

A Minority Opinion
on
Authentein : Response to a Request from the Atlantic District

Does a single Greek word that appears only once in the Bible deserve its own CTCR report? When the implications and applications are broad, important and significant, it most certainly does. This narrow focus highlights a fact: our proper understanding of this word of Holy Scripture is crucial to God-pleasing church practice.

Overall, the CTCR's response on *Authentein* is a fine technical document. It summarizes the latest research quite well for most seminary graduates, but may lie beyond the understanding of many others.

Laypeople would do well to print out this study and hand it to their pastor. Ask him: "What does this mean for our practice, here in our congregation?"

To simplify and clarify, I draw three important conclusions from this document. With regard to the "**authority**" that this word of Holy Scripture reserves to men and proscribes to women, a proper understanding of *authentein* entails:

1) Not only to "have" it but more concretely to "exercise" it. The sense of the word is not merely potential, official, theoretical, or passive, but actual, real, practical, and active. For years, it was objected that "The word (in Greek it is *authentein*) is never elsewhere employed in the Bible and is only rarely found in later Greek"¹ to suggest that we cannot know its meaning for certain. Now this CTCR document proves that the word was not so uncommon as once thought. As a result of recent research, we *can* now say with confidence what it means: "exercise authority." That which may not be used, ought not be assigned, and that which is actually used, has already (in effect) been assigned or usurped.

2) Not merely its *bad misuse*, but even its *good use*. The document conclusively establishes a new and related insight: we now know that the word *authentein* does not only mean "domineering." For almost fifty years the opposite view has been widely held in the Missouri Synod: "it has an opprobrious connotation, something like our 'domineer over,' 'lay down the law to,' dictate to,' 'to lord it over' (our vulgar 'to wear the pants')."² This CTCR document disproves that view: "according to Köstenberger *authentein* viewed within its grammatical context in 1 Timothy 2:12 should not be understood as having a pejorative or negative connotation (such as, for example, the translation "domineer" would have), but a positive one."³ In other words, the exercise of authority depicted with this word is good and not inherently bad of itself. It is not just a bad practice which is forbidden, but a good action that is limited in how it is to be exercised or implemented.

¹ "Scripture on Women in the Church," Proceedings of the Forty-Third Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 563.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Authentein*: Response to a Request from the Atlantic District," approved April 16, 2005 and placed online June 2005, (<http://www.lcms.org/graphics/assets/media/CTCR/041505%20AUTHENTEIN%20FULL%20TEXT.doc>), 10.

3) **Not only that *wrongfully taken* but even that *permissively given*.** The word *authenthein* does not merely refer to “usurped” authority, as in the self-willed, greedy, grasping of office or power for oneself – taking what was not given. The full meaning certainly includes, but is not limited to, this aspect. God holds men responsible and accountable for some things that they may not avoid or delegate to women. The Church may suffer as much or more from passive, silent, neglectful or irresponsible men as from overly vocal or domineering women.

Beyond this need for greater simplicity and clarity, I object to three aspects of this otherwise fine study:

- 1) The one-page Summary obscures a key finding of the study’s conclusions.
- 2) The CTCR carefully “limits itself” to a “lexical” study, without detailing any practical applications and implications in this document. In reality, these are unavoidable.
- 3) Instead, “the Commission recommends the continued study of its 1985 report *The Service of Women: Scriptural Principles and Ecclesial Practice*.”⁴ I believe this represents a significant inconsistency. The Commission ought not imply that the latest studies support and confirm that document. In fact, I am convinced the conclusions of this study contradict and undercut crucial aspects of the 1985 Report.

Right at the outset, the Summary quotes the New International Version of 1 Timothy 2:12, and even accents certain words with bold type: “I do not permit a woman to teach or to **have authority over** a man; she must be silent.” Yet it is precisely this translation “have” which research has now established as inadequate. The word “exercise” is better and more accurate than the word “have.” As the more recent English Standard Version puts it: “I do not permit a woman to teach or to **exercise** authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.” To use the NIV in the Summary’s first sentence serves to overlook or diminish one of the document’s most important conclusions (see p. 13).

Furthermore, the Commission deliberately backed away from “connecting the dots” between the document’s conclusions and our church practice:

Nor is it the Commission’s purpose here to draw conclusions regarding the application of this verse in the contemporary church. For a discussion of what the New Testament says in general about the service of women in the church the Commission recommends the continued study of its 1985 report *The Service of Women: Scriptural Principles and Ecclesial Practice*.⁵

On the following page it concedes, “In its 1985 report on *Women in the Church* the Commission understood *authenthein* in the general sense of ‘**have** authority’ ...” and on its final page notes that the lexical studies conducted since that date “have confirmed that the term ought to be translated ‘**exercise** authority over.’ In the Commission’s view the English Standard Version accurately translates 1 Timothy 2:12: ‘I do not permit a woman to teach or to **exercise** authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.’” (emphases added)

⁴ *Authentein*, 12.

⁵ *Ibid.*

Yet that 1985 Report contains an entire section on “Guidelines for Practice.” If the Commission truly wished to avoid drawing conclusions regarding the application of this verse, then it should *not* have made reference to that document. I question the presumption that no reassessment of the 1985 Report is necessary in light of this new study. One statement in particular certainly seems to merit renewed scrutiny:

... a careful review of this passage indicates that the terms “teach” and “exercise authority” parallel each other. They are intentionally linked. The kind of teaching referred to in the passage is tied to exercising authority. The authority forbidden to women here is that of the pastoral office, that is, one “who labors in preaching and teaching.” (1 Tim. 5:17; cf. 1 Thess. 5:12)⁶

These statements stand as bare assertions, unsubstantiated by the kind of thorough and careful research the CTCR discovered in the most recent scholarship on the meaning of the word *authentein*. With this new document, the focus now shifts to the meaning of the Greek word οὐδέ (“oude”) in “teach **or** exercise authority,” for the word *authentein* ought not be abstracted from its context. Exactly what relationship does οὐδέ establish between the words “*didaskein*” and “*authentein*”?

The CTCR’s *Authentein* document cites Andreas J. Köstenberger’s excellent chapter “A Complex Sentence Structure in 1 Timothy 2:12” in the book *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*. With regard to the meaning of οὐδέ here, Köstenberger summarizes a debate between two contemporary scholars. One insisted that

while οὐδέ ‘certainly usually joins “two *closely-related* items,” it does not usually join together words that restate the same things or that are mutually interpreting.’ Moo concluded that, while teaching and having authority are closely related, “they are nonetheless distinct,” referring also 1 Timothy 3:2, 4-5 and 5:17, where the two concepts are distinguished.⁷

Over the next three pages, Köstenberger identifies seven weaknesses in the contrary argument. He then devotes 19 pages to an exhaustive study of οὐδέ, including comprehensive tables on its patterns of usage in the New Testament and in ancient Greek literature. His thorough assessment of the word’s usage yielded these conclusions:

[T]he effort to make αὐθεντεῖν subordinate to διδάσκειν so that it in effect functions as an adverb and to give it a negative connotation as “to teach in a domineering way,” is contradicted by the fact that οὐδέ does not function as a subordinating but as a coordinating conjunction. Neither the syntactical parallels in the New Testament nor the extrabiblical parallels lend support to the contention that the second term linked by οὐδέ modifies the first term adverbially. And while “teaching” and “exercising authority” may well be perceived jointly in 1 Timothy 2:12, these concepts

⁶ *Women in the Church: Scriptural Principles and Ecclesial Practice*. A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 1985, 35.

⁷ Andreas J Köstenberger, , Thomas R. Schreiner and H. Scott Baldwin, *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 82. (I commend this book for any pastor’s library: ISBN 0-8010-2020-4)

do not blend to the extent that they become one concept in which the two constituent elements are no longer distinguishable.⁸

We cannot ignore these insights if we are to understand *authenthein* correctly. Yet the CTCR's 1985 Report, in the statements quoted above, seems to employ the very "blending" and "subordinating" that recent comprehensive research invalidates. Did it properly distinguish *authenthein* from *didaskhein*? As the 1985 Report itself notes: "A proper understanding of Paul here is of enormous significance for the discussion of the service of women in the church."⁹ To repeat my concern, I believe the Commission's new document on *Authentein* undermines and contradicts crucial aspects of its 1985 document. If the previous conclusions and applications were not confirmed and reinforced, they should not have been cited.

While the CTCR consciously refrained from proposing any practical applications, its conclusions make these unavoidable. With this word *authenthein* in Holy Scripture, God addressed no mere abstract concept of "authority," but the real fact of its improper usage or exercise. If the document summarizing the CTCR's study can be clearly understood, then it must be put into practice – even (and especially) if the clear teaching of Scripture contradicts or undermines recent trends, present practices, and desired innovations. I believe the Commission's failure to make at least a few of these practical implications more plain falls short of providing the Synod what it needs from this document. In 1967 the CTCR also devoted a full report to a single important word: "*What is a Doctrine?*" Even that seemingly abstract question was answered with a section on "Conclusions and Applications." Where the authority to teach and clearly speak is not exercised, the responsibility nonetheless remains. If a CTCR document does not guide the church's practice, what then is its purpose?

Conclusion

One who cannot exercise authority does not really have it. And one cannot "exercise" authority without "having" it, even temporarily. Both the steward and the thief hold and use what they do not own. By recognizing that the authority of *authenthein* is in fact exercised, the CTCR acknowledged a more recognizable field of application, but neglected to explain what this necessarily implies. In the context of Paul's first letter to Timothy, this concrete reality – the *exercise* of authority – is what God states that He does not allow a woman to wield over a man.

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⁸ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁹ *Women in the Church*, 35.