronological order* is ‘superior’ to what is *chronologically in order* created second.

Martin in contrast teaches that men and women are ‘equal’ and contradictorily their ‘subordination’ is grounded in a creation given *hierarchical social ordering*.

V 14 ‘Eve was deceived.’ Paul’s factual observation that it was Eve whom the Devil deceived was almost universally interpreted to mean that women are more easily deceived and are more prone to sin.

Martin and Fiona McLean both unambiguously deny this

When it comes to the key term *authentein*, the force of which is a very important issue in a right interpretation of this passage, what we find is that the Vulgate, the Geneva edition, the King James Version, the Revised Version, Goodspeed, NEB and numerous other translations render the word ‘to dominate’ or ‘usurp authority,’ i.e. negatively.

In contrast Martin says it is ‘certain’ this word means ‘authority in a positive sense,’ the idea that the word means to usurp authority of to seek to dominate is a novel opinion.

The historic interpretation of 1 Tim. 2:11-14 is unambiguously given in Donald Guthrie’s 1957 Tyndale Commentary. First he says, the word *authentein* ‘means ‘have mastery over’ or more colloquially “lord it

over.”” Second, created first speaks of ‘the priority of man in creation [that] places him in a position of *superiority* over women.’ And third, in speaking of Eve’s deception Paul ‘had in mind the greater aptitude of the weaker sex to be led astray.’<sup>23</sup>

Then we have the matter of prophecy. Until modern times prophecy was understood to be *authoritative preaching* under the inspiration of the Spirit. Thus Charles Hodge in his 1875 Commentary on 1 Corinthians says, ‘to prophesy, in Scripture is accordingly, to speak under divine inspiration; not merely to predict future events, but to deliver as the organ of the Holy Ghost, the messages of God to men (*sic*), whether in the form of doctrine, exhortation, consolation or prediction.’ And then he adds, prayer and prophecy were ‘the two principal exercises in the public worship in the early church.’<sup>24</sup>

In contrast Martin depicts prophesying as a secondary ministry, not the same as preaching/teaching. He has to do this so that his novel interpretation of 1 Tim. 2:12 does not contradict 1 Cor. 11:5 where Paul affirms women leading the congregation in prayer and prophecy.

Finally, I mention the matter of the parallel exhortations to wives and slaves to be subordinate. Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as I have already mentioned, all commentators equated these exhortations. Hodge, for example, said that to suggest that Paul’s advice to slaves was not binding would call into question the rightful subordination of wives.<sup>25</sup>

In opposition Martin argues that these parallel exhortations are to be contrasted. The ones to women are permanently binding; the ones to slaves are not.

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23 *The Pastoral Epistles* (London, Tyndale) 1957, 76-77.

24 (London: Banner of Truth, 1964) 207-209.

25 *Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: Banner of Truth, 1960 ) 336

I conclude: despite repeated claims by Martin that he is giving the historical interpretation of 1 Tim. 2:11-14, this is clearly not the case. He outlines his own modified version of the post 1970s novel interpretation of this passage, diverging from the more openly stated views of leading hierarchical complementarians such as Mark Driscoll, and the exegesis he gives in a dogmatic way is highly questionable in almost every detail as I have shown. I for one do not think Martin was speaking for God or even giving the ‘plain meaning’ of the text. Such presentations of the hierarchical-complementarian position may seem compelling to young university students with little knowledge of the Bible or experience of life, but to the informed and mature this teaching leaves one cold and disillusioned by the extremes in evangelicalism.

What I found particularly fascinating is that the hierarchical-complementarian respondents to my paper in draft virtually all said that there was much taught on the day with which they did not agree. It seems that although the conference speakers all claimed to be giving the ‘plain’ meaning of what the Bible says on the hierarchical ordering of the male-female relationship, among those most informed and most dogmatic about the permanent subordination of women, the reasons for this are not agreed; they are not ‘plain’ at all.

### **A few other matters.**

Before concluding my response to what Martin said I must mention his dismissive comments on Gordon Fee’s carefully reasoned case that 1 Cor. 14:35-36 was not written by Paul but added by a later scribe. Evangelicals have always honoured the textual critic. We evangelicals want to be sure the text before us is as sure as possible. Fee is one of

the most competent evangelical textual critics alive today. He makes a good case that the text is not authentic, and since he wrote very weighty objective evidence has come forward indicating that in early manuscripts these words were missing.<sup>26</sup> Martin once again too readily excludes any evidence that does not correspond to his position.

In expounding these two verses Martin says dogmatically and unequivocally that they forbid women from judging the words of the prophets, an authoritative exercise. However the 'plain' words of scripture indicate that what is forbidden is asking (disruptive?) questions. The advice given is, 'Let them (the women) ask their husbands at home.' Again Martin lets his hierarchical-complementarian commitment determine his interpretation of the text, instead of letting what the scriptures actually say determine its meaning.

Several times in his talk, Martin with great passion, said that most evangelicals 'hate' what 1 Tim. 2:11-14 'plainly teaches' because it contradicts their cultural view that women should be granted spiritual and social equality. I certainly do not 'hate' any passage in scripture and I find it impossible to believe that John Stott, Leon Morris, F. F. Bruce or Gordon Fee hate one or more texts in the Bible. What I 'hate', and I suspect they 'hate,' is an androcentric *interpretation* of 1 Tim. 2:11-14 that demeans women, finds no support in the text of Gen.1-3, directly contradicts the teaching of Jesus and cannot be reconciled with Paul's theology and general practice of ministry. Martin should accept that what is in contention is not the authority of the Bible. What is in contention is mainly the *interpretation* of one passage in scripture, and Martin's interpretation of it is rejected by some of the most respected and godly evangelical leaders.

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26 See Payne, *Man and Woman*, 217-270.

## **Fiona McLean**

I must admit I was flabbergasted to hear that the leading hierarchical-complementarians in the Melbourne Diocese, the very people who tell us the Bible absolutely forbids women to teach the Bible in a mixed Christian communal setting (church or home), had invited a woman to speak in church on what the Bible teaches on the subordination of women, to correct Melbourne evangelical Anglican theologians like Leon Morris, John Wilson, David Williams, Gordon Preece, Barbara Darling, Evonne Paddison and Kevin Giles. Martin Pakula told us he believed passionately that 1 Tim. 2:11 excluded women from teaching the Bible in a mixed Christian gathering, and there could be no exceptions. It was a binding principle, what the Bible clearly and emphatically taught. To allow that a woman could teach the Bible in church even under the authority of ‘the senior pastor’ was definitely wrong, he said. It was to disobey ‘the plain teaching of scripture.’ And yet there was Fiona, with his apparent approval, teaching a mixed audience in a Christian communal gathering in a church building! Fiona did attempt to justify this glaring inconsistency by saying that she was not teaching in a proper church meeting, but she acknowledged that some present might think her teaching in church contradicted what ‘complementarians’ say they believe. She was right.

This stark tension between principle and political expediency imposed on Fiona by the organisers of this conference really worries me. The choice of Fiona McLean to put the case for the permanent subordination of women from a woman’s point of view both amused and amazed me. Fiona is one of the most gifted upfront people I know. She is a natural leader, very assertive, extroverted, articulate, intelligent and charming. She was by far the most gifted teacher on the day. There is in Fiona not a bone that appears as submissive, although she has a servant’s heart. For

me she is powerful evidence that appeals to the Bible to prove that God has made woman subordinate to man and did not equip them as Bible teachers cannot be true. I thank Fiona for making this point so obvious.

I am at a bit of a loss to know how to respond to so much of what Fiona said. She and I have had many exchanges on these matters. She wants to listen and not misrepresent what egalitarians are saying. She even admitted openly in her talk that the hierarchical-complementarian position is not without biblical and practical challenges, and it can be used to put women down. I note also that she warned that ‘complementarian’ teaching ‘can be used as an excuse for the abuse of women.’ And she also openly admitted that there are ‘many grey areas’ in putting ‘headship’ teaching into practice in the home and the church. The Bible is not prescriptive on many issues in this regard, she conceded.

Three quarters of what Fiona said I would have few problems with, even if I would express myself differently. I too believe we should obey the word of God; I believe scripture should stand over culture; I believe God made us two differentiated sexes (who teaches the ‘sameness’ of the sexes?) and we are the richer when we affirm the contribution of both; I believe the Bible is predicated on a communal view of life not an individualistic one (my book on the church is predicated on this belief); I believe order and good government are good gifts from God; I affirm the high value of being a good marriage partner and parent; I accept that we live in a very self-preoccupied materialistic society that undermines the Gospel, and I accept that ‘feminism’ like all great social movements has its good and bad elements. Fiona at points conceded that evangelical egalitarians have the same values as she does but repeatedly she implied, and at times openly said, that most evangelical egalitarians do not accept these values and ideas. They have allowed modern secular culture and

secular feminism to trump Christian values. She repeatedly said, 'I want my world view to be shaped by the Bible, not secular culture or feminism.' Are hierarchical-complementarians alone on this? Would not egalitarians like Leon Morris, F. F. Bruce, Gordon Fee or our Melbourne evangelical Bishops, John Wilson and Barbara Darling, agree with her?

Unfortunately, Fiona at her worst moments made it plain, and Martin is of exactly the same opinion, that she thinks 'feminism' is of the devil, even if she admits a few good things may have come out of it. At one point she described it as 'ungodly and destructive,' elsewhere as 'negative.' Martin blamed feminism for the huge increase in marriage and family breakdown. Both of them claimed feminism teaches the 'sameness' of the sexes. I ask them to come forward with one quote saying this. If anything today, most secular feminists stress gender differences. Women and men are full human beings in their own right each with a distinctive contribution to make to life. 'Feminism' is a big word meaning different things to different people and encompassing many points of view. At base level, nevertheless 'feminism' simply means affirming the worth, dignity and leadership potential of women. Why is this idea so dangerous? I suspect Jesus may have been a feminist in this non-emotive, non-political, sense. I would need a book to deal with this matter and therefore must leave it. The truth is in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century one of the most profound social changes in human history took place, the liberation of women, and reflections on this and attempts to guide its development and outcomes are neither entirely good nor bad. It is simply mindless to use the word 'feminism' in a completely negative and emotive way to denigrate a very complex phenomenon.

Why any modern Australian Christian would be so negative about the changes feminism has brought in the last 30 or more years leaves me



baffled. I for one am delighted that women today have the opportunity to go to university, to move to the top of their chosen profession, and, such as in the case of Fiona, be free to address large public gatherings such as this conference, MC CMS celebrations at the annual summer school and chair important CMS missionary committees. Before the advent of ‘women’s lib’ this would have been unthinkable. I am also delighted that today we have a woman Governor General, a woman Prime Minister and two women state Premiers. Not so long ago no one would have dreamt this to be possible. And, I am delighted that today we have a godly and scholarly evangelical woman, Barbara Darling, as a bishop. How can all this be wrong?

Fiona and Martin made a heated assertion that having a subordinated ‘role’ does not imply the one in the subordinate role is ‘inferior.’ Evangelical-egalitarians are in their sights. But who teaches this? This is the proverbial straw man. Evangelical egalitarians, NOT ONE OF THEM, suggest this. We are 100% agreed that the pupil is not less than or ‘inferior’ to the teacher or the sailor to the captain, etc. They are of equal personal worth and dignity. The reason this must be so is because their ‘roles’ can change, the pupil can become a teacher, the sailor a captain and the captain can be demoted. What is more the superior position is invariably grounded on age, experience, training, etc. However, this is not the case with the so-called ‘roles’ ascribed to women by hierarchical-complementarians. *For then woman’s subordinate ‘role’ is given by birth; it can never change.* It defines her person. She does not simply *function* subordinately as the student or sailor, she *is* the subordinated sex, she is ‘inferior’ to, or less than men in some ways. Women, because they are women and for no other reason, are to accept the subordinate ‘role’ and this can never change. Only when hierarchical-complementarians

give up using the word ‘role’ in a non-dictionary way, unknown in any sociological texts, will communication on this matter become possible. Let me say it in capitals, NO EVANGELICAL EGALITARIN BELIEVES THAT A SUBORDINATE ROLE THAT CAN CHANGE IMPLIES INFERIORITY. WHAT WE BELIEVE IS TO ASCRIBE A PERMANENTLY BINDING SUBORDINATE POSITION, INVALIDLY CALLED A ‘ROLE’, TO ONE SEX, RACE OR CASTE IS TO IMPLY THAT THEY ARE LESS THAN, INFERIOR TO THE ONES PERMANENTLY SET OVER THEM. Because this obfuscating use of the term ‘role’ is so fundamental to the novel post 1970s hierarchical-complementarian case, I find my debating opponents simply cannot accept the logic of what I have just said. They only falter when I ask them to apply this language to two races. Let’s imagine what the black man would think when a Reformed and evangelical white man in the Apartheid days said to him, ‘the Bible says we are truly equal but your *role* must always be subordinate to mine. I am born to lead; you are born to be under my authority. Simply because of your skin colour given in birth you can never have a leadership *role*.’ I suspect the black man, would say to himself, ‘This is a funny kind of equality: it has no content in the world in which I live.’

Rebecca Groothuis in her very helpful book, *Good News for Women: A Biblical Picture of Gender Equality*, sums up eloquently the problems inherent in this wellnigh universally put hierarchical-complementarian argument.

Because a woman’s traditionally inferior status follows necessarily from the single fact of her essential female nature, her status is itself a function of her ‘being’; it is determined by what she is, not by what she can do. ... Regardless of how

hierarchicalists try to explain the situation, the idea that women are equal *in* their being, yet unequal *by virtue* of their *being*, is contradictory and ultimately nonsensical. . . . A permanent and comprehensive subordination based on a person's essence is an essential (not merely a functional) subordination. In the final analysis, gender hierarchy allows for no meaningful distinction between the person and the position.<sup>27</sup>

Few other matters in Fiona's talk got more mention than her belief that the Bible gives men *authority* over women. She repeatedly paralleled the authority of the state and the authority husbands are to have in the home and pastors in the church. At this point I emphatically break with her. For me relationships in marriage and the church are to be contrasted, not compared, with obedience to rulers in the state. For me, the marriage relationship is predicated primarily on self-giving love (*agape* – see Eph. 5:25-33) and in the church service/ministry to one another is primary. In a moment of insight Fiona says, the basic question is, 'how can I best serve the body of Christ.' I agree. It is not who has *authority over* whom? This is the question the world asks. Somehow, Fiona has got the whole issue of authority wrong. What she thinks is Christian is of this world and what is rightly of the world she brings into the home and the church.

In her very helpful reply to my first draft of this paper, Fiona continues to find my comments on authority very difficult. She is convinced the Bible gives husbands *authority over* their wives and pastors *authority over* their congregations in the sense that the state has authority over its citizens, and this does not contradict Jesus' repeated warnings that his disciples should not seek to exercise *authority over* others. Her

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27 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997) 53, 55.

explanation is that Jesus is only telling his disciples to exercise their authority in ‘a sacrificial, servant hearted way,’ or ‘to use their authority to serve.’ I very much doubt if this is an accurate interpretation of what Jesus lays down repeatedly as a principle. To me it seems to domesticate our Lord’s words. However, the issue of the nature of *authority* that Fiona’s reply to me raises is an important one. The word ‘authority’ can refer to something *intrinsic* or inherent in a person or to something *extrinsic* to the person. The Gospels use the Greek word *exousia* and its English translation ‘authority’ in both senses. Jesus has intrinsic authority. When he speaks the crowds recognise the authority with which he speaks (Mat. 7:29, Mk. 1:22, 1:27 etc). This is not something he imposes on them, not something he demands of them; it is rather that his words and actions evoke a positive response in his hearers. His authority lies in his person. Authority understood in this sense is often described as ‘influence.’ This kind of authority empowers others; it does not limit and constrain. In contrast, the Gospels also use *exousia*/authority in the extrinsic sense to mean ‘power over.’ So the rulers of this world are said to have ‘authority over’ others (Matt. Lk 19:7, 22:7 etc) and Jesus gives his disciples ‘authority over’ sickness and demons (Matt. 10:1, Mk 3:15). Authority understood in this sense is often described as ‘coercive authority’ or ‘control.’ Its goal is to limit and constrain what others can do. It is clear from what Fiona says that for her authority means ‘power over,’ even if she says Christians should use such power/authority in the service of others. Before Fiona and I - and others who agree with her - can have a meaningful dialogue on what authority husbands might have and is appropriate for pastors we need to agree on what we are talking about when we use this word.

When Fiona argues against leadership in the church being based on spiritual gifting she directly contradicts St Paul. She asserts this is ‘a

modern secular idea.’ However, for Paul all ministry flows from the gifts or *charismata* given by the Spirit (Rom. 12:3-8, 1 Cor. 12-14, Eph. 4:11-12).<sup>28</sup> In the case of her appeal to primogeniture of Adam to prove his super-ordination nothing at all can be found to support this hypothesis. This well-known argument suggests that Adam’s priority over the woman is based in that he is *the first born son* (c.f. 1 Tim. 2:13 – ‘Adam was created first’). Most contemporary hierarchical-complementarians do not use this argument. Neil and Martin never mention it. The more common argument is that the ‘first’ 1 Tim. 2:13 alludes to a once given creation social ordering in which the man is ‘first,’ meaning has precedence/headship. The problem with the primogeniture argument is that Adam is spoken of as *the first man created*, not the first Son. He has no human father. And then there is the problem that in the OT the second son is often given precedence over the first son (see Gen 4:1-16, 17:19-21/Rom. 9:10-13, Gen. 48:21-49:28, 48:11-20, etc, etc.).

Finally, I take up the most difficult matter Fiona raised. She said it is wrong to think that the hierarchical-complementarian position simply reflects the age old belief that men should rule over women with 1 Timothy 2 quoted in support. If this were the case she asked, why would I as a woman be standing up and putting the hierarchical case? You would think I would be excluded from doing this. She is a clever woman. She asked the most profound and dangerous question possible. I would have feared to bring up this issue if she had not.

Years ago when I studied sociology at university I did a course on social stratification. In this I learned that those holding power always find reasons to justify and validate their precedence. They

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<sup>28</sup> See my *Patterns of Ministry*, 14-18

think of reasons why they should rule and others obey and they come to believe their position of privilege is ordained by God. And surprisingly, those disempowered come to believe the rationale given and completely internalise their lowly status. In almost every instance the rationale is that this is how God has ordered things, ‘the rich man in his castle the poor man at his gate.’ This is how all classic aristocracies work, it explains the Indian caste system, slavery, apartheid and the hierarchical-complementarian position. In all these power-relations the surest way for the disempowered to gain the favour of the powerful, to achieve for themselves some power, is to endorse the system. In the slave states of America a slave who went around telling other slaves of the virtues of slavery was called a ‘black sambo.’ For them to be effective in commending the rightful subordinate role and status of black people they had to be natural leaders, gifted and able speakers, and well informed on the ‘biblical’ arguments for slavery.

This bit of sociological analysis also explains why many evangelical women accept, at least at one level, their subordinate status. Week after week people like Martin tell them God has ordered the world in this way. They are told that if you reject male authoritative headship you are rejecting the order God himself had established. What Christian woman wants to oppose God? The truth is all human hierarchical ordering is ‘man’ made and men and women can change it. The myth that the Bible grounds woman’s subordination in creation has been rejected by the Roman Catholic Church and by most evangelical leaders. Women make up 60% of the church, and it’s time they started to think for themselves. They need to realise that the Gospel liberates not oppresses.

Once it is recognised that *at the most fundamental level* this is a debate about power; who should have authority over whom, so much becomes clear. We immediately see why this debate arouses so much animosity, anxiety, and obfuscating language. Power is being contested in two arenas. First, there is a contest on who has the right to say what the scriptures teach. The hierarchical-complementarians insist that they alone have the right to do this. They are the ones giving the ‘plain’ meaning of scripture. They alone stand over culture. Don’t listen, they say, to John Stott, Leon Morris, F. F. Bruce, Gordon Fee, Howard Marshall, Philip Payne or Kevin Giles: these people have adopted a liberal hermeneutic. Because of their implied claim to speak for God hierarchical-complementarians will not even sit down with egalitarians to discuss the issue. Even to agree to discuss, let alone admit that their position is *one* interpretation of the Bible, would weaken their claim to be representing God’s point of view.

Second, this is a contest over the right of men to rule over women. Deep down it is easy for men to think that they should rule the world, and given an interpretation of one text, 1 Tim. 2:11-14, that they are told says that this is just what God has ordained, most men are hooked for life. I for one found this belief very hard to throw off once I had internalised it as a young man. Only the close study of the Bible liberated me.

Men, even evangelical Christian men, do not readily give up power. Once power over others is attained it is only relinquished when it becomes impossible to maintain. The more pressure applied to share power, the more reasons are thought up to justify the power held and the more hostility to opponents is shown. Let me illustrate

what I have just asserted. We have all heard many times how evangelicals led the opposition to slavery two hundred years ago. Who does not honour William Wilberforce and those who worked alongside him? What we never hear in evangelical circles is that in the southern states of America in the 19<sup>th</sup> century evangelicals *led the opposition* to the emancipation of the slaves, insisting the Bible sanctioned and endorsed slavery. The most able and respected Reformed and evangelical theologians of the day such as Charles Hodge, Robert Dabney and James Thornwell all wrote arguing that the Bible approved of slavery. They found much in scripture to support their ideas. Nearly all the evangelical clergy in the Old South were convinced that slavery was taught in the Bible and many in the northern states as well.<sup>29</sup> It took a civil war and the loss of over a million lives before these Christian men were forced to give up their power over their black slaves and it took nearly 150 years before the Southern Baptists openly admitted they had been wrong to appeal to the Bible to justify slavery. Men resist at all cost giving up power over others. Another example is Apartheid. In South Africa the Apartheid ideology was devised and institutionalised by Reformed Christians. They wrote extensively arguing that the Bible taught the separation of the races and that some should rule over others. Appeal was made to a supposed ‘order of creation’ that set white men over black and coloured people. These white Reformed Christians only relinquished power when the economic and political pressures became impossible to withstand. Now in South Africa it is hard to find a Reformed pastor or theologian who is not ashamed that such repeated and insistent

<sup>29</sup> I give the full account of this story in my, *The Trinity and Subordinationism*, 215-268. See also, Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel: University of North Carolina, 2006) and J. P. Daly, *When Slavery was Called Freedom: Evangelicalism, Proslavery and the Causes of the Civil War* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky, 2002).



appeal to the Bible was made to justify what is unjustifiable. It is undeniable that as a general principle men resist at all cost giving up power over others. And if they are Christians, try to find justification for their power by appeal to the Bible.

My debating opponents keep accusing me and other egalitarian evangelicals in the harshest of language of subordinating the Bible to culture. Evangelical egalitarians think this accusation is perverse and untrue. We insist that we believe what we do because we are convinced that a holistic reading of scripture makes the spiritual and social equality of men and women the revealed ideal. Could it be that the heated polemic against us is simply evidence that power is being challenged? The hierarchical-complementarians are angry with us for saying that their reading of the Bible is self-serving and their desire to have authority over women contradicts the creation mandate (Gen. 1:27-28) makes one consequence of the Fall the ideal (Gen. 3:16) and denies the teaching of Jesus who forbade his disciples from seeking authority over others.

### **Conclusion.**

I hope I have put my response to the Melbourne hierarchical-complementarians clearly and unambiguously.

- I argue that this is a debate essentially about the *interpretation* of the Bible and one side has got it basically right and one side has got it basically wrong. To settle the matter the two sides need to sit down and honestly assess the evidence. Simply dogmatically asserting, ‘I am giving the plain meaning of scripture’ proves nothing.
- I argue that their claim to be simply reiterating how the Bible has been understood since the time of the apostles is false.

- I argue that Martin’s contemporary interpretation of 1 Tim. 2:11-14 is tendentious and unconvincing.
- I argue that the stark contrast these three speakers made between those who hold to the authority of the Bible and thus believe in the permanent subordination of women and those who give primary authority to culture and are thus egalitarians are absurd and demeaning of fellow evangelicals. I do not think John Stott, Leon Morris, F. F. Bruce, Howard Marshall, Gordon Fee and countless other respected evangelical leaders, men and women, can be so easily dismissed and silenced.
- I argue that the negative diatribe against contemporary culture and ‘feminism’ is emotive rhetoric and too simplistic to be helpful.
- I argue that at the most fundamental level this debate is about power. It is about who has the right to say what the Bible teaches, and who rules over whom.
- I argue that by failing to give detailed attention to what Genesis 1 to 3 teaches, the passage on which they base their distinctive interpretation of 1 Tim. 2:13-14, and saying virtually nothing about Jesus’ positive stance towards women and his silence on male headship, political concerns have eclipsed any concern to fairly listen to the whole of scripture.

What is now needed is a reply to my very precise and pointed conclusions. I wait to hear from my debating opponents. If they would like to enter into dialogue with me by email or sit down with me at any time to discuss what I have said, I am willing to give them of my time. I readily admit my reading of the Bible is an *interpretation* and as such it may be good, patchy, wrong in places or completely wrong. I am more

than happy to hear any criticism of my interpretation of any text or passage I have discussed. What I hope will not happen, is that what I have written will be completely ignored by my hierarchical-complementarian friends. That they will go on insisting that the Bible subordinates half of the human race, women, to the other half of the human race, men, knowing full well that they have not answered a critic who has rationally and exegetically argued they are completely mistaken. The Biblical ideal (Gen. 1:27-28) is rather the substantial equality of the differentiated sexes.

Kevin Giles

3-12-2010

## Postscript

One of the organisers of this conference to whom I sent this paper for comment very heatedly objected to my claim that the hierarchical-complementarian position was based primarily on one text. Fiona McLean said much the same more gently. Let's assess the evidence. The supporting texts quoted are Gen. 2-3, 1 Cor. 11:2-16, 14:33-34 and Eph. 5:21-33. It would seem that Gen. 2-3 does not subordinate women to men before the Fall. It teaches rather that woman's subordination is one consequence of the sin of the first man and woman (Gen. 3:16). (see my earlier comments on this passage). 1 Cor. 11:4 actually *endorses* women proclaiming the word of God in the congregation in the power of the Spirit (prophecy). 1 Cor. 14:33-34 is textually doubtful and if authentic simply forbids women from asking disruptive questions in church. Eph. 5:21-33 is Paul seeking to transform patriarchy. He agrees with his culture that men are 'the head' or leader of their wife but then turns this headship on its head denying it has anything to do with privilege or authority over. Marriage partners are to subordinate themselves to one another and the husband is to love his wife with self-denying *agape*-love even to the point of giving his life for her. He quotes Gen. 2:24 (in Eph. 5:31) not to prove that a hierarchical relationship is prescribed in creation but rather the most profound unity. It seems to me that 1 Tim. 2:11-14 does stand out like the proverbial thumb and nothing else in scripture says anything like this. Too much has been built on one possible and widely disputed interpretation of one text.