



The Order of Creation

THEOLOGY, HISTORY, DEFINITION

COMMISSION ON THEOLOGY AND CHURCH RELATIONS
THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD | OCTOBER 2022



Abbreviations used:

AC	Augsburg Confession
Ap	Apology of the Augsburg Confession
CCM	Commission on Constitutional Matters
CTCR	Commission on Theology and Church Relations
FC SD	Formula of Concord: Solid Declaration
KW	Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds. <i>The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church</i> (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000).
LC	Large Catechism
LSB	<i>Lutheran Service Book</i> (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006).
LSCwE	<i>Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation</i> (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017).
LW	<i>Luther's Works, American Edition</i> , ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut T. Lehmann and Christopher Boyd Brown, 75 vols. (Philadelphia and St. Louis: Augsburg and Concordia Publishing House, 1955–).
SA	Smalcald Articles
SC	Small Catechism

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The Order of Creation

THEOLOGY, HISTORY, DEFINITION

THE TERM “ORDER OF CREATION” is not found in Scripture. This does not mean it is unbiblical, let alone that we should not consider it a Lutheran idea that, properly understood, contributes to our understanding of God’s wise and benevolent design for His creation. On the contrary, the order of creation is a theological concept that Lutherans — among others — have used to make sense of New Testament references to the story of creation as a basis for relationships today, particularly those relationships between men and women in the church and in the Christian home. While it is tempting to dismiss this concept as antiquated or to view it through the lens of current cultural debates regarding gender, marriage and sexuality, the theology behind the order of creation seeks to state clearly the traditional, biblical Christian view of a Creator God who has established and who governs all things according to His loving, unchanging will. This includes the fundamental goodness of all He has made, the creation of man and woman in the image of God, the distinctiveness of man and woman, the indissoluble bond of man and woman in matrimony, and the Christian home and Christian church as reflections of God’s divine order for humanity, among many other relationships that touch the whole of Christian life. With the current virulent cultural assault on traditional Christianity, it is important — maybe now more than ever — to ground our moral views not in historical precedent, judicial or legislative politics, or pragmatic reasoning, but in God’s institution at creation and what He has revealed about it in Holy Scripture.

It is in this light that the 2016 convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod passed Resolution 5-14 (“To Reaffirm Biblical Teaching on Man and Woman in the Church”), which requested that the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) produce “a biblical, confessional, and historical study of the concept of the order of creation, examining its relevance to various questions about the service of men and women in the church and society today and also taking into account continued disagreements and discussion in the Synod about the service of women in certain lay positions and offices of leadership (e.g., congregational chairman or vice-chairman).”¹ Implicit in this resolution are two different but related sets of questions. First, what is the order of creation, and where does it come from — Scripture, Luther, Lutheran theologians, the Synod? Second, what role does the order of creation play in how Christians organize our churches and homes, and what implications might it have for society more broadly, including the involvement of women in various occupations, politics, the military or law enforcement? While both sets of questions have been addressed in various ways during the recent history of the Missouri Synod, it is the contention of this report that answering the first set of questions by clarifying the theology of the order of creation will resolve many of the tensions inherent in the second set of questions.

This report, then, seeks to fulfill the requirements of 2016 Resolution 5-14 through a substantial biblical, theological and historical study of the order of creation. The first section will present a brief survey of the biblical references for the order of creation, its use in Luther and post-Reformation Lutheranism, and its development among theologians inside and outside the Missouri Synod in recent centuries. The second section will detail the term’s formal adoption by the Missouri Synod in 1956 and its application to various ecclesiastical matters by Synod conventions and the CTCR since then, including women’s suffrage, women’s ordination and women’s service in the church in various ways. On the basis of this historical review, the document will then seek to provide a succinct definition of the order of creation (and related terms) consistent with the Synod’s historic usage and understanding, which may help to facilitate and support responsible catechetical instruction, charitable Synod discussions and faithful public witness.

¹ *Proceedings of the 66th Regular Convention* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2016), 162–63.

I. Order of Creation in Scripture, Luther and Lutheran Theology

While the term “order of creation” is not found in Scripture, it is nonetheless a biblical concept. This theological term describes repeated instances where the New Testament appeals to the creation and fall in Genesis 1–3 as precedent for conduct in the church and Christian home. The order of creation is then complemented by the “order of redemption,” a term that traditionally refers to the new creation initiated by Christ’s death and resurrection and the consequences that new creation has for life in the temporal realm. The order of redemption does not negate the order of creation, but it provides a new perspective from which to view the order of creation and freshly envision how we might live in accordance with God’s design for humanity. At the same time, the order of creation as God established it in the Garden of Eden can never be fully restored due to the effects of the fall into sin. Only after Christ’s return will God finally remove forever the wicked adversaries of his creation — sin, death and the devil — though nowhere does Scripture promise that the order of creation will be restored in exactly the same way as it existed before the fall.

The order of creation as a theological theme is derived from numerous New Testament passages. The primary two instances occur in 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy 2. In 1 Corinthians 11:3, St. Paul says that “the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.” He then goes on to ground this — and the custom of women wearing head coverings in worship — in the sequential ordering of creation, beginning with man, followed by woman: “For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head” (1 COR. 11:7–10). St. Paul makes a similar comment in 1 Timothy 2:11–14, “Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.” In this passage, however, he intones not only the sequence of creation, but also the sequence of the fall — man was created before woman, woman was deceived before man.

A parallel passage that incorporates both of these arguments, yet without explicit reference to creation, is found in 1 Corinthians 14: “As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church” (1 COR. 14:33–35).² While no passages in the Gospels directly refer to the order of creation, Christ Himself does cite creation (over the Mosaic Law) as precedent for God’s intention that marriage be indissoluble:

He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” They said to him, “Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?” He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.” (MATT. 19:4–9; SEE MARK 10:2–9)

In these examples, the New Testament does not appeal to natural law (“the work of the law is written on their hearts,” ROM. 2:15); the moral, sacrificial or civil regulations of the Mosaic Law; or ancient Greek or Roman custom. On the contrary, it appeals to the divine arrangement — revealed throughout Scripture — of human relationships as they were constituted at creation and, ultimately, confounded by the fall. After the creation of man and woman on the sixth day of creation in Genesis 1, God gave humanity authority over all animals of land, sky and sea (GEN. 1:28), and He placed all vegetation — fruit and plant life — under humanity to be used for food (GEN. 1:29).³ God first gave animals to

² It should be said, however, that the New Testament does not *always* describe male headship or female submission in terms of creation. St. Paul just as readily uses the relationship between Christ and the church as basis for both headship and submission (EPH. 5:22–33). In a similar way, St. Peter grounds submission of Christians to the Emperor, or submission of servants to masters, in Christ’s own unjust suffering (1 PETER 2–3).

³ CTCR, *Together with All Creatures: Caring for God’s Living Earth* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2010), 40.

Adam that they might be his helpers, and Adam named them (GEN. 2:18–20).⁴ Finally, God formed Eve out of a rib taken from Adam’s side that she might be what the animals could not be: “a helper fit for him” (GEN. 2:18). Together as man and wife, Adam and Eve were given dominion over all creation, and the relationship between them had no parallel within that creation.⁵ This orderly design, however, became disfigured through the fall in Genesis 3. Eve was deceived by the serpent, ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and gave the fruit to Adam, who ate of the fruit (GEN. 3:5–7), which God had specifically commanded him not to eat (GEN. 2:16–17). As a result of their disobedience, sin entered the world and, along with it, God imposed certain clear consequences. He tells the woman, “Your desire shall be for [or, *contrary to*]⁶ your husband, but he shall rule over you” (GEN. 3:16).⁷ He declares that man’s own stewardship of creation and daily labor shall become onerous “because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it’” (GEN. 3:17). While the exact practical implications of Genesis 1–3 for a fallen — or redeemed — creation may be uncertain, St. Paul finds in them precedent for the specific submission of wife to husband in the home and for the proscription against women publicly teaching and exercising authority in the church (see 1 COR. 11; 14; 1 TIM. 2 above).

An explanation of the term “order” is merited. The meaning of “order” is not always altogether clear when describing the order of creation and can lead to misunderstanding in its own right.⁸ Order translates the Greek word *taxis*, which has the sense of an “arrangement.” It is used to classify objects, such as one might find in the sciences with the term taxonomy. Likewise, it is the root of the forms often used in the New Testament to describe “submission” (*hypotage*) or its verbal analogue, “to submit” (*hypotasse*). Thus, one will often find these Greek words translated “subordination” or “to be subordinate,” because the root is “order.” The “order” in the order of creation, then, has primarily to do with the classification of living beings in accordance with God’s created design for them — men, women, husbands, wives, parents, children, animals, vegetation. In the case of human beings, the first and primary distinction made by God Himself in creation is that of men as men and women as women. All humans fall into one of these two classifications, and the proper relationships between all humans are fundamentally shaped by that divinely instituted distinction.

⁴ “Because they alone were made in God’s image, they were not simply another category of earthly creatures but were given dominion over the birds, fish, and land animals. Although the word ‘image’ itself does not mean ‘to rule over,’ this unique status given the human creatures resulted in their having dominion over the animals. In order to exercise this dominion as responsible stewards of the earth, they were given wisdom and the capacity to make judgments,” CTCR, *The Creator’s Tapestry: Scriptural Perspectives on Man-Woman Relationships in Marriage and the Church* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2009), 9. “The image of God appears closely tied to the commission to exercise dominion. The narrative of Genesis 1 moves in this direction. First, God gives them the same command as He does to other creatures, namely, to ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.’ He then gives them the additional commission to ‘subdue it [kabash] and have dominion [radah] over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth’ (v. 28). The first word, kabash, carries with it an element of forcefulness when used elsewhere in the Old Testament. Before the fall, human beings reflect and pattern themselves after God’s own relationship to the world. In that regard, kabash may refer to the setting of boundaries even as God did so during the first three days. Dominion, radah, means among other things, the gracious rule of a shepherd king. Humans are given the responsibility of protecting and guiding creation in order to maintain shalom. Psalm 72 describes the rule of a righteous king under whose rule everything flourishes, from the human realm to the nonhuman creaturely realm,” CTCR, *Together with All Creatures*, 40.

⁵ For whatever differences exist between them, man and woman in their common humanity bear the image of God, which distinguishes them from all other created beings. The concept of the image of God — what it is and precisely what it entails for man and woman in contrast with one another or the rest of creation — has long been a contested subject and one that is beyond the scope of this document.

⁶ The English Standard Version (ESV) changed the translation of the Hebrew preposition “el” from “for” to “contrary to” when it codified its permanent text in 2016. In doing so, it adopted a minority position among English and other translations. Though “contrary to” had previously been an alternate translation in the ESV footnotes, the change was ostensibly made to parallel a similar Hebrew construction in Genesis 4:7, where God questions Cain for fearing that his offering would not be accepted and says, “And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. *Its desire is contrary to you*, but you must rule over it.” For a discussion of this parallel, see Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 201–2. In 2009’s *Creator’s Tapestry*, the CTCR used the ESV’s then-current translation of “for,” but included a footnote explaining how the translation choice might affect the interpretation of the passage: “That she will physically desire her husband, even though he ‘rules her’ (oppressively) or that she will desire to dominate her husband, but instead he will rule over her (compare GEN. 4:7),” 19 n4. While the grammar and exact translation of this construction are not certain, the reality it reflects in either case is the same: the sin that entered with the fall fundamentally disordered the relation between man and woman God instituted at creation, and, because of that sin, man and woman thus act against their orderly design in relation to one another.

⁷ “With the perfect harmony of marriage destroyed, competition and conflict now corrupt the husband and wife relationship. The painful effects of sin will be evident in her vocation as mother and wife,” CTCR, *Creator’s Tapestry*, 19.

⁸ “Order” in English can denote a rank — one over the other. It can mean a classification — one fits here, another there, almost in a sense of orderliness. It can indicate a command — that of giving an order. We can speak of a “church order” [*Kirchenordnung* in German]. Order can also imply a sphere or realm, and this seems to be the most accurate representation within Lutheranism historically. The official introduction of the term into the Missouri Synod in 1956 defines it as a “relative position in a series,” that is, as one thing relates to another in a succession. For these considerations, see Carl Braaten, *No Other Gospel: Christianity among the World’s Religions* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 119. See also Edward H. Schroeder, “The Orders of Creation — Some Reflections on the History and Place of the Term in Systematic Theology,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 43 (1972): 169.

That is not to say that the relationship between men and women as individuals, let alone their union as husband and wife, can simply be reduced to their designation by God in creation as “male” or “female.” Indeed, the purpose for such an orderly creation of men and women is ultimately the marital union — and through it, the propagation of children.⁹ It is for this reason that God designed man and woman biologically in the way that He did. Man and woman are designed to form a union of self-giving love with one another. Adam describes his wife as “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (GEN. 2:23). God commands man that he “shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (GEN. 2:24; MATT. 19:5–6; MARK 10:7–8). Through this union, man and woman shall “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (GEN. 1:28). Together in this union, they are to “subdue” the earth and exercise dominion over plant and animal life (GEN. 1:28–29).

Though man and woman have definite roles in this creation and though the curse of sin has indelibly damaged the perfect exercise of these roles, nonetheless men and women in marriage are not independent of one another, nor is their relationship defined in terms of opposition, control or manipulation. As St. Paul says, “In the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman” (1 COR. 11:11B–12). Likewise, through the marital union of man as man and woman as woman, the two become united in one flesh sexually, and they are no longer independent agents operating as they please. “For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does” (1 COR. 7:4). While the order of creation clearly distinguishes between man and woman and the complementary roles they play in marriage, those roles do not exhaustively define man and woman and they also do not encompass the entirety of marriage.

Similarly, the sense of the term “submission” or “to submit” does not express a relationship of power. It is not the husband who compels or requires submission; he freely receives it. The direction to submit is given to the woman, not the man. Nor does the man coerce submission of the woman.¹⁰ As the CTCR report on *Women in the Church* stated in one of its summary principles: “Subordination, when applied to the relationship of women and men in the church, expresses a divinely established relationship in which one looks to the other, but not in a domineering sense. Subordination is for the sake of orderliness and unity.”¹¹ This relationship and the proper understanding of divinely ordered submission has, however, been affected by sin. The curse pronounced upon Eve in Genesis 3:16 means that the godly practice of the order of creation has been tragically twisted and complicated by sin. Man sins by exercising his domestic authority coercively or abusively, just as he sins by failing to exercise it properly and lovingly, or by abdicating it to another. This is why the New Testament urges him to carry out his divine responsibilities in the home faithfully, caring for his wife spiritually (EPH. 5:25–29) and treating her respectfully (COL. 3:9; 1 PETER 3:7). Woman, for her part, may militate against the authority of man or seek to exercise that authority herself. Thus, the New Testament urges her to submit to her husband spiritually as the church submits to Christ (EPH. 5:22–24) with a gentle and quiet spirit (1 PETER 3:4). Any and all misuse or rejection of these divinely ordered roles is a direct consequence of sin.

⁹ This is not meant to imply that single men or women are somehow acting contrary to the created order. St. Paul himself is explicit about the role of singleness in the life of the Christian and the ministry of the church: “I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord” (1 COR. 7:32–35).

¹⁰ CTCR, *Creator’s Tapestry*, 26: “The original Greek verb for ‘submitting to’ is appropriately translated ‘subject yourself to’ another. The word (*hypotassō*) is a combination of the Greek preposition *hypo* (‘under’) and the verb *tassō* (‘to arrange’), signifying an ordered place or arrangement. Foreign to this good and common word in the Scriptures are negative thoughts of inferior human ability or worth, of lesser intelligence or competence. Still more foreign are ideas of oppressive bondage or coerced servitude — as if to make of someone a mere doormat or slave. Rather, viewed in its full biblical context, and particularly when it describes Christian conduct in life’s callings, the word signifies willingly yielding to the other, an attitude of looking to another; of putting first the desires of another, of seeking another’s benefit.” Cf. CTCR, *Women in the Church: Scriptural Principles for Ecclesial Practice* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1985), 31: “There are also differences in the way subordination and governance are conducted. Governance in a subordinate relationship can be oppressive — a relationship that works for the benefit of the ruler and to the detriment of the subordinate. This relationship is characterized by obedience to command, a ‘lording-it-over-the-other’ attitude. But a person can be subordinate without ever having to obey a command. Nowhere in Scripture is it ever said that power or authority (*exousia*) or rule (*arche*) is given to the man over the woman. All of the passages which speak of the subordination of the woman to the man, or of wives to their husbands, are addressed to the woman. The verbs enjoining subordination in these texts are in the middle voice in the Greek (reflexive). The woman is reminded, always in the context of an appeal to the grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ, that she has been subordinated to man by the Creator and that it is for this reason that she should willingly accept this divine arrangement. The Scriptures never tell the man that he is to ‘keep his wife in subjection’ (unlike the exhortation concerning children in 1 TIM. 3:4) by the issuance of commands. People can be subordinate by serving others, by cooperating with another’s purposes, or by following another’s teaching. The more love and commitment to the interest of others (PHIL. 2:4) are present in the relationship of the man to the woman, the more this subordinate relationship conforms to the Scriptural ideal.”

¹¹ CTCR, *Women in the Church*, 32.

Moreover, this divine ordering of relationships between men and women in the church and in the Christian home cannot possibly be ascribed to any superior or inferior quality inherent in males and females.¹² Were that the case, St. Paul could not apply the same argument to the relationship between the Father and the Son, as he does in 1 Corinthians 11. The term Paul uses for the husband (*kephale*) as head of the wife is the same term he uses for God the Father as head of the Incarnate Son (1 COR. 11:3). To regard the one submitting as inherently inferior is essentially to deny the equality of the Son with the Father which Scripture (PHIL. 2:6) and the creeds expressly teach.¹³ As the Commission stated in its report, *Creator's Tapestry*:

At a first glance, we may think that Paul is lining up some kind of power structure, an organizational chart with God at the top, woman at the bottom, and man as Christ's comediator in the middle. This hierarchical understanding of "headship" — a superior over an inferior — will not mesh with God's design, for even Christ has a head. Jesus Christ, God's incarnate Son, willingly submitted Himself to God his Father for the sake of His body the church. ... The relationship between God the Father and Christ demonstrates that submission to a head must not be seen as something servile or degrading but as a calling to willing and joyful service (HEB. 12:2; 1 COR. 15:28).¹⁴

For a wife to submit to her husband or for woman to submit to man in the church in these New Testament passages is to reflect God's design inscribed upon creation as it pertains to those relationships. Submission does not degrade the female, nor does it elevate the male, but rather reflects the Creator who established this order in creation.

This also raises the question of whether this natural arrangement referred to by the order of creation is eternal and will be maintained in the new heavens and new earth. The New Testament does not fully define what our created, human relationships will look like after Christ's return, only that all things that exist will be utterly transformed. That could mean that the order of creation *itself* will be transformed and ultimately replaced by a different arrangement. At the same time, it could mean that the creation *as it currently exists* will be transformed through the eradication of sin and its effects. The point is that we cannot know with certainty since Scripture does not straightforwardly depict post-resurrection anthropology but employs much metaphor and symbolism. The same holds true for images of the natural realm in the life to come, such as the wolf and the lamb, calf and lion, cow and bear, cobra and adder (ISAIAH 11:6-9). Scripture includes them in prophecy regarding the new heavens and new earth, yet that does not necessitate that these species, let alone every individual animal or species, will share in the eternal kingdom. On the contrary, such passages evoke for us the restoration of innocence and complete transformation of life as we know it using memorable, symbolic images. Biblical prophecy does not necessarily describe in actual detail the composition of the universe after the Second Advent. While we cannot say with exact certainty how the beings and relationships God ordered at creation will exist after Christ's return, this does not affect the ordering of that creation as we experience it now and as we live in accordance with God's design for it.

Just as the term "order of creation" is not explicitly found in Scripture, but is a concept used to make sense of biblical passages that appeal to the narrative of creation and fall as precedent for conduct in the church and home, so, too, Luther and subsequent Lutherans did not necessarily use the term "order of creation," choosing instead analogous terms to express the same idea of authority structures inscribed on the created order. That came in numerous forms for Luther. Under the heading of the Fourth Commandment in his Large Catechism, Luther describes the honoring of father and mother as applying to submission to three sources of authority, or "fathers":

¹² CTCR, *Human Sexuality* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1981), 31: "It will always be inappropriate to ask for some special reason why the man ought to exercise headship over the woman, other than the reason that God ordained the hierarchy which exists in marriage." This comment implies that the function of headship and submission within marriage is a consequence of an explicit Scriptural command rather than a logical deduction from observable traits independent of God's Word.

¹³ The Athanasian Creed notes that the persons of the Trinity are in "glory equal," and "coeternal with each other and coequal," while the Son is "equal to the Father with respect to His divinity, less than the Father with respect to his humanity" (LSB, 319–20).

¹⁴ CTCR, *Creator's Tapestry*, 32. See also Peter Brunner, *The Ministry and the Ministry of Women* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), 30: "Despite individual differences of various forms of subordination, the subordination of the woman to the man is mysteriously bound up with the subordination of the church to Christ and Christ to the Father. What is 'subordination' for the Lord Jesus Christ is reflected in the subordination demanded of the woman, and she may see it in the light of the relationship between the church and Christ and between the Father and the Son."

So we have introduced three kinds of fathers in this commandment: fathers by blood, fathers of a household, and fathers of the nation. In addition, there are also spiritual fathers—not like those in the papacy who have had themselves called “father” but have not performed a fatherly function. For the name of spiritual father belongs only to those who govern and guide us by the Word of God.¹⁵

Not only domestic heads of households, but civil rulers and pastors of the church count as “fathers,” with the latter two deriving their authority from the institution of the family in the Garden of Eden and the resulting parental responsibility for children (“For all other authority is derived and developed out of the authority of parents”).¹⁶

In a similar manner, Luther speaks of three “orders,” or “estates,” as spheres of authority that correspond to these three “fathers”: the political (*politia*), the ecclesiastical (*ecclesia*) and the domestic (*oeconomia*).¹⁷ Luther explains them several different ways. He expressly calls them “orders” in his 1528 *Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper*: “But the holy orders [*die heiligen Orden*] and true religious institutions established by God are these three: the office of priest, the estate of marriage, the civil government.”¹⁸ Later, in his 1539 *On the Councils and the Church*, he uses the term “government” (*Regiment*) for all three:

The first government is that of the home, from which the people come; the second is that of the city, meaning the country, the people, princes and lords, which we call the secular government. These embrace everything — children, property, money, animals, etc. The home must produce, whereas the city must guard, protect, and defend. Then follows the third, God’s own home and city, that is, the church, which must obtain people from the home and protection and defense from the city. These are the three hierarchies ordained by God, and we need no more; indeed, we have enough and more than enough to do in living aright and resisting the devil in these three.¹⁹

While Luther does not directly identify creation or fall as precedent for these orders in the present, he nonetheless clearly sees the domestic, civil and religious spheres as having a divinely instituted order with divinely instituted authorities implying submission on the part of others within those spheres.²⁰

When Luther addresses the account of creation and the fall in his lectures on Genesis, he explains the emergence of each of these three orders in sequential order. The first institution of creation for Luther was the church, by which he means God’s Word calling forth faith and worship from Adam already in the Garden of Eden before the formation of Eve.²¹ The domestic estate followed, though the civil estate would have to await the fall. Commenting on Genesis 2:16, Luther says,

¹⁵ LC IV 158; Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 408.

¹⁶ LC I 141, KW, 405.

¹⁷ Luther’s view can be found as early as his 1519 treatise on the Sacrament of Baptism, LW 35:39.

¹⁸ Luther may be using the term “orders” here as an alternative to the monastic or religious orders of the day. He follows this with a further description: “All who are engaged in the clerical office or ministry of the Word are in a holy, proper, good, and God-pleasing order and estate, such as those who preach, administer sacraments, supervise the common chest, sextons and messengers or servants who serve such persons. These are engaged in works which are altogether holy in God’s sight. Again, all fathers and mothers who regulate their household wisely and bring up their children to the service of God are engaged in pure holiness, in a holy work and a holy order. Similarly, when children and servants show obedience to their elders and masters, here too is pure holiness, and whoever is thus engaged is a living saint on earth. Moreover, princes and lords, judges, civil officers, state officials, notaries, male and female servants and all who serve such persons, and further, all their obedient subjects — all are engaged in pure holiness and leading a holy life before God. For these three religious institutions or orders are found in God’s Word and commandment; and whatever is contained in God’s Word must be holy, for God’s Word is holy and sanctifies everything connected with it and involved in it” (LW 37:364–65).

¹⁹ LW 41:177. Luther also uses as a synonym the term “hierarchy,” which he inherits from the Middle Ages, where it had less to do with ranks of authority than with a mystical ascent toward the divine. The meaning is altogether different for Luther, who uses it to refer to the existing church and domestic and civil structures. On this, see Wilhelm Maurer, *Luthers Lehre von den drei Hierarchien und ihr mittelalterlicher Hintergrund* (Munich: Verlag der Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1970), and F. Edward Cranz, *An Essay on the Development of Luther’s Thought on Justice, Law, and Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), 173–78.

²⁰ The Lutheran Confessions, like Luther, make no direct reference to the order of creation as a topic in its own right. However, in addition to Luther’s own discussion of the three “fathers” in the Large Catechism, the German text of the Augsburg Confession does speak specifically of the “estates” (German *Stand*, or “walks of life”), which refers to the domestic, ecclesiastical and political spheres, as true “orders” instituted by the Creator: “The gospel does not overthrow secular government [*Regiment*], public order [*Polizei*], and marriage [*Ehestand*] but instead intends that a person keep all this as a true order of God [*Gottesordnung*] and demonstrate in these walks of life [*Ständen*] Christian love and true good works according to each person’s calling,” AC XVI 5, KW, 50.

²¹ It is in this sense that Lutheran theologian Oswald Bayer refers to “the church as order of creation” (*status ecclesiasticus, Kirche als Schöpfungsordnung*), Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology: A Contemporary Application*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 126–39. For Luther’s explanation of Adam hearing the Word, obeying God’s law and worshipping the Creator in the innocence of Eden, see LW 1:104–6.

Here we have the establishment of the church before there was any government of the home and of the state; for Eve was not yet created. Moreover, the church is established without walls and without any pomp, in a very spacious and very delightful place. After the church has been established, the household government is also set up, when Eve is added to Adam as his companion. Thus the temple is earlier than the home, and it is also better this way. Moreover, there was no government of the state before sin, for there was no need of it. Civil government is a remedy required by our corrupted nature. It is necessary that lust be held in check by the bonds of the laws and by penalties. For this reason you may correctly call civil government the rule of sin.²²

The order of civil government comes into existence only after the fall as a means to restrain sin. God instituted government for that purpose, and it thus continues to be inscribed onto the creation as we know and experience it.²³ Consequently, one cannot encounter the created order without encountering all three of these orders in some form or fashion, no matter how unintelligible they may be to sinful humanity apart from God's revelation.

Turning to the relationship between men and women before sin, the distinctiveness of man and woman was a feature of creation and included male headship and female submission. The relationship of male headship to female submission, however, was adversely impacted by the fall, not by abolishing it, but by distorting it. Now, fallen man is predisposed to assert his headship coercively over woman, and fallen woman is inclined to chafe at her submission to man. Luther, using imagery customary for his day, described the curse pronounced upon Eve in Genesis 3:16:

This punishment, too, springs from original sin; and the woman bears it just as unwillingly as she bears those pains and inconveniences that have been placed upon her flesh. The rule remains (*regnum manet*) with the husband, and the wife is compelled to obey him by God's command. He rules the home and the state, wages wars, defends his possessions, tills the soil, builds, plants, etc. ... If Eve had persisted in the truth, she would not only not have been subjected to the rule of her husband, but she herself would also have been a partner in the rule which is now entirely the concern of males. Women are generally disinclined to put up with this burden, and they naturally seek to gain what they have lost through sin. If they are unable to do more, they at least indicate their impatience by grumbling. However, they cannot perform the functions of men, teach, rule, etc. In procreation and in feeding and nurturing their offspring they are masters. In this way Eve is punished; but, as I said in the beginning, it is a gladsome punishment if you consider the hope of eternal life and the honor of motherhood which have been left her.²⁴

In this case, Luther somewhat equivocates between woman's submission to man as a dictate of creation — "the rule remains with the husband" — and as a consequence of the fall — "if Eve had persisted in the truth, she would ... not have been subjected to the rule of her husband."²⁵ Whether he roots this alone in the creation account of Genesis 1–2 or, in certain respects, in the fall account of Genesis 3, the creation as we know and experience it in the present, according to Luther, is no different: innate to this creation are realities designed by God — before or after the fall — which entail relationships of authority and submission, including between husband and wife in the home and man and woman in the church.

Lutheran theologians in the two centuries after the Reformation followed Luther's lead. They continued to affirm the authority of the husband and father in the domestic sphere, the pastor in the ecclesiastical sphere, and the prince or magistrate in the civil sphere, though such responsibilities tended to overlap because of the state churches of the day and their rigorous application of Scripture to civil law.²⁶ Where Luther's successors commented on Genesis 1–3,

²² LW 1:104.

²³ Luther and Melancthon both argue that the state's use of force to preserve obedience is an outgrowth of Adam's use of coercive authority *after the fall* to exercise his headship over woman. See Mickey L. Mattox, "Order in the House? The Reception of Luther's Orders Teaching in Early Lutheran Genesis Commentaries," *Renaissance & Reformation Review* 14, no. 2 (2012): 110–26.

²⁴ LW 1:202–3.

²⁵ We note this again elsewhere in Luther's Genesis lectures: "Hence it follows that if woman had not been deceived by the serpent and had not sinned, she would have been the equal of Adam in all respects. For the punishment, that she is now subjected to the man, was imposed on her after sin and because of sin," LW 1:115.

²⁶ Joel F. Harrington, *Reordering Marriage and Society in Reformation Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 48–100.

most followed Luther's view that male authority in both home and church was rooted in creation, while the misuse of that authority by men in the home and the church, as well as the state's coercive authority to punish sin, came about as a result of the fall.²⁷ The 17th-century Lutheran theologian Johann Gerhard, however, implied that women may not have been subject to submission apart from the fall:

A woman should not teach nor dominate the man because the beginning of sin came from the woman. But the manner of teaching in which the woman taught the man turns out badly here, for she did not so much teach or lead him as she deceived him. In punishment for this deception she was subjected to the man, and the genuine domination of woman over man is incompatible with this divine judgment.²⁸

Yet Gerhard can in other places describe submission as part of creation itself:

Therefore, when the apostle says that woman is the glory of man, but man is the image and glory of God, he is not denying that woman also was created after the image and likeness of God in the principal sense. Instead, he is speaking of the sense in which the dignity of the image had been placed secondarily and principally, that is, the position of domination whose high status properly befitted man, for the woman was made subject to the authority of man."²⁹

Nonetheless, Luther and the Lutheran tradition affirmed a divine order built into creation that remains in effect for all structures of society — the home, the church and the civil sphere — even where those structures are impacted by sin and we as sinners fail to act in accordance with God's design for us.

When did the order of creation as a specific term enter the discussion? Though Luther and his successors understood divinely instituted authority in a way conceptually similar to the order of creation, specific use of that language only began to emerge among German Lutheran theologians in the 19th century. The terminology and its applications were diverse. It could be referred to as "orders of creation" (*Schöpfungsordnungen*) or "orders of the creator" (*Schöpferordnungen*). Theologians described the concept as "fundamental forms of human community" — chiefly, though not exclusively, those of the family — and the relationships that govern them.³⁰ It could refer with varying degrees to the state as a political entity, the land or territory in which one lives, one's network of family relationships, or even one's ethnicity. These forms are accessible to all people by reason and experience, not strictly revelation. Much of this was articulated against the breakup of traditional European institutions like the Holy Roman Empire or the state churches of Germany due to the spread of constitutional democracies in the mid-19th century.

The order of creation debates continued into the 20th century, where the idea was most controversially abused by the "German Christian" movement to support its racial politics, identifying nationality and race as intrinsic parts of that human community created by God.³¹ Certain German theologians responded directly to this misapplication of the order of creation and offered a different perspective. In particular, Lutheran theologians such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Walter Künneth responded with their own interpretation of the order of creation that took into consideration the consequences of the fall. Bonhoeffer used the terminology "order of preservation" in arguing that due to sin the order of creation is no longer intelligible to all peoples, so God has provided an order of preservation that sustains

²⁷ Mattox, "Order in the House," 115–23. This would also account for the male's sinful abuse of his authority through verbal or physical violence.

²⁸ Loci XII.II.36, in Johann Gerhard, *On Original Sin, On Actual Sin, and On Free Choice*, trans. Richard J. Dinda (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2014), 21.

²⁹ Speaking in reference to 1 Cor. 11:7, Loci XI.VI.107, in Johann Gerhard, *On Creation and Angels, On Providence, On Election and Reprobation, and On the Image of God in Man before the fall*, trans. Richard J. Dinda (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2013), 301.

³⁰ Nathan Howard Yoder, *Ordnung in Gemeinschaft: A Critical Appraisal of the Erlangen Contribution to the Orders of Creation* (New York: Peter Lang, 2016), 2–8, 52–54.

³¹ This approach misused the order of creation by claiming that German ethnicity and land — *Blut und Boden* ("blood and soil") — were established by God and could take preeminence over the shared religious identity Christians had across many nations and many races. For more on this, see Robert P. Erickson, *Theologians under Hitler* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), and Yoder, *Ordnung in Gemeinschaft*, 90–105.

creation after the fall.³² In a similar, but clearer way, K nneth speaks of an order of preservation as God’s ongoing creative work (*creatio continua*), or the means through which God preserves not simply creation in the abstract, but the original order which God instituted at creation and which remains inaccessible to fallen humanity apart from God’s revelation.³³ In this sense, the order of creation is parallel to natural law, yet it is only perceptible and appropriated by virtue of the order of preservation. While K nneth’s explanation was more explicitly Lutheran and emphasized revelation to a greater degree, both used the order of preservation as a direct rejoinder to the misuse of the order of creation by theologians sympathetic to National Socialism. The order of preservation provided them a way to view the order of creation and its potential applications after the fall into sin from the perspective of the Christian standing under the authority of God’s Word rather than as a strictly philosophical or political idea accessible naturally to all human beings apart from faith in Christ or submission to Holy Scripture.

Order of creation terminology also makes its way into the *Christian Dogmatics* of the prominent late-19th, early-20th century Missouri Synod theologian Francis Pieper, presumably through his arduous study of theological currents in Germany. Pieper makes two passing references to the “order of the creator” (*Sch pferordnung*), by which he had in mind the order in which man was created by God before woman, and both references pertained to the position of women relative to men in contemporary society. In the first case, he explains passages regarding subordination of women in the New Testament as having their origin in both creation and fall: “It is the plain teaching of Scripture that in relation to the man, the woman is in a position of subordination. Both the order of creation and the order established after the fall assign her that position.”³⁴ Shortly thereafter, Pieper defends the conception of the home as “the sphere of woman’s dominion and teaching activity” against those who consider this view a relic of a different time or place. He claims that according to 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2, it is a “universal, permanent order, for Paul gives as the reason for vetoing any public teaching of the women in the church (1) the order of creation, that Adam was made first, after him Eve; and (2) the role that woman played in the Fall,” namely, the deception of Eve.³⁵

The most direct precedent for the Missouri Synod’s official adoption of the term “order of creation,” however, came through a 1950 dissertation by Austrian theologian Fritz Zerbst, published in English by Concordia Publishing House in 1955.³⁶ Zerbst had written the book in response to concerns over the legitimacy of women serving congregations in emergency situations as assistants to the pastors, including in certain exceptional cases the right to preach or even celebrate the Sacrament of the Altar.³⁷ Central to his argument was the distinction between the order of creation and the order of redemption. The order of creation provides the conceptual background to St. Paul’s insistence in several New Testament letters that women should not speak or exercise authority over a man (1 COR. 11; 1 TIM. 2) and that wives should submit to their husbands (EPH. 5; COL. 3; 1 PETER 3). He ultimately concludes that if a woman were

³² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1–3*, trans. Douglas Stephen Bax (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 139–40. “The Creator is now the preserver; the created world is now the fallen but preserved world” (139); “All order of our fallen world are God’s orders of preservation that uphold and preserve us for Christ. They are not orders of creation but orders of preservation” (140). Ultimately, Bonhoeffer would augment this with his notion of four “mandates” — work, marriage, government and church — which provide Christians an ethical principle for life in the present world yet could only be understood through faith in Christ. See, for example, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, trans. Richard Krauss, et al (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 68f.

³³ Walter K nneth, “The Concept of the Order of Preservation,” in *Faith and Action: Basic Problems in Christian Ethics: A Selection of Contemporary Discussions*, ed. Heinz Horst Schrey (Edinburgh: Olivier and Boyd, 1970), 282–92, and Yoder, *Ordnung in Gemeinschaft*, 189–200. According to K nneth, “the thesis of the divine order of preservation does not represent the result of empirical perceptions, nor does it represent an idea which is the result of metaphysical speculation. Man is denied immanent recognition of the orders as an order of God” (“Concept of the Order,” 282); and “the fundamental recognition of world order as ‘God’s order of preservation’ is not a product of human wisdom but it is dependent on revelation, and every closer development of this judgment is bound by revelation” (“Concept of Order,” 283).

³⁴ Franz Pieper, *Christliche Dogmatik*, 4 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1917–1924), 1:627; for the English, see Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, trans. Theodore Engelder, 4 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950–1957), 1:524.

³⁵ Pieper, *Christliche Dogmatik*, 1:629; English 1:526. The term “order of creation” also appears in John T. Mueller’s *Christian Dogmatics: A Handbook of Doctrinal Theology for Pastors, Teachers, and Laymen* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1934), 179, in reference to the chronology of the six-day creation narrative, not the relationship between men and women. Mueller does, however, refer to a “divine order” that “must not be subverted,” since it is “the will of God that the woman should not usurp authority over the man by ruling over him” (209). Similarly, Edward Koehler does not address the order of creation or the primeval headship of man over woman, nor the complication of that headship after the fall. By contrast, however, he speaks of the “dominion and rule” of humanity over other creatures, and how that “dominion of humanity over nature was curtailed” due to sin. See Edward W.A. Koehler, *A Summary of Christian Doctrine: A Popular Presentation of the Teachings of the Bible*, rev. ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1939), 50–52.

³⁶ Fritz Zerbst, *Das Amt der Frau in der Kirche: eine praktisch-theologische Untersuchung* (Vienna: Evangelischer Pressverband in  sterreich, 1950); English translation, *The Office of Woman in the Church: A Study in Practical Theology*, trans. Albert G. Merckens (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955).

³⁷ These measures had taken shape due to the financial and demographic devastations of Weimar Germany and World War II, though by the 1950s cases for women’s ordination had begun to percolate throughout northern Europe, most notably Sweden. See Zerbst, *Office of Woman*, 7–13, for the historical background.

to receive the office of pastor, she would “completely reverse the order of creation” by assuming the role of “head” of the man.³⁸ The biblical case against women’s ordination for Zerbst depends upon the relationship of headship and submission instituted at creation and subsequently reiterated in the New Testament. Interestingly enough, Zerbst never clearly defined the order of creation or order of redemption, nor did he address the implications of the order of creation for the civil or domestic realms.³⁹ Yet it was his thorough argument against female clergy on the basis of the order of creation that would lead to the term’s adoption within the Missouri Synod, while also leaving some ambiguity about how it should apply to matters other than the pastoral office.

To summarize: The concept order of creation, though not found by name in Scripture, has in the Lutheran tradition been used as a way of referencing or summarizing Scripture’s own rationale for assigning specific roles of authority to men in the church and in the Christian home. First, the New Testament appeals to the account of creation and the fall in Genesis 1–3 as the basis for male authority in the public teaching and liturgical conduct of the church. Second, Luther and subsequent Lutheran theologians understood this authority as applicable to the realms of the home, the church and the government as instituted and preserved by God Himself in His created order. Third, 19th- and 20th-century German theologians, including Lutherans, debated how the concept related to those same spheres of authority and how sin affected the way Christians perceive them and live in accordance with them. Finally, the application of the order of creation to specific questions about the roles and relationships between men and women in the church would ultimately suggest the adoption of that terminology by the Missouri Synod.

II. Order of Creation in the Missouri Synod

The Missouri Synod officially endorsed the language of the order of creation — and, with it, the language of the order of redemption — at its 1956 convention in St. Paul, Minnesota through the report of the Committee on Woman Suffrage. The committee delivered a report drawing heavily on Zerbst’s dissertation. It argued that Christians live simultaneously within two orders — the order of creation and the order of redemption — and that these orders are governed by what God has instituted through them: either the “horizontal” relationships between all created beings, including men and women, or the vertical, redemptive relationship between God and man. The committee’s definition of both orders provided far more clarity than Zerbst’s and reveals to some degree the narrowness of their intended application.⁴⁰ It dismisses any attempt to protest the order of creation using Galatians 3 — that there is no distinction between male and female in Christ — by claiming that this does not override what God has established in creation.⁴¹

The report concludes that, because the order of redemption does not abrogate the order of creation, then likewise the order of redemption does not support the formal adoption of women’s suffrage, which it argues is prohibited by the order of creation. The submission of woman to the headship of man in the order of creation, which according to Zerbst undergirds St. Paul’s prohibition of women teaching or exercising authority over men in the church, then determines the role women have in the governance of the local congregation. To that end, 1956 Resolution 03-22 argues that, while Scripture does not specifically address whether women should participate in voters’ assemblies, surrendering male headship to women in congregational matters is “anti-Scriptural,” and thus commends the

³⁸ Zerbst, *Office of Woman*, 81.

³⁹ The translator, Concordia Seminary professor Albert Merkens, provides this brief description of terms in a footnote: “‘Order of creation’ (*Schöpfungsordnung*) and ‘order of redemption’ (*Erlösungsordnung*), as employed by the author of this book with reference to the positions assigned by God to man and woman, must be understood in the sense of an arrangement of things in order, as in ranks, rows, or classes. In some sentences of the book ‘ordination’ and ‘ordinance’ express more clearly the intended meaning of *Schöpfungsordnung* and *Erlösungsordnung*” (Zerbst, *Office of Woman*, 11 n9).

⁴⁰ The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Proceedings of the 28th Delegate Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 566.

⁴¹ 1956 *Proceedings*, 556.

traditional position of male voters' meetings as "Scripture-sanctioned and time-tested."⁴² It explicitly cites the distinction between the order of redemption and the order of creation as meriting further attention, while resolving that all members should study "the God-pleasing place of woman in home and church with renewed diligence and zeal," all congregations that practice male voters' assembly should continue in that practice, and all congregations that practice women's suffrage should reconsider their position.⁴³

The question of women's suffrage would be revisited again between 1968 and 1970, with implications for an understanding of the order of creation. In 1968, the CTCR published a report on women's suffrage.⁴⁴ While the report repeatedly affirms the distinction between the order of creation and the order of redemption, it does not base its decision regarding women's suffrage on the structures of male headship and female submission.⁴⁵ Instead, it argues that since Scripture does not address voters' assemblies at all, then no biblical passage directly forbids women's suffrage. If there is no "clear passage" prohibiting it, then the Synod "cannot adopt binding legislation" on the matter. The relevant New Testament texts deal with "public teaching in the church," or the pastoral office. Suffrage — whether it be a male voting or a female voting — does not imply occupying the pastoral office.⁴⁶ This logic was likewise applied (generally speaking) to women holding congregational offices.⁴⁷

The 1968 CTCR report laid the foundation for the adoption of women's suffrage at the 1969 convention. 1969 Resolution 2-17, "To Grant Women Suffrage and Board Membership," commended both the CTCR study and the earlier 1956 report, then resolved that since Scripture does not prohibit suffrage at the congregational or Synod level, the Synod and its member congregations have freedom to adopt it as they wish — provided that such policies do not allow women to hold the office of pastor or exercise authority over men. The resolution did cite the order of creation, but only as prohibiting the holding of certain offices in the church "if this involves women in a violation of the order of creation."⁴⁸ In 1970, the LCMS Commission on Constitutional Matters (CCM), in providing direction to congregations considering the adoption of women's suffrage, interpreted this resolution to say that women may not serve as elders, chairs or vice-chairs of the congregation, since such offices are either identified with the functions of the pastoral ministry (in the case of elders) or may exercise authority over the men (in the case of chairs or vice-chairs). "[S]uch offices might indeed be in violation of what has been called the order of creation or of preservation."⁴⁹ It adds, however, that this conclusion is reached not by divine right — *de iure divino*, or Scripture — but by human right — *de iure humano*, or practical arrangement — and is thus subject to revision and change. Consequently, the Synod's use of the order of creation to prohibit women's suffrage shifted to prohibiting leadership of women in the church only where this involved a direct violation of the order of creation, such as when women "hold the pastoral office or serve in any other capacity involving the distinctive functions of this office" or "when holding any other kind of office or membership on boards or committees in the institutional structures of a congregation" which necessarily involved violations of the order of creation.

⁴² 1956 *Proceedings*, 570. It may seem curious today that women's suffrage would lead to the adoption of the term order of creation. Opponents of suffrage argued that, for a woman to vote in the congregational assembly is to exercise a degree of authority over both the pastor and other men in the congregation, and that was certain to raise questions over how these pivotal New Testament texts are interpreted and applied. In this sense, the debate provided the perfect opportunity to consider whether there are broader ecclesiastical implications to the Pauline prohibition of woman speaking, teaching or exercising authority in the congregation. Synod, at that time, found in Zerbst's use of the order of creation a helpful framework to say that participation in a voters' assembly runs counter to the way in which God made women and the way in which He made women to relate to men.

⁴³ 1956 *Proceedings*, 570. As an indication of gravity of the issue, the convention proceedings expressly indicate that the 10 negative voters were asked to give the Secretary of Synod their reason for voting that way, 1956 *Proceedings*, 571.

⁴⁴ When the CTCR was formed in 1962, it absorbed the functions of the standing three-person Committee on Woman Suffrage and thus inherited its task of addressing this issue in response to repeated requests by Synod (1959 Res. 3-08, 1965 Res. 2-36, 1967 Res. 2-05).

⁴⁵ In several places, the report provides the order of preservation as a synonym for the order of creation. Though entirely undefined in the report, this parallel term also made its way into the subsequent 1970 Commission on Constitutional Matters opinion (see below).

⁴⁶ CTCR, *Woman Suffrage in the Church* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1968), 10. The Commission did not reject or reinterpret the order of creation to reach its conclusion. Instead, it put forward a positive argument in favor of women's suffrage by appealing to the democratic notion of franchise, even claiming that parliamentary procedure itself prevents women from exercising authority over men in the way the New Testament warns.

⁴⁷ CTCR, *Woman Suffrage in the Church*, 10–11; note the significant caveats in this discussion.

⁴⁸ 1969 Res. 2-17, *Proceedings*, 88. Sufficient ambiguity resulted that this would continue to be a point of contention in subsequent decades.

⁴⁹ LCMS Commission on Constitutional Matters, "Suggestions for Congregational Constitutions or Bylaws Regarding the Privileges of Women (Voting and Holding Office)," January 22–23, 1970.

In the face of increasing theological and cultural pressures during this pivotal period in American history, the order of creation took on fresh relevance for the Missouri Synod: It was applied expressly to the question of the ordination of women. The Missouri Synod had been involved in a theological committee of the Lutheran Council of the USA, which included representatives of both the American Lutheran Church (ALC, with which the LCMS was in fellowship, albeit tenuously) and the Lutheran Church of America (LCA), on the topic of women's ordination. In 1970, both the ALC and the LCA approved the ordination of women, leading to the LCMS' 1971 objection to the ALC's action, its declaration of "fellowship in protest" in 1977, and ultimately its dissolution in 1981.⁵⁰ The order of creation and the New Testament texts supporting it provided the Missouri Synod a firm exegetical and theological basis for rejecting the ordination of women and limiting the pastoral office and its distinctive functions to men. While disagreement over the order of creation's implications for the role of women in the life of the congregation or in church governance would repeatedly arise, the Synod continued to affirm that the order of creation unequivocally prohibited women from occupying the pastoral office or carrying out its distinctive functions.⁵¹

In 1985, the CTCR published a report titled *Women in the Church*.⁵² In the report, the CTCR specifically focused the order of creation on the question of women's ordination. It affirms that the order of creation also applies to the relationship between men and women in the church: "Distinctive identities for man and woman in relation to each other were assigned by God at creation. These identities are not nullified by Christ's redemption, and they should be reflected in the church."⁵³ The report argues that, in the context of the church, male headship and female subordination imply a reciprocal relationship that is maintained "for the sake of orderliness and unity."⁵⁴ But it restricts the ecclesiastical function of this headship and subordination to the question of pastoral ministry and the distinctive functions of the pastoral office.⁵⁵

It is in this light that the report lays down a principle regarding the application of the order of creation that directly reflects the Synod's position: "The creational pattern of male headship requires that women not hold the formal position of the authoritative public teaching office in the church, that is, the office of pastor."⁵⁶ Further commenting on the "distinctive functions" of the pastoral office as articulated in 1969, the report identifies four specific activities: "1) preaching in the services of the congregation; 2) leading the formal public services of worship; 3) the public administration of the sacraments; 4) the public administration of the office of the keys."⁵⁷ Ultimately, *Women in the Church* affirms the 1956 position of the order of creation yet limits its principal relevance for the

⁵⁰ For more background to these developments, see Gracia Grindal, "Getting Women Ordained," *Lutheran Quarterly* 32 (2018): 281–306; John H.P. Reumann, *Ministries Examined: Laity, Clergy, Women, and Bishops in a Time of Change* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987), 78–139; and Raymond Tiemeyer, ed., *The Ordination of Women: A Report Distributed by Authorization of the Church Body Presidents as a Contribution to Further Study, Based on Materials Produced through the Division of Theological Studies of the Lutheran Council in the U.S.A.* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1970).

⁵¹ This has been repeatedly stated in a variety of resolutions since, including 1971 Res. 2-04, "To Withhold Ordination of Women to the Pastoral Office"; 1977 Res. 3-15, "To Reaffirm the Synod's Position on Women with Reference to the Pastoral Office"; 1986 Res. 3-10, "To Reaffirm Position of Synod on Ordination of Women"; and 1998 Res. 3-25A, "To Affirm Position of Synod That Only Men May Hold the Pastoral Office."

⁵² In the intervening years, there was little direct discussion of the order of creation. The CTCR's 1981 report, *Human Sexuality*, had a shorter treatment of the topic under the rubric of "Headship within Marriage." It was limited to the "hierarchy of function" (*Human Sexuality*, 31).

⁵³ CTCR, *Women in the Church*, 27.

⁵⁴ CTCR, *Women in the Church*, 32.

⁵⁵ For instance, it argues that the "teaching" and "exercising authority" of 1 Timothy 2 are "intentionally linked," and do not apply to functions outside the pastoral office. It is not permissible to apply them abstractly, but both "teaching" and "exercising authority" relate strictly to the specific functions of the pastoral office. CTCR, *Women in the Church*, 36.

⁵⁶ CTCR, *Women in the Church*, 37.

⁵⁷ CTCR, *Women in the Church*, 42. In light of these distinctive functions, the report raises no objection to women addressing the congregation outside the worship service in an area of their expertise, holding offices in the congregation, or serving as acolytes and ushers, while it expresses reservation about other instances that may involve confusion with the pastoral office. In the case of participating in the public services of the church, such as reading the lessons or distribution of the elements in Holy Communion, the document urges against it. With respect to reading the lessons, the report says, "the reading of the Scriptures is most properly the function of the pastoral office and should therefore not ordinarily be delegated to a lay person, woman or man" (CTCR, *Women in the Church*, 45). 1989 Res. 3-14, 1989 *Proceedings*, 118, cited this same passage, concluding that "congregations of the Synod proceed with care and sensitivity in making decisions permitting the lay reading of the Scriptures, recognizing decisions in this regard lie in the area of Christian judgment." It is worth noting, however, that the distinction drawn in *Women in the Church* and in this resolution is between pastoral reading and lay reading, not between male reading and female reading. Yet, in both cases, the argument is not made on the basis of the order of creation, but on the basis of the pastoral office and the distinctive functions reserved to it.

church to the lines laid out from 1968–1970: the pastoral office and the distinctive functions of that pastoral office.

Questions regarding the order of creation would arise again in 1994 with the publication of the CTCR's *Service of Women in Synodical and Congregational Offices*.⁵⁸ The report utilized the 1970 CCM distinction between *de iure divino* and *de iure humano* to argue that the pastoral office and its functions were divinely instituted by Holy Scripture, and those functions were to be carried out in accordance with the requirements and prescriptions laid out by Holy Scripture, including the prohibition of women serving in this way. Other offices established by the church, however, are ultimately according to human right and without mandate from Scripture. This allows for the possibility of women holding such humanly instituted offices, provided that doing so does not include performing the distinctive functions of the pastoral office. The 1994 report made no explicit mention of the order of creation, as the 1969 resolution had. This led to a dissenting opinion from several members of the CTCR, arguing that the report did not account for the role of the order of creation in its presentation. In fact, the dissent states, when the report cites 1969 Resolution 2-17, it quotes the statement regarding the prohibition against women carrying out the distinctive functions of the pastoral office and refers to the allowance that they may hold congregational and Synod office but does not include the rationale qualifying their holding of such offices: It is prohibited “if this involves women in a violation of the order of creation.” To the minds of the dissenters, this “violation of the order of creation” is what precludes women holding certain congregational and Synod leadership positions.⁵⁹

The Executive Committee of the CTCR subsequently drafted a rejoinder to the dissent. It rejects the notion that the report failed to include the order of creation as a guiding concept simply because there was no explicit mention of it, pointing to the order of creation in 1985's *Women in the Church* and calling it “the ‘guiding concept’ which informs this entire report and its argumentation regarding women serving in the church.”⁶⁰ It also claims that the order of creation as articulated in the New Testament prohibitions against certain activities of women (as stipulated in 1 COR. 14 or 1 TIM. 2) applies specifically to church and worship contexts. “If those dissenting believe that ‘more general’ applications of the order of creation are mandated by the Scriptures with respect to the service of women in offices brought into being by the church, what are these specific applications and what is their Scriptural foundation?”⁶¹ The CTCR would continue articulating this same position: that the order of creation primarily pertains to the ordination of men alone and to male headship in the Christian home due to clear scriptural passages, but its implications for the service of women in humanly instituted offices of the church is not made explicit by Scripture.

In a 2006 report, the CTCR points out that Scripture clearly teaches the order of creation but not necessarily *how* the order of creation applies to certain practical issues. Scripturally speaking, the order of creation relates to the pastoral office (citing 1 COR. 14:33B–35 and 1 TIM. 2:11–15), so the church is bound to affirm that women cannot hold this office or the responsibilities inherent in it. “The order of creation is clearly taught in Scripture and has important implications for the service of women in the church — specifically with reference to the pastoral office and its distinctive functions.” But it concludes, “the CTCR also believes, however, that we are bound to Scripture alone as the norm when it comes to making doctrinal judgments about the specific implications and applications of the order of creation for the service of women in the church.”⁶² Thus, the Commission responds that disagreement remains not about the order of creation as such or about its relation to the pastoral office, but rather how the order of creation should influence the discussion beyond what Scripture expressly states. A 2014 CTCR report further acknowledges that the order of creation has not received sufficient attention at times, but adds that the degree to which that sufficiency is determined may depend upon what one expects from the order of creation:

⁵⁸ *The Service of Women in Congregational and Synodical Offices* (1995 Workbook), 310.

⁵⁹ “Dissenting Opinion on *Women in Congregational Offices*,” 1995 Workbook, 312.

⁶⁰ “Response to the Dissenting Opinion on *The Service of Women in Congregational and Synodical Offices*,” 1995 Workbook, 315.

⁶¹ 1995 Workbook, 316.

⁶² “CTCR Response to Expressions of Dissent,” 2007 Workbook, 406.

Finally, it should be noted that while the Commission affirms that “the order of creation is clearly taught in Scripture,” and while it acknowledges that questions about the understanding and implications of this issue have not been sufficiently addressed and articulated, it also recognizes that questions about exactly “how to apply” the order of creation to specific questions of practice and polity (beyond its application to the pastoral office and its distinctive functions) are very difficult to address with complete certainty, clarity, and consensus on the basis of Scripture alone. In other words, the Bible does not spell out explicitly “where to draw the line(s)” when it comes to exactly how the Biblical principle of the order of creation applies to all matters of congregational polity and practice.⁶³

On matters where Scripture clearly prohibits a certain practice or directly applies the order of creation to a concrete situation (as with its application to the pastoral office and its distinctive functions), we must stand firm and remain united. Where it does not, the CTCR maintained, we have freedom to discuss and debate these matters in Christian charity without disagreement over questions of application threatening our unity and fellowship.

Two more extensive and recent CTCR reports touch on the topic as well. The 2009 *Creator's Tapestry* did not treat the order of creation at length, but does provide a short clarification of the order of creation's terminology, conceding that it is not a biblical term strictly speaking and suggesting that “future study of this terminology, its history, its potential for misunderstanding, and its value as a means of communicating biblical truth effectively may be of benefit.”⁶⁴ Despite this caution, it nonetheless proposes that the order of creation should be reflected in the church and in the home, though it makes no reference to the civil sphere. The 2017 report *Women and Military Service: A Lutheran Perspective* includes a short description of the contours of the order of creation and the biblical citations supporting it. The section begins by asserting the relevance of the order of creation for both marriage and for the order of the church. It acknowledges that “God's Word does not make explicit every implication or application of the order of creation for life in the civil estate,” yet nonetheless emphasizes that the order of creation assumes “essential realities” for male and female that “remain and must not be ignored or denied,” and that they have import not only for family and church, but also “other vocations and areas of society.”⁶⁵ At the same time, it notes that the entrance of sin into the world has damaged the relations instituted at creation: “It is important to note that sexual distinctions and roles were not created because of sin but are strained and abused as a result of sin.”⁶⁶ Moreover, it underscores the need for restraint in appealing to the order of creation in realms where Scripture does not:

Less clear is how Scripture's teaching about the order of creation may be relevant or properly applied to various questions in the left-hand kingdom, since (as noted earlier) Scripture does not make explicit every implication or application of the order of creation for life in the civil estate. Here we must be cautious to say neither more nor less than Scripture itself says, nor expect or insist that Christians equally committed to the authority of Scripture will reach exactly the same conclusions about how the order of creation may or may not apply to such questions.⁶⁷

It is for this reason that the report allows for difference in opinion based upon conscience.⁶⁸ The report does affirm the relevance of the order of creation for civil matters yet exercises a degree of restraint by not urging a theological inference (as opposed to a clear statement of Scripture) upon the consciences of the faithful in a way that may be unnecessarily divisive of fellowship.

⁶³ CTCR, *Review of 2005 Task Force “Guidelines for the Service of Women in Congregational Offices,”* 6.

⁶⁴ CTCR, *Creator's Tapestry*, 52.

⁶⁵ CTCR, *Women and Military Service: A Lutheran Perspective* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2017), 7.

⁶⁶ CTCR, *Women and Military Service*, 9.

⁶⁷ CTCR, *Women and Military Service*, 11.

⁶⁸ While it opposes the conscription of women into the military by appealing to the basic biblical and theological contours of the order of creation, as well as natural law and human reason, it also allows that, given the “distinction between the two kingdoms, the inherent complexities of biblical interpretation, and the absence of specific and explicit mandates regarding the service of women in the military,” Christians may “very well support and defend the ‘the informed consciences of women who have carefully considered their station in life and Holy Scriptures on this issue who wish to voluntarily serve in our nation's military’ (2016 Res. 5-11A), even when this may include serving in positions of combat,” *Women in Military Service*, 14.

The Missouri Synod's official treatment of the order of creation may be summarized thusly: The concept was officially adopted in 1956 in declining proposals for women's suffrage; its use shifted beginning in 1968–1970 to safeguard the biblical proscription of women assuming the pastoral office or its distinctive functions, before becoming a subject of debate over the role of women in church governance in the 1990s and finally the role of women in society more generally in the 2010s. Questions about the precise definition of this term and its specific applications and implications would then lead to the 2016 resolution precipitating the current report.

III. Defining the Order of Creation

The concept of the order of creation is indeed found in the Scriptures; in the writings of Luther and subsequent Lutheran theologians; and in reports, resolutions and statements about its specific use and application in the Missouri Synod. Nonetheless, a completely clear and exact definition of the order of creation or its corollary, the order of redemption has remained elusive. For instance, the 1956 report proposing the order of creation as the basis for refusing women's suffrage defined the concept this way:

Order of Creation designates the particular position which by the will of the Creator any created object occupies in relation to others. Thus man has a position in creation different from that of all other animate and all inanimate creatures (GENESIS 1). On the level of life in this world husband and wife, parents and children, have their own assigned position in relation to each other (Table of Duties). The triad Father-Mother-Child is one that even atheistic evolutionists cannot escape, although they believe neither in Creation nor in Redemption. This triangular relationship belongs to the very structure of existence.⁶⁹

By contrast with what the report later calls these “horizontal, earthly relations” of the order of creation, it defines the order of redemption this way: “Order of redemption is employed to denote the relationship of man to God in the new life established by God the Redeemer and Sanctifier.”⁷⁰

This bears comparison to the definition given in the CTCR's 1985 report *Women in the Church*. The 1985 report treats the order of creation almost identically with the 1956 convention report: “This [order of creation] refers to the particular position which, by the will of God, any created object occupies in relation to others. God has given to that which has been created a certain definite order which, because it has been created by Him, is the expression of his immutable will. These relationships belong to the very structure of created existence.”⁷¹ However, the report's definition of the order of redemption departs in one important way from its 1956 precursor, as the term “refers to the relationship of the redeemed to God *and to each other* [italics added] in the new creation established by Him in Jesus Christ (GAL. 6:15; 2 COR. 5:17). This new creation constitutes participation in a new existence, in the new world that has come in Christ. It is a relationship determined by grace.”⁷² The simple interpolation of the words “and to each other” changes the distinct historical-vertical axes of the 1956 report. It in turn introduces a degree of ambiguity into the question of precisely how the order of redemption relates to the order of creation. In what ways does the order of redemption govern the relationships between Christians differently than the order of creation does? The report states that the order of creation establishes “individual identities to each sex,” and that they are not “interchangeable,” but must “remain distinct.” But are there now two types of relationships between men and women in the church — those governed by the order of creation and those governed by the order of redemption? How are we to know which one applies, apart from the prohibition of women serving in the pastoral office? Moreover, does the order of redemption have any implication for the roles of women in relation to men within society, politics or domestic life?

⁶⁹ 1956 *Proceedings*, 566.

⁷⁰ 1956 *Proceedings*, 566.

⁷¹ CTCR, *Women in the Church*, 21.

⁷² CTCR, *Women in the Church*, 21.

A further ambiguity was introduced with the term “order of preservation,” used by both the 1968 CTCR report on women’s suffrage and the 1970 CCM guidelines for women in congregational and Synod offices, albeit without definition. In both cases, “order of preservation” appears as a synonym for “order of creation,” yet that is not how the order of preservation had been used in prior theological discussion. Preservation applied to the postlapsarian condition — how relationships within marriage, for instance, existed despite the impact of the fall and the damage it caused. Thus, one might reject the order of creation’s relevance entirely in deference to the order of preservation, through which God continued governing a fallen society. Is the order of preservation different from the order of creation? Is it merely a way of expressing how the order of creation operates after the fall? If the order of preservation is entirely distinct, how might it help us better understand the consequences of the fall for what God instituted perfectly at creation or how we should apply the order of creation in a fallen world?

Lastly, there remains a question of how the order of creation relates to natural law.⁷³ At times, the order of creation has been viewed as a close parallel to natural law, or the law written on human hearts.⁷⁴ However, the single figure most influential for the Missouri Synod’s formal incorporation of the language of order of creation, Fritz Zerbst, explicitly denied that natural law was to be viewed as synonymous with the order of creation. Rather, he saw them as complementary concepts — natural law for the broader society originating in human nature, order of creation for the Christian originating in Holy Scripture.⁷⁵ Are natural law and the order of creation the same? If they are different, and if natural law is accessible to all, but the order of creation is strictly revealed by God’s Word, how does this distinction impact the way we can apply it beyond the Christian church and home? How might this affect the way we talk about the ecclesiastical or domestic applications of male headship versus possible social or political applications?

While the order of creation has clear theological, historical and denominational precedents, it has lacked a clear and precise definition. The same is true for the order of redemption (and the order of preservation). The evolving use, differing descriptions and repeated resolutions appealing to the order of creation on divisive matters have only exacerbated the ambiguity already implicit in terms that have lacked clear and consistent definitions. Without agreed-upon definitions for these terms, members of the Synod continue to talk past one another. For this reason, we offer below definitions of the order of creation and order of redemption that we believe are consonant with what the Synod and the CTCR have said in the past (rooted in Scripture, Luther and subsequent Lutheran theology). We do so in the hope of clarifying what we mean when we talk about these orders and facilitating continued fraternal discussion about the implications and applications of these orders for our life today in home, church and society.

- **Order of Creation:** *The set of relationships among all created things that God has instituted in His creation.* These natural relationships assume orderliness, with God entrusting to some responsibilities that involve the benevolent exercise of authority in their relationship with others — husbands in relationship to wives, parents to children, civil authorities to subordinates, humans to animals and vegetation — and in turn subordinating some to others (GEN. 1:29, 2:15; EX. 20:21; ROM. 13:1–7; 1 COR. 11:3). The fall into sin has damaged the order of creation, including our perception and application of it (GEN. 3:16–19; 1 TIM. 2:13). Scripture is not definitive about its future in the new heavens and new earth. Nonetheless, its affirmation by Christians supports male headship and female submission in ways Scripture makes explicit for relationships within the Christian home and within the church (1 COR. 11:7–9; 14:33B–35; 1 TIM. 2:11–13).

⁷³ On natural law, see CTCR, *The Natural Knowledge of God in Christian Confession and Christian Witness* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2013), 28–32.

⁷⁴ CTCR, *Women and Military Service*, 12–16, seeks to keep natural and human reason distinct from the order of creation, but never fully defines the respective terms.

⁷⁵ “The will of the Creator concerning marriage and the relation between husband and wife must, however, not be confused or identified with natural law. Natural law proceeds from possibilities inherent in man, from his ‘nature,’ from biological facts, and the like. Natural law can serve as a basis for the temporary establishment of definite sociological structures for human life. Theology, however, always operates with the will of the Creator as the deciding factor and is, therefore, essentially concerned with the ethical side. Because of this the New Testament indeed demands no change of the social order, but it does call for a change in the ethical behavior of human beings. Natural law knows nothing of accountability unto God, and it has, therefore, led to the most varied solutions of the question concerning the sexes. For the Christian, however, the all-important factor is the one will of the divine Creator, according to which there is only one fundamental order, though this order may under various social circumstances assume various forms. Whereas this fundamental order has its origin in the will of the divine Creator, the affairs of men point in manifold ways to this order and express it in marriage laws, in the possibility of finding a place for both man and woman in the political economy, and in other ways. Thus natural law sees effects, but not the cause; and vice-versa, theology must look from the Cause or Author to the creatural facts” (Zerbst, *Office of Woman*, 111f).

- **Order of Redemption:** *The set of relationships between all created things and God, which God has effected through the life, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.* While this redemption has certain implications for all creation, it principally concerns the standing of fallen humanity before God as a consequence of saving faith in Christ and with the hope for a restored, renewed creation in the life and world to come (GAL. 3:26–28; 1 COR. 12:13; 1 PETER 2:9–10). This order of redemption does not abrogate the order of creation yet points beyond it to the consummation of God’s eternal plan for salvation (2 COR. 5:1–5; REV. 21:1–7). Through regeneration by the Spirit and obedience to the Holy Scriptures under this order of redemption, Christians are able by faith to better understand the order God has established in creation and to live out their vocations in the world in a way that embodies that order, albeit incompletely and imperfectly (EPH. 5:22–33; 1 PETER 2:13–3:7).⁷⁶

IV. Concluding Remarks

Since 1956, the concept of the order of creation has proven somewhat controversial and, at times, poorly defined, with different interpretations arising from different circumstances. The central concerns over the order of creation, however, have largely revolved around practical applications. What roles may women occupy in the church? What positions and offices are reserved exclusively for men? How should the practice of the church reflect what God has instituted in creation? What, if anything, can we say on the basis of Scripture about how the order of creation applies in the civil sphere? The Synod has over time, after extensive study and discussion, changed its stance on certain of these practical applications under the auspices of Christian liberty. Despite these varied practical applications, the Synod has maintained a basic, consistent consensus that resists polarized opinions on matters where Scripture has not expressly spoken. It was in this spirit that the 2016 LCMS convention, in the same resolution requesting this report, identified three specific areas where the order of creation does come to bear on matters of church practice:

- (1) “That the term ‘elder,’ in view of the use of this term in the Scriptures, in the history of the church, and in the Synod’s history, be reserved for that humanly instituted office in the congregation which has as its assigned duty the assisting of the pastor in the public exercise of the distinctive functions of this office” (i.e., Office of the Public Ministry);
- (2) “That lay assistance in the distribution of the elements in the celebration of Holy Communion, in order ‘to avoid confusion regarding the office of the public ministry and to avoid giving offense to the church,’ [1989 Res. 3-10] be limited to lay men”; and
- (3) “That, while situations exist in which the service of women in leadership positions in the congregation is desirable or even necessary, men be encouraged to continue to exercise leadership in their congregations even as they are encouraged to exercise their God-given leadership in a God-pleasing manner in their homes.”⁷⁷

These positions did little more than reiterate what the Synod had said since 1969. Though reasoned disagreement may exist on the consequences of the order of creation for church structure or governance, Scripture’s teaching regarding the order of creation clearly rules out the ordination of women or their service in ways that may be confused with the pastoral office or involve the performance of its distinctive responsibilities.

Whatever questions (even disagreements) may continue to exist over certain practical applications of the order of creation, these ought not, in our view, prevent us from seeing and affirming the principal benefit of this theological concept for the church. St. Paul indeed saw a direct relevance of the order of creation for specific areas of church practice, in particular preaching, teaching and conduct of worship in the Christian church, as well as spiritual headship in the Christian home. Yet he articulates these positions to Christians sharing the same fundamental biblical worldview as his, with its affirmation of an eternal Creator God who made all things with order, beauty and

⁷⁶ This report has focused largely on the biblical, theological and historical foundations of the order of creation, not the order of redemption. The definition here draws upon that given in the 1956 report of the Committee on Woman Suffrage and the 1968 CTCR report on *Woman Suffrage in the Church* cited above. The reader is referred to those sources for further explanation.

⁷⁷ 2016 *Proceedings*, 163.

design, with interactive and inter-dependent rhyme and reason, which informed how they were to live in accordance with that divinely designed intentionality. We can no longer assume that most people — even Christians — hold this worldview in 21st-century American culture. Thus, it is all the more imperative that we as Lutherans, who confess unreservedly the authority of Holy Scripture, likewise affirm the God who reveals himself as Creator in Holy Scripture and what Scripture says about the implications of His created order and design for how we live in a sinful world that does not share those assumptions. The relevance of the order of creation for us, then, has not only to do with the practical applications we draw from it, but more importantly with the theological beliefs it reflects. As 20th-century German Lutheran theologian Peter Brunner once stated in the context of the controversy of his day over the ordination of women:

Above all else, we must take into account the theological doctrine of the sexual difference between man and woman. It is extremely necessary for the church to interpret the natural state doctrinally if she wants to present the message of the New Testament in a relevant fashion. She cannot be satisfied to borrow the insights of biology, psychology, philosophy, sociology, or medicine. Texts such as Eph. 5:22–23, Col. 3:18ff, and 1 Peter 3:1–7 show that the church must say something about what it means to be man or woman before God; it must say something that can be said by no one else in the world, because what it says is said in the light of this understanding of the Gospel. How is this to be said? What must be its content? It is my opinion that the question whether or not women should be ordained to the ministry depends on the theological doctrine of the nature and relationship between the God-given sexes.⁷⁸

In short, what we say about the order of creation is a consequence of what we believe about the God who ordained it at creation. The order of creation is not strictly or even primarily about certain “rules” or “guidelines” for how we live or who may do what in the church. It is finally about the Creator and Lord, how He has made us as His creation, and how what we believe about this creation reflects what we believe about the Creator who made it.

To affirm the order of creation, then, is not simply to affirm and uphold specific practical applications (though those are real consequences and worth consideration). To affirm the order of creation is to join together in a bold theological confession of God as creator and us as His creation. The order of creation confesses that God alone is the creator of all things that exist, and He made them out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*). The order of creation confesses the goodness of God’s creation, that everything He has made is fundamentally “good,” as Genesis 1 reiterates time and again, and is not to be discarded or regarded as worthless by us. The order of creation confesses that God has made all of humanity, all of humanity bears His image, and therefore all of human life is to be valued and protected. The order of creation confesses that God has made humans male and female and for them alone has instituted marriage, that in the indissoluble bonds of matrimony we might care for the earth and populate it. A rightly understood concept of the order of creation can only help us confess in a consistent, unified way, among other things, the biblical qualifications and distinctive functions of the pastoral office; God’s natural design for marriage and sexuality; and the marked contrast between the church and an increasingly secularized society when it comes to living in accordance with how God has created us. This report has sought to clarify our historic understanding of the order of creation through a biblically and theologically informed study, so that ultimately, we might know its foundations better, explain it more coherently and teach it more faithfully in accordance with Holy Scripture.

⁷⁸ Brunner, *Ministry and the Ministry of Women*, 13.

