

# Ten Theses on God's Arrangement of the Sexes

## Prologue

Our God is not a God of confusion, but of order. Our Lutheran forefathers believed that God arranged creation in a certain way, giving order to all human existence which binds us together through a variety of relationships. Normally, we call this arrangement the Order of Creation (whereas God's arrangement for our salvation is called the Order of Salvation).

Martin Luther divided this divine order (*ordo divina*) into three spheres: the Household, the State, and the Church. Within these three spheres, everyone is given vocations—particular relationships with particular people, and particular responsibilities to serve them in particular ways. Most members of our congregations are familiar with Luther's teaching on this matter from reading the Table of Duties in the *Small Catechism*.

Unfortunately, there is great confusion among Christians concerning how the two sexes are to relate to each other within the Order of Creation. The members of the ACELC fraternally offer the following theses as our unanimous confession, explaining what the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions teach about God's arrangement of the sexes within creation.

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## Thesis One – The Creation of Two Distinct Sexes

<sup>27</sup> So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; *male and female* he created them. <sup>28</sup> And God blessed them. And God said to them, "*Be fruitful and multiply* and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth. (Genesis 1:27-28 ESV; emphasis added)

[Jesus] answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them *male and female*." (Matthew 19:4 ESV; emphasis added)

**We confess** that God created all mankind either male or female. God works through these two sexes for the procreation of children.

**We reject** all beliefs, teachings, and practices that diminish or deny the biological differences between the two sexes. Likewise, we reject the view that there are more than two "genders," that "gender" is a social construct, and that "gender" isn't determined by one's biology. We condemn medical procedures which purport to change one's sex.

## Thesis Two – God Reflected in the Order of Creation

*So God created man in his own image*, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27 ESV; emphasis added)

<sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, *as Christ loved the church....* <sup>31</sup> "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." <sup>32</sup> This mystery is profound, *and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.* (Ephesians 5:25, 31-32 ESV; emphasis added)

I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. (1 Corinthians 11:3 ESV)

"Pray then like this: 'Our *Father* in heaven....'" (Matthew 6:9 ESV; emphasis added)

<sup>30</sup> The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, <sup>31</sup> because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness *by a man* whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” (Acts 17:30-31 ESV; emphasis added)

**We confess** that man and woman reflect the nature or character of their Lord as they live according to their vocations as husband/father or wife/mother. For example, fathers reflect the creative and sustaining care of our heavenly Father and husbands reflect Christ’s self-sacrifice for the sake of his Bride, the Church. Wives reflect Christ in that he willingly submits to the Father and they also reflect the Church in her glad submission to the Lord.

**We reject** the attempts of Feminist Theology to give women authority in the Church, to overturn the Order of Creation in the home, and to oppose abstinence outside of marriage and procreation within marriage. We reject these attempts of Feminist Theology, not only because they erode the Order of Creation, but also challenge other articles of the Christian Faith. For example, the article concerning the Trinity and the article concerning the Incarnation are corrupted when our heavenly Father is called “mother,” Jesus is referred to as “the Divine Child” instead of “the Son of God,” or the feminine pronoun is used in reference to the Holy Spirit.

### **Thesis Three – The Equal Dignity and Worth of Man and Woman**

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

<sup>27</sup> So God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
*male and female* he created them.

<sup>28</sup> And God blessed *them*. And God said *to them*, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and *subdue it*, and *have dominion* over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” (Genesis 1:26-28 ESV; emphasis added)

When writing about justification by faith alone and our eternal inheritance in Christ, St. Paul said: There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, *there is no male and female*, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28 ESV; emphasis added).

<sup>38</sup> Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. <sup>39</sup> And she had a sister called Mary, *who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to his teaching*. (Luke 10:38-39 ESV; emphasis added)<sup>i</sup>

Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, *since they are heirs<sup>ii</sup> with you of the grace of life*, so that your prayers may not be hindered. (1 Peter 3:7 ESV; emphasis added)

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<sup>i</sup> This passage shows that Jesus was kind to women, showed them respect, and even taught them. In those days, rabbis didn’t consider women capable of learning theology or worthy of an education. Clearly, Jesus disagreed with his peers on this point.

<sup>ii</sup> Many manuscripts say, “since they are joint/equal heirs...”

<sup>18</sup> Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. <sup>19</sup> Husbands, love your wives, *and do not be harsh with them.* (Colossians 3:18-19 ESV; emphasis added)

**We confess** that both men and women were made in the image of God, that both are loved by God, and that both share the same dignity and worth. Together man and woman enjoy God's blessings and together they have dominion over creation as God's representatives.

**We reject** any appeal to the Scriptures to deny the equal dignity and worth of man and woman, which would include any appeal to the Scriptures to justify the abuse and mistreatment of women.

#### **Thesis Four – Authority Is a Good Gift**

And God blessed them. And God said *to them*, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and *subdue* it, and *have dominion* over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Genesis 1:28 ESV; emphasis added)

<sup>1</sup> Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. *For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.* <sup>2</sup> Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. (Romans 13:1-2 ESV; emphasis added)

I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. (1 Corinthians 11:3 ESV)

**We confess** that all authority comes from God and is a good gift. Also, we confess that submission is a Christian virtue. God calls some people to exercise authority for the benefit of those placed under their authority and God calls other people to practice submission.

**We reject** the notion that authority is inherently oppressive and that true happiness can only be found in complete autonomy.

#### **Thesis Five – God's Arrangement of the Household**

<sup>17</sup> Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.... <sup>18</sup> Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." <sup>19</sup> Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. <sup>20</sup> The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. <sup>21</sup> So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. <sup>22</sup> And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. <sup>23</sup> Then the man said,

"This at last is bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;  
she shall be called Woman,<sup>iii</sup>  
because she was taken out of Man." (Genesis 2:7, 18-23 ESV)

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<sup>iii</sup> In creating all things, God names the various parts of creation. When Adam gives names to all the animals, and to the woman also, it reflects the headship that he has been given as one who represents God.

But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, *the head of a wife is her husband*, and the head of Christ is God. (1 Corinthians 11:3 ESV; emphasis added)

<sup>12</sup> I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. <sup>13</sup> For *Adam was formed first*, then Eve;<sup>iv</sup> <sup>14</sup> and *Adam was not deceived*, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. (1 Timothy 2:12-14 ESV; emphasis added)

<sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> For man was not made from woman, but *woman from man*.<sup>v</sup> <sup>9</sup> Neither was man created for woman, but *woman for man*. (1 Corinthians 11:7-9 ESV; emphasis added)

<sup>22</sup> *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord*. <sup>23</sup> For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. <sup>24</sup> Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

<sup>25</sup> *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*, <sup>26</sup> that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, <sup>27</sup> so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. <sup>28</sup> In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. <sup>29</sup> For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, <sup>30</sup> because we are members of his body. <sup>31</sup> “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” <sup>32</sup> This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. <sup>33</sup> *However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband*. (Ephesians 5:22-33 ESV; emphasis added)

<sup>1</sup> Likewise, *wives, be subject to your own husbands*, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, <sup>2</sup> when they see your respectful and pure conduct. <sup>3</sup> Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—<sup>4</sup> but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. <sup>5</sup> For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, *by submitting to their own husbands*, <sup>6</sup> as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.

<sup>7</sup> Likewise, *husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel*, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered. (1 Peter 3:1-7 ESV; emphasis added)

**We confess** that God ordered the household in a particular way. God made the man the head of the household as his representative, thereby giving to him the responsibility to protect and

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<sup>iv</sup> Paul says that women should not teach or exercise authority over a man, because Adam was formed first. Why should it matter that Adam was formed first? In the Old Testament, when a man died, his firstborn son received a double portion of his father's goods and became the new head of the house. As James B. Hurley explains, “Paul's appeal to the prior formation of Adam is an assertion that Adam's status as the oldest carried with it the leadership appropriate to a first-born son (Adam, the first human, could not be ‘first-born’. He was instead ‘first-formed’),” (*Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 1981, page 207).

<sup>v</sup> In discussing the matter of women wearing head clothes, Paul justifies his teaching by saying that the woman (Eve) came from man (Adam). But why should that matter? The Bible assumes that one should honor the source of his existence. So, children owe their parents honor, because they originate from their parents. Likewise, if woman came from man, then she owes him honor. And so, wives should honor their husbands.

provide for his family, and also giving him the authority to carry out this task. He is to lead with love, sacrificing his own happiness and well-being. The woman is to respect her husband and follow his lead (i.e., submit to him), trusting him to fulfill his vocation and helping him raise their children in the fear of the Lord.

**We reject** all beliefs, teachings, and practices that diminish or deny this God-given order, such as Egalitarianism and Feminism. We reject all beliefs, teachings, and practices that encourage wives to despise the role of their husbands or to resist their leadership. We further reject all beliefs, teachings, and practices that encourage husbands to abandon their God-given vocation of leadership.

### **Thesis Six – The Relevance of the Order of Creation**

And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, *it was very good*. (Genesis 1:31 ESV; emphasis added)

<sup>17</sup> Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. <sup>18</sup> *For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.* <sup>19</sup> Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:17-19 ESV; emphasis added)

For *in the resurrection* they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. (Matthew 22:30 ESV; emphasis added)

**We confess** that the Order of Creation is a part of God's "very good" creation and not a result of mankind's Fall. Therefore, it is not overturned by the redeeming work of our Lord, but remains God's good gift for humanity, until our Lord brings us into the New Creation.

**We reject** any attempt to dismiss the relevance of the Order of Creation by falsely arguing that it is a result of the Fall or by appealing to the dawn of the New Age of God's Kingdom.

### **Thesis Seven – The Central Vocations of Men and Women**

"Then bring near to you *Aaron* your brother, and *his sons* with him, from among the people of Israel, to serve me as priests...." (Exodus 28:1 ESV; emphasis added)

Just as God ordained only men to serve as priests, he appointed men to rule Israel as kings (see the Book of Samuel and the Book of Kings).

<sup>1</sup> The LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying, <sup>2</sup> "Take a census of all the congregation of the people of Israel, by clans, by fathers' houses, according to the number of names, *every male*, head by head. <sup>3</sup> From twenty years old and upward, all in Israel *who are able to go to war*, you and Aaron shall list them, company by company. (Numbers 1:1-3 ESV; emphasis added)

And [Deborah] said, "I will surely go with you. Nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." (Judges 4:9 ESV)

"The villagers ceased in Israel;

they ceased to be until I arose;

I, Deborah, arose *as a mother in Israel.*" (Judges 5:7 ESV; emphasis added)<sup>vi</sup>

The LORD will judge the ends of the earth;

he will give strength to his king

and exalt the power of his anointed. (1 Samuel 2:10 ESV)

<sup>11</sup> Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him,

for what his hands have dealt out shall be done to him.

<sup>12</sup> My people—infants are their oppressors,

*and women rule over them.*

O my people, your guides mislead you

and they have swallowed up the course of your paths. (Isaiah 3:11-12 ESV; emphasis added)

**We confess** that the vocations of husband/father and wife/mother are not merely jobs that an individual might choose, but they are the defining and characterizing vocations for men and women. Whether or not they are married, whether or not they have children, these vocations are so central to our created order that they guide and inform the roles of all men and women as outlined in the Table of Duties in the Small Catechism.

**We reject** all beliefs, teachings, and practices that attempt to restrict the Order of Creation to the Christian household or Christian congregation.

### **Thesis Eight – The Order of Creation and Authority in the Congregation**

<sup>1</sup> And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction. <sup>2</sup> The names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; <sup>3</sup> Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; <sup>4</sup> Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. <sup>5</sup> These twelve Jesus sent out.... (Matthew 10:1-4a ESV)

<sup>33</sup> As in all the churches of the saints, <sup>34</sup>*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. <sup>35</sup> 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. <sup>36</sup> Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? <sup>37</sup> If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing

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<sup>vi</sup> "A woman's character is not found first in herself, while motherhood and wife are just two incidental options. Rather, a woman's identity is founded in these two great callings, since these were instituted with her at the beginning of creation.

"One of the women in the Old Testament who was not barred from leadership when the circumstances required it was the judge, Deborah. She sent Barak to engage in battle against Sisera, the general of the Canaanite army. She chided Barak for wanting her to go with him, acknowledging the shame for a man to have a woman fight his battles for him. She said that the victory would not be to his glory, because God would give Sisera into the hands of a woman (Jud 4:9). But what was the nature of Deborah's leadership? She did not herself fight in battle. Instead, she encouraged Barak to man up and do his duty. And after God gave them the victory, Deborah sings a song in praise to God in which she reveals the true nature of her calling. She calls herself the mother of Israel (Jud. 5:7). Her office is characterized by the office of mother," (Rev. Andrew J. Preus, *Patriarchy: What and Why?* Presented at the ACELC 2017 Free Conference).

to you are a command of the Lord. <sup>38</sup> If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. (1 Corinthians 14:33-38 ESV; emphasis added)

<sup>11</sup> Let a woman learn quietly *with all submissiveness*. <sup>12</sup> I do not permit a woman *to teach or to exercise authority over a man*; rather, she is to remain quiet. <sup>13</sup> For Adam was formed first, then Eve; <sup>14</sup> and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. <sup>15</sup> Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control. (1 Timothy 2:11-15 ESV; emphasis added)

**We confess** that every Christian congregation must respect the Order of Creation. Therefore, they must select only men to exercise authority over the congregation. In doing so, these churches imitate our Lord, who chose twelve men to lead his Church.

**We reject** the belief that women can exercise authority over the men within the Christian congregation and we reject the practice of giving women roles of authority over the congregation such as president, vice-president, or elder.

### **Thesis Nine – Women and the Pastoral Office**

I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man.... (1 Timothy 2:12 ESV)

Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, *the husband of one wife*.... (1 Timothy 3:2 ESV; emphasis added)

Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. (1 Timothy 4:13 ESV)

**We confess** that, since God does not permit a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, it is God's will that only men serve as pastors (i.e., overseers and spiritual fathers).

**We reject** the practice of ordaining women and the theological rationale for this practice. Also, we do not permit women to help their pastor carry out those functions specifically associated with the Pastoral Office, such as reading the Scripture Lessons during the worship service, reading a previously prepared sermon when the pastor is absent, and distributing the consecrated elements during the Lord's Supper.

### **Thesis Ten – Honoring the Service of Women**

<sup>30</sup> And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, <sup>33</sup> and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." (Luke 1:30-33 ESV)

<sup>1</sup> Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, <sup>2</sup> and also *some women* who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: *Mary*, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, <sup>3</sup> and *Joanna*, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and *Susanna*, and many others, *who provided for them out of their means*. (Luke 8:1-3 ESV; emphasis added)

[Apollos] began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when *Priscilla* and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and *explained to him the way of God more accurately*. (Acts 18:26 ESV; emphasis added)

<sup>1</sup> I commend to you our sister *Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae*, <sup>2</sup> that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been *a patron* of many and of myself as well. <sup>3</sup> Greet *Prisca* and *Aquila*, my *fellow workers* in Christ Jesus, <sup>4</sup> *who risked their necks for my life*, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well.... <sup>7</sup> Greet *Andronicus* and *Junia*, my kinsmen and *my fellow prisoners*. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me. (Romans 16:1-4, 7 ESV; emphasis added)

<sup>3</sup> Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, <sup>4</sup> and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, <sup>5</sup> to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. (Titus 2:3-5 ESV)

**We confess** that our Lord has given many gifts to countless Christian women and that these women serve the Church with their time and talents. We celebrate their piety and service, acknowledging them as fellow workers in God’s Kingdom. Just as the lives of husbands and wives are ordered by God for the common good, so also pastors and people and men and women are arranged by God for the good of the congregation.

**We reject** any notion that in order to contribute something valuable to the Church or to society women must despise those particularly feminine vocations (e.g., wife and mother), or must wield authority over the congregation, or stop practicing feminine virtues.

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## In Summary

We “unanimously believe and hold that there is only one true, natural God, Maker of all creatures.”<sup>vii</sup> This “Maker of all creatures” knew exactly what he was doing when he created the two sexes and he ordered them in a particular way for the good of the world. If Adam and Eve had not listened to the voice of the serpent, who works to subvert God’s order of creation (Gen. 3:1-7), the above theses would be unnecessary.

Unfortunately, they did listen to the serpent’s lies. Thus creation was corrupted and cursed, putting enmity, not only between God and mankind, but between man and woman as well. Thankfully, the “offspring of woman” provided reconciliation, blessing, and restoration through his obedience, death, and resurrection.

While we understand that these Theses cannot cure the sin problem, we hope that they can provide guidance to God’s saints as they try to “serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness,” (Small Catechism, 2<sup>nd</sup> Article of the Creed). We commend these Theses to the Church for further study and application, believing that they will go a long way in correcting the “great confusion among Christians in America concerning how the two sexes are to relate to each other within the Order of Creation.”<sup>viii</sup>

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<sup>vii</sup> Martin Luther, “The Marburg Articles,” *Word and Sacraments IV*, vol. 38 of *Luther’s Works*, J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, eds. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985): page 85.

<sup>viii</sup> See, for example, Fritz Zerbst (trans. by Albert G. Merckens), *The Office of Woman in the Church: A Study in Practical Theology*, 1955; edited by Hale, 2017, Mercinator Press, Omaha, Nebraska.