



# WOMEN AND MILITARY SERVICE:

A LUTHERAN PERSPECTIVE



A REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON THEOLOGY AND CHURCH RELATIONS  
THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD    NOVEMBER 2017



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1333 S. Kirkwood Road  
St. Louis, MO 63122  
888-THE LCMS • *lcms.org*

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# WOMEN AND MILITARY SERVICE:

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## PART 1:

# Background and Introduction

**T**HROUGHOUT AMERICAN HISTORY, women have served in a variety of roles in support of military forces, particularly during times of war.<sup>1</sup> However, women normally did not function in direct combat roles, and they were never subject to conscription.<sup>2</sup> The increasing role and number of women in the U.S. military in recent years, and their participation in combat, has coincided with several societal shifts occurring in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> These changes include movements for equal rights (including calls for equal opportunities for women in all fields), the end of the draft and the beginning of the all-volunteer U.S. military force in 1973, and the evolution of combat tactics of

enemy forces in war to a nonlinear battlefield (also called asymmetrical warfare) in which, by definition, there is no set line of battle or clear articulation of what is behind combat lines. In asymmetrical warfare, enemy assaults and acts of terror are often intentionally directed toward “soft targets” consisting of noncombat support units, which are then thrust into the middle of combat. Since the Vietnam War, for example, traditional noncombat units have regularly engaged the enemy in forward operating bases, convoys, at checkpoints, in action involving both direct and indirect fire, and met with improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and suicide bombers.

Following the Vietnam War, the role of women in the U.S. military began to increase in noticeable and significant ways. In 1975, President Gerald Ford signed a law permitting women to enroll in the U.S. military academies.<sup>4</sup> But in 1981, in the *Rostker v. Goldberg* ruling, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld as constitutional the practice of requiring only men to register for the draft, since women were ineligible to serve in a combat capacity at that time. In 1988, the Department of Defense (DoD) adopted a department-wide policy called the “Risk Rule.” This set a single standard for evaluating positions and units on the basis of which the military services could prohibit women from direct combat involvement.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> From 1775–1783, women served as cooks, laundresses, nurses and seamstresses in support of the colonial army. In 1812, women nurses served aboard U.S. Navy ships. From 1861–1865, women nurses served wounded service members. Dr. Mary Edwards Walker served in the Union Army and was appointed the first female surgeon; in 1895, she was the first woman to receive the Medal of Honor. In 1901, the U.S. Congress established the Army Nurse Corp; in 1908, the Navy Nurse Corps was established. In 1917, the U.S. Navy allowed women to enlist and serve stateside during World War I. In 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt authorized creation of the Army, Navy and Coast Guard women’s auxiliary/reserves. In 1948, the Women’s Armed Services Integration Act granted women permanent regular and reserve status in the Army, Navy, Marine Corps and newly created Air Force; women could comprise 2 percent of enlisted and 10 percent of officer total end strength. [archive.defense.gov/Home/features/2012/0212\\_womenshistory/](http://archive.defense.gov/Home/features/2012/0212_womenshistory/)

<sup>2</sup> Military terminology (including terms employed to define various facets and aspects of “combat”) is encyclopedic and, at times, complex. For a thorough and official glossary and discussion of military terms, see [jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/dictionary.pdf](http://jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/dictionary.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> A brief survey of the history of the draft in the U.S. can be found at [selectiveservice.us](http://selectiveservice.us).

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<sup>4</sup> The first women entered the U.S. military academies in 1976, and the first women graduated in 1980.

<sup>5</sup> The rule exempted women from noncombat units or missions if the risks of exposure to direct combat, hostile fire or capture were equal to

In 1994, Defense Secretary Les Aspin announced a new policy regarding women in combat. He rescinded the 1988 “Risk Rule” and replaced it with a less restrictive ground combat policy.<sup>6</sup> In 2013, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta lifted the barriers preventing women from serving in direct combat roles. Finally, in 2015, Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter announced that all combat positions would be opened to women.

Since that time, many U.S. politicians, military leaders and other government officials have publicly indicated or intimated that they support the registration of women for the draft. In February 2016, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen. Robert Neller, and the Chief of Staff of the Army, Gen. Mark Milley, voiced their support for the inclusion of women in the Selective Service now that all military positions, including combat roles, had been opened to women. On June 15, 2016, the Senate overwhelmingly passed the National Defense Authorization Act (85-13), which included an amendment that would require women to register for the draft. The House of Representatives, however, declined to include this amendment in the National Defense Authorization Act, and the issue was set aside for the time being.

In the social and political realm, those who oppose the employment of women in direct combat roles often make arguments such as the following:<sup>7</sup>

- **Physical Ability:** While the majority of jobs in the armed forces are open equally to men and women, there are some for which women are not physically suited. The standards of physical fitness have been set to suit men, and women attempting to reach them will over-stretch themselves. In addition, combat units engage in activities designed to suit men’s capabilities. Women serving in integrated units will suffer higher injury rates as a result.
- **Efficiency:** Some women will be able to meet the required standards, but most will not. While integration of women into combat is possible for those qualified, the small number versus the additional logistical, regulatory and disciplinary costs associated with integration do not make it a worthwhile move.

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or greater than the risk in the combat units they supported.

<sup>6</sup> As a result, 80 percent of all military positions could then be filled by either men or women. By 1997, women consisted of 13.6 percent of active duty end strength, and by 2011, women comprised 14.5 percent of active duty end strength.

<sup>7</sup> The “pro” and “con” arguments listed here are taken (slightly abbreviated and edited for stylistic purposes) from *sistersinarms.ca/history/women-in-combat-pros-and-cons/*.

- **Morale and Cohesion:** Having women serving in direct combat will hamper mission effectiveness by hurting unit morale and cohesion.
- **Military Readiness:** Pregnancy can affect the deployability of a unit when the unit has a disproportionate number of women or is understaffed.
- **Tradition:** Men, especially those likely to enlist, maintain traditional gender roles. In some situations, men may act foolishly to protect women in their combat units. Harassment and resentment of the presence of women in a hyper-masculine military subculture would likely become a problem.
- **Abuse by Enemy:** Both male and female prisoners are at risk of torture and rape, but misogynistic societies may be more likely to abuse female prisoners.
- **Career Advancement:** Men and women are both given opportunities to join the army, but with the understanding that different roles require different physical and emotional attributes. This should mean, in turn, that there are multiple routes to promotion so that women have equal opportunities without having to fight to take part in combat operations.

Those who support the opening of all combat roles to women often make arguments such as the following:

- **Physical Ability:** As long as an applicant is qualified for a position, one’s gender is irrelevant. It is possible to calibrate recruitment and training standards to women. Extra pre-training for muscle building can also be used to reduce female injury rates. In modern high-technology battlefields, technical expertise and decision-making skills are increasingly more valuable than simple brute strength.
- **Military Readiness:** Allowing a mixed gender force keeps the military strong. The all-volunteer forces are severely troubled by falling retention and recruitment rates. Widening the applicant pool for all jobs guarantees more willing recruits. Women who choose to become active combat soldiers are unlikely to shirk their duty by becoming pregnant after a call-up as these women have willingly joined the army.
- **Effectiveness:** A blanket restriction for women limits the ability of commanders in theater to pick the most capable person for the job.
- **Tradition:** Training will be required to facilitate the integration of women into combat units. Cultures

change over time, and the masculine subculture can evolve too. Many previously masculine professions have been successfully opened to women over the past century.

- **Modern Warfare and Public Support:** In the modern world of combat (Afghanistan, Iraq), all women serving in the military are exposed to “front-line risks.” Support for women serving in the armed forces has not wavered as warfare has changed, a clear sign that the necessity of women serving in combat is recognized.
- **Cultural Differences and Demographics:** Women are more effective in some circumstances than men. Allowing women to serve doubles the talent pool for delicate and sensitive jobs that require interpersonal skills not every soldier has. Having a wider personnel base allows militaries to have the best and most diplomatic soldiers working to end conflict quickly.
- **Career Advancement:** As combat duty is usually regarded as necessary for promotion to senior officer positions, denying female personnel this experience ensures that very few will ever reach the highest reaches of the military and so further entrenches sexism. Women have to be given the same opportunities as men in the army; in order to have the same opportunities, they have to be exposed to the same risks.

Questions regarding women serving in combat were first brought to the attention of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) by the president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) in November 2001, following the attacks of Sept. 11 and the subsequent launching of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF).<sup>8</sup> Overtures directed specifically to this issue were formally submitted to the Synod in convention in 2004, 2007 and 2010, but no resolutions on this matter were adopted by the assembly. At its 2013 convention, the Synod adopted Res. 2-12A, “To Speak re Employment of Women in Military Combat”:

<sup>8</sup> An initial response to the issue of women in combat appeared in the May 2003 issue of *The Lutheran Witness*, which published articles by two theologians who had been invited by the CTCR to share their (differing) perspectives on this issue. One article (by David Wollenburg) took the position that there is no “clear guidance in the Scriptures regarding the subject of women in combat,” while the other (by Leroy Vogel) argued that God’s Word does speak to this issue in various ways. See “Women in Combat: Does God’s Word Give Guidance?” (*The Lutheran Witness* [May 2003], 17–20).

*WHEREAS*, On January 24, 2013, the U.S. Department of Defense announced its intent to lift our nation’s Department of Defense ground combat exclusion which presently prohibits women from serving in ground combat positions, an exclusion upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court; and

*WHEREAS*, The women of the LCMS may be subject to registering for selective service and a possible draft, as the rationale provided by the U.S. Supreme Court in prohibiting this practice was the Department of Defense’s ban on women in combat; and

*WHEREAS*, Biblical arguments against women serving in combat positions have been marshaled by many Christians, including members of the LCMS, who strongly object to the Department of Defense’s decision, such arguments being based on specific texts (GEN. 1–2, DEUT. 22:5, AND EPH. 5:25); therefore be it

*Resolved*, That the LCMS support those who have a religious and moral objection to women serving in ground combat positions; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the CTCR study this issue and produce a statement that can be considered and acted upon by the Synod in its next convention.

Most recently, in 2016, the Synod in convention adopted Res. 5-11A, “To Protect Christian Consciences and Address Conscription of Women,” which includes the following “Resolveds”:

*Resolved*, That the Word of God and the LCMS in convention supports individuals in the LCMS who conscientiously object (1) to a woman’s service in the military in general or (2) to a woman in the military being required to serve in a combat capacity; and be it further

*Resolved*, That due to deep and widespread concern among many members of the LCMS — rooted in biblical convictions, historic understandings of natural law, and reason-based common sense — about the negative impact of the conscription of women on individual consciences, marriages, families, and society as a whole, the LCMS in convention strongly oppose any legal action that forces the compulsory service of women in the military, also called the conscription of women, by mandatory participation in Selective Service registration, a draft, or by any other mechanism; and be it further

*Resolved*, That we also defend the informed consciences of women who have carefully considered

their station in life and Holy Scripture on this issue who wish to voluntarily serve in our nation's military; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) continue their diligent and beneficial work as tasked by the 2013 convention (Res. 2-12A) to study the issue of employing women in combat and bring it to a swift conclusion for widespread distribution and use in the church; and be it further

*Resolved*, That at its earliest convenience, the Council of Presidents become familiar with and discuss together this topic and the information readily available (along with the forthcoming CTCR document) to better assist pastors and congregations and those LCMS individuals “whose position is firm, fixed, sincere and deeply held” (DoDI 1300.06) who are bound to apply for conscientious objector status; and be it finally

*Resolved*, That the LCMS in convention strongly support the responsibility and necessity for men and women to live and act according to the Word of God and their consciences in this matter while respecting the consciences of others (ROM. 14:2-3, 13-23; 1 COR. 10:29; 1 TIM. 1:5; HEB. 13:18). (Yes: 946; No: 89)

This document has been prepared by the CTCR in response to these 2013 and 2016 resolutions of the Synod. The moral question of whether a society or a government should conscript women or employ them in combat is an important one. In view of the American social, political and legal context — especially in view of very recent decisions opening all combat roles to women and recent legislative discussions regarding the possibility of requiring Selective Service registration for women as well as men — the primary focus of the present study is on the moral deliberation of women who are serving in or contemplating service in the military, or who could potentially face registration for or conscription by a military draft.

## PART 2:

# Theological Considerations

### *The Faithful Service of Christians in Governmental Vocations*

**S**CRIPTURE MAKES CLEAR that God oversees and is intimately involved in everything that He has made (ACTS 17:28; HEB. 1:3). In the Church (the right-hand kingdom or realm), He works through His Word and Sacraments, bringing the Gospel message of forgiveness and salvation through Jesus Christ. In the world (the left-hand kingdom or realm), He works through earthly (yet God-given) vocations, offices and office-holders.<sup>9</sup> Vocations serve as “masks of God.”<sup>10</sup> The most foundational institution in God’s creation is the family, “with its offices of marriage — comprising the vocations of hus-

band and wife — and parenthood — with its vocations of mother, father, and child.”<sup>11</sup> The vocation of citizenship ultimately has its foundation in the family as the most basic social unit.<sup>12</sup> Individuals will have other vocations as well, such as employee or employer, citizen, neighbor, church member — or for some, the vocation of military service.<sup>13</sup> Vocation involves certain “givens” about where God has placed each of us here and now, which impact considerations about what we might or might not do to serve our neighbor in the future. If a person is married, that is his or her God-given vocation; if a person has children, then that is also his or her God-given vocation.<sup>14</sup> Problems arise when people ignore or disregard the essential responsibilities God has given them in their current or primary vocations, or fail to consider how their various abilities, inclinations and stations in life are to be properly exercised in service to their neighbor.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Rom. 13:1–7; Matt. 22:15–22; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13–15. Martin Luther identified the two kingdoms (or realms or governments) in this way: “For this reason God has ordained two governments: the spiritual, by which the Holy Spirit produces Christians and righteous people under Christ; and the temporal, which restrains the un-Christian and wicked so that — no thanks to them — they are obliged to keep still and to maintain an outward peace.” Martin Luther, “Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed” (1523), *Luther’s Works*, vol. 45, ed. Walther I. Brandt, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962), 91. The means or instruments through which God works in the left-hand kingdom include earthly government, rulers and laws, which also entail the use of force (the “sword”). The means or instruments through which God works in the right-hand kingdom are the Word of God (both Law and Gospel, but especially the Gospel) and the Gospel as it is connected to visible means (i.e., the Sacraments administered in and by the church). See CTCR, *Render Unto Caesar ... and Unto God: A Lutheran View of Church and State*, September 1995, 34ff, [lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=360](https://lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=360).

<sup>10</sup> “Though justification has nothing to do with good works, vocation does involve good works. The Christian’s relationship to God is based on sheer grace and forgiveness on God’s part; the Christian’s relationship to other people, however, is to be based on love put into action. As Wingren puts it, ‘God does not need our good works, but our neighbor does.’” Gene Edward Veith, *The Spirituality of the Cross* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010), 99.

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 96–97. “Every Christian — indeed, every human being — has been called by God into a family. Our very existence came about by means of our parents, who conceived us and brought us into the world ... . The family is the most basic of all vocations, the one in which God’s creative power and His providential care are most dramatically conveyed through human beings.” Gene Edward Veith, *God at Work*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002), 78.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 4–5. Veith, *Spirituality of the Cross*, 103–104.

<sup>14</sup> Veith, *Spirituality of the Cross*, 104.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 107. Your “station in life” includes such things as age bracket, marital status, whether or not you have children, whether you are a church worker or layperson, perhaps your work status (i.e., if you are an employer or not).



Holy Scripture clearly affirms that government in the earthly realm is instituted by God and is to be respected and obeyed.<sup>16</sup> Christians, therefore, may in good conscience serve in governmental offices and vocations, including the military.<sup>17</sup> The Lutheran Confessions affirm this scriptural understanding of government service:

Concerning public order and secular government it is taught that all political authority, orderly government, laws, and good order in the world are created and instituted by God and that Christians may without sin exercise political authority; be princes and judges; pass sentences and administer justice according to imperial and other existing laws; punish evildoers with the sword; wage just wars, serve as soldiers; buy and sell; take required oaths; possess property; be married; etc.<sup>18</sup>

There are always limits to a Christian's obedience in the left-hand realm, however, for Christians must "obey God rather than men" if a conflict should arise between these dual but unequal loyalties.<sup>19</sup>

Serving as the "sword" of government (Rom. 13:4) to help preserve and maintain order and justice, either in the military or in other civil vocations, is in itself a God-pleasing form of service.<sup>20</sup> In support of this un-

derstanding, Martin Luther wrote a beautiful prayer for those who serve as soldiers:

Heavenly Father, here I am, according to your divine will, in the external work and service of my lord, which I owe first to you and then to my lord for your sake. I thank your grace and mercy that you have put me into a work which I am sure is not sin, but right and pleasing obedience to your will. But because I know and have learned from your gracious word that none of our good works can help us and that no one is saved as a soldier but only as a Christian, therefore, I will not in any way rely on my obedience and work, but place myself freely at the service of your will. I believe with all my heart that only the innocent blood of your dear Son, my Lord Jesus Christ, redeems and saves me, which he shed for me in obedience to your holy will. This is the basis on which I stand before you. In this faith I will live and die, fight, and do everything else. Dear Lord God the Father, preserve and strengthen this faith in me by your Spirit. Amen.<sup>21</sup>

Chaplain Jonathan Shaw, a colonel in the U.S. Army, has helpfully summarized why Christians can and do serve in faithful, God-pleasing ways in governmental vocations:

The answer lies in the love of Christ. The fullness of His holy life and the bitterness of His suffering and death, given freely, have changed the life equation for Christians. Freed from the bonds of sin and death, and made citizens of the kingdom of God, Christians willingly bend low to serve others in the kingdom of this world. They do this not because they must, but because they desire to offer a measure of the love first shown them . . . . On this basis, Luther encourages all Christians to serve the state dutifully, wherever they are qualified, be it in government, administration, law enforcement, or simply as an honorable citizen. The Christian undertakes such service not for the sake of wielding power or seeking revenge, but "for the good of your neighbor and for the maintenance of the safety and peace of others."<sup>22</sup>

<sup>16</sup> See, again, Rom. 13:1–7; Matt. 22:15–22; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13–15 and footnote 8 above.

<sup>17</sup> Matt. 8:5–13; 27:54; Luke 3:14; 7:1–10; Acts 8:26–39; Acts 10:1–33; Augsburg Confession XVI (see also footnote 8 above). This CTCR document is dedicated to the glory of God and the honorable service of our LCMS women and men who have served and continue to serve in the armed forces of our nation out of love for the neighbor. We, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, thank you for your service to God, your church and your country.

<sup>18</sup> Acts 4:18–20; 5:27–29. We are to be obedient to God whenever human authority seeks to require us to act contrary to our conscience-bound convictions regarding God's Word and will. This could involve civil disobedience and the consequences that may follow. Consider the 1966 CTCR report "Civil Obedience and Disobedience," [lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=367](http://lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=367).

<sup>19</sup> Acts 4:18–20; 5:27–29. We are to be obedient to God whenever human authority seeks to require us to act contrary to our conscience-bound convictions regarding God's Word and will. This could involve civil disobedience and the consequences that may follow. Consider the 1966 CTCR report "Civil Obedience and Disobedience," [lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=367](http://lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=367).

<sup>20</sup> "Now, it would be quite un-Christian to say that there is any service of God in which a Christian should not or must not take part, when service of God is actually more characteristic of Christians than of anyone else." Luther, "Temporal Authority," 100. Luther reaffirms this position in a writing which specifically addressed service in the military: "For the very fact that the sword has been instituted of God to punish the evil, protect the good, and preserve peace, [Rom. 13:1–4; 1 Peter 2:13–14] is powerful and sufficient proof that war and killing along with all the things that accompany wartime and martial law have been instituted by God." Martin Luther, "Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved" (1526), *Luther's Works*, vol. 46, ed. Robert C. Schultz (Phila-

delphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 95.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 135–136.

<sup>22</sup> Jonathan Shaw, "The Franchise: Spending the Coin of the Realm" *Gottesdienst* 20, no. 3 (Michaelmas 2012): 17.

Christians (including those within the LCMS) differ, however, on whether the employment of women in military combat is God-pleasing and morally permissible. Such differences and debates have increased in significance and complexity in recent years for several reasons.

First, as noted earlier, the nature of warfare has changed. At a time in which asymmetrical warfare is the norm, the lines between “combat” and “noncombat” (zones, personnel, missions, scenarios, etc.) become blurred, often beyond recognition or meaningful distinction. Someone serving in what is technically a combat support unit or role can quickly and unexpectedly find himself or herself in the middle of a kinetic threat and have to face immediate life-or-death decisions about whether and/or how to engage the enemy in combat (whether defensively or offensively or both).

Second, military policy has changed. Now that all combat units and positions are open to women, there is increasing pressure on women to make decisions about pursuing combat-related opportunities for service (for reasons of potential advancement, peer pressure, etc.). Women who are constrained or commanded to serve in combat roles face the difficult decision of conscientiously objecting to such service.

Third, now that the ban on women serving in combat has been lifted, there is no evident legal rationale for exempting women from conscription into military service should registration for Selective Service be required at some point in the future. This would create a crisis of conscience for *any* Christian (not just LCMS) woman who may be required to register and yet objects for reasons of conscience to being employed in military

combat or being compelled to participate in military service and training in any form.

Finally, as everyone is aware, cultural and societal views on the relationship between men and women and on women’s role in society at-large have changed dramatically in recent decades, and they continue to change. Some of these changes have been positive, resulting in more opportunities for God-pleasing and beneficial service of women in a variety of vocations, greater respect for women and their God-given gifts and abilities, and societal concerns about and protection for women who encounter derogatory attitudes and abusive behavior. Other cultural and societal changes in this area, however, have been decidedly negative from a Christian perspective, contributing to a continual blurring of the lines between any meaningful, created, God-given distinction between the sexes and chilling the possibility of discussing, expressing and affirming the God-given distinction between men and women in ways that are heard and received positively and constructively.

These factors, among others, have made it much more challenging to discuss the issues addressed in this document, and they have also made it all the more necessary to do so clearly, respectfully and lovingly in faithfulness to God’s Word and on the basis of sound reason and common sense (in their proper ministerial roles).

Theological debates about the service of women in combat and the conscription of women into military service most often begin with (or circle back around to) the question of divinely created male-female distinctions and their continuing significance in marriage, the family, church and society. To this issue, therefore, we now turn.

### *Male-Female Distinctions within the Order of Creation*

**T**HE ROLE AND SERVICE OF MEN AND WOMEN in marriage and the family and in the church are rooted by Scripture in the order of creation.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> “The 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.” CTCR, *Women in the Church: Scriptural Principles and Ecclesial Practice*, September 1985, 21, [lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=316](http://lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=316). Specifically, this is “the basic and important truth that what God has done in the creation of the world continues to be relevant and paradigmatic for today — and until the end of time . . . [God’s] created design has continuing significance in the lives of men and

God’s Word highlights the primacy of the marital vocations of husband and wife and engenders deep respect and honor for these vocations, together with the overall institution of marriage. It also sets forth parameters for order in the church (most specifically, for the pastoral office) that are consistent with created realities that reflect God’s work and will. (See discussion below.) God’s Word does not make explicit every implication or application of the order of creation for

women today.” CTCR, *The Creator’s Tapestry: Scriptural Perspectives on Man-Woman Relationships in Marriage and the Church*, December 2009, 52, [lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=310](http://lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=310).

life in the civil estate. However, essential realities woven by God into the very order or structure of His creation (such as the distinction between male and female) remain and must not be ignored or denied. As God's creatures specially designed in accordance with His will, men are to embrace their masculinity<sup>24</sup> and women are to embrace their femininity<sup>25</sup> together with all this implies, not only within the realms of the family and the church, but also in other vocations and areas of society.<sup>26</sup>

The Triune God<sup>27</sup> created humans, male and female, in His image (GEN. 1:26). This means that they knew God, lived in righteousness and holiness before Him, and looked to Him as the giver of all good gifts (EPH. 4:24; COL. 3:10). The same God also created sexual identity. This is a given and not a matter of human choice.<sup>28</sup> God did not create an abstract "human nature," but rather male and female human beings who are distinct and who together constitute humanity (GEN. 1:27).<sup>29</sup>

According to the order of creation, God has assigned individual identities to each sex. He "from the beginning made them male and female" (MATT. 19:4). The identities and functions of each are not interchangeable; they must remain distinct. This is the burden of the Pauline use of the opening chapters of Genesis in those passages concerned with women in the church [1 COR. 11 AND 14].<sup>30</sup>

God first created the man of the dust of the ground (GEN. 2:7), and then the woman was created from the man's rib or side.<sup>31</sup> She was created as the man's helper.

"The word [helper] does not imply that the helper is inferior to the one being helped. In fact, the Scriptures often speak of God as our 'helper,' signifying that God places Himself in the service of our needs."<sup>32</sup> At the same time, it is clear from the creation account in Genesis that "God created this 'helper fit for him' in a distinctive way"

Unlike the creation of the man directly from the earth, God created the woman from the man. God had given Adam the responsibility of naming the other creatures. Now Adam names his fellow human being "woman, because she was taken out of man" ... Adam rejoices as much in their differences as in their sameness.<sup>33</sup>

Lutheran commentator Gregory J. Lockwood observes:

According to Gen 2:18, she [the woman] was formed for the purpose of providing Adam with a helper. So, "neither in her origin, nor in the purpose for which she was created, can the woman claim priority." And this original ordering of creation has ongoing significance for the relationship between the sexes. The man's priority in the order of creation lays on him the responsibility of leadership, while the woman is to be helpful (GEN 2:18), submissive, supportive, and complementary.<sup>34</sup>

God's creation of man and woman leads to the creation and divine institution of marriage (GEN. 2:24): a one-flesh union, a profound unity of persons created by God, one man and one woman.<sup>35</sup>

According to Genesis 2, woman was created to be a help to man, not a servant or slave. She was created to be a complement to him, making a household and children possible. He in turn protected her, provided for her, and

<sup>24</sup> Consider 2 Sam. 10:12 and 1 Cor. 16:13.

<sup>25</sup> Consider Prov. 31:10–31; Is. 49:15; Is. 66:13; and Titus 2:3–5.

<sup>26</sup> It should be understood that this is an implication (not an explicit command) drawn from the importance of the order of creation and the emphasis on the roles of husband and wife in marriage and men and women in the church. This understanding, however, flies in the face of contemporary culture where individual freedom is elevated above even the created limitations of one's own body. Consider "The Metaphysical Revolution," *First Things* (June/July 2015): 5–7.

<sup>27</sup> The plural "we" and "our" of Gen. 1:26 was regarded by the Early Church Fathers and other early theologians almost unanimously as indicative of the Trinity. C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, vol. 1, *The Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, reprinted 1980), 62. See also Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 144.

<sup>28</sup> CTCR, *The Creator's Tapestry*, 10.

<sup>29</sup> CTCR, *The Creator's Tapestry*, 9–10.

<sup>30</sup> CTCR, *Women in the Church*, 22.

<sup>31</sup> "The woman was created, not of dust of the earth, but from a rib of Adam, because she was formed for an inseparable unity and fellowship of life with the man, and the mode of her creation was to lay the actual foundation for the moral ordinance of marriage." Keil-Delitzsch, vol. 1, 89. Note also Robert Davidson, *Genesis 1–11* (Cambridge: Cambridge

University Press, 1973), 38; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 181; U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part 1 From Adam to Noah* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1961), 137.

<sup>32</sup> CTCR, *Creator's Tapestry*, 13. "Helper" (ezer) means to assist, succor or support another. The word implies that two individuals share the same goal but the wherewithal of the one to be helped is inadequate in some way. The one needs the help of the other.

<sup>33</sup> CTCR, *The Creator's Tapestry*, 14.

<sup>34</sup> Gregory J. Lockwood, *Concordia Commentary: 1 Corinthians* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 372.

<sup>35</sup> Their differences give birth to their interdependence. Ibid., 15. The distinct but complementary genders are brought together in a union where the primary function is mutual support, child-bearing and child-rearing.



considered her a partner in life. He was the head of the relationship, head of a relationship that was “one flesh.”<sup>36</sup>

Sadly, the image of God (in terms of the original righteousness and holiness in which man and woman were created) was destroyed through the fall into sin (GENESIS 3). As a result, the complementary and united relationship between man and woman was also profoundly distorted and damaged. Both Eve and Adam were complicit in the fall into sin, resulting in their separation from God<sup>37</sup> and from one another.<sup>38</sup> Ever since the fall into sin — and because of the fall — the order of creation (intended by God as a gift and blessing) has become a point of contention between man and woman. Tragically, competition and conflict now corrupt the relationship, as Lockwood observes:

Her transgression, according to Genesis, led to the conflict in which her desire (to rule) is over her husband, but he will rule over her (GEN. 3:16). Thus, by the order of creation she was subordinated to the man before the fall, and after the fall her subordination was confirmed.<sup>39</sup>

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.

Genesis 3 describes the disruption and distortion of the order of creation brought about by the fall into sin. The “curse” pronounced in Gen. 3:16 does not institute subordination as such, but it does make this relationship irksome for both parties. Man was woman’s head from the first moment of creation, but after the fall the will to self-assertion distorts this relationship into domination and/or independence.<sup>40</sup>

Both man and woman now face death (GEN. 3:19). A further consequence of sin is that brother rises up against brother (GEN. 4:8), and so the first murder is ultimately the beginning of war. Already here in the book

of Genesis, therefore, we find theological grounding for God’s vesting of government with the power of the sword (ROM. 13:4).

In the face of such disastrous rebellion, God promises restoration of humankind through the woman’s seed (GEN. 3:15).<sup>41</sup> Adam identifies the woman as Eve (in Hebrew, “life” or “living”) “because she was the mother of all living.”<sup>42</sup> It is through her offspring that Satan will be crushed. God’s promise of a Savior was carried forward by and through the patriarchs and prophets. In the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son (GAL. 4:4).<sup>43</sup> Sin and death came through Adam, but life and salvation come through Jesus Christ (ROM. 5:12–21), so that in Holy Baptism we are connected to Christ’s death and resurrection. We are made alive to God in Christ (ROM. 6:1–11; COL. 2:9–15; GAL. 2:20; 3:27), and the image of God is restored (COL. 3:10; EPH. 4:24).

Specific emphases on the order of creation appear several times in the New Testament, primarily in Paul’s letters. His central concern in these passages is for the preservation of the proper, God-given understanding of marriage and of order in the church, especially with reference to the pastoral office.<sup>44</sup> Key New Testament passages include the following:

- **1 Cor. 11:2–16:** Paul sees the attempts of the Corinthian women to lay aside the head cloth as an attack upon the structure of marriage and the relationship of man and woman as it is established by God in creation.<sup>45</sup> He is not enacting a concrete rule about specific practices (i.e., head coverings) for all places and all times. Rather, he is confirming the principle

<sup>41</sup> This is also referred to as the *protoevangelium*, the former or earlier gospel.

<sup>42</sup> Some have inferred from this that the woman’s vocation is therefore only to beget and nurture life and never to take it. However, it should be noted that this is an inference that is not explicitly supported by other passages of Scripture. Furthermore, if one draws this implication based on Adam’s naming, then is there a further implication that man (as in male) was created or intended for the taking of life or singly intended for service as wielder of the government’s sword (ROM. 13:4)? Some draw this conclusion based on the Old Testament directives that only men are counted for war. (See below.) If one argues that Scripture forbids women to serve in vocations that may involve the risk or necessity of taking human life, then this would have implications not only for the service of women in combat but also in certain (defensive) noncombat roles and in other civil vocations such as law enforcement.

<sup>43</sup> The pre-existent Son of God (1 COR. 8:6; PHIL. 2:6–11; COL. 1:15–16) was made man.

<sup>44</sup> Fritz Zerbst, *The Office of Woman in the Church: A Study in Practical Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), 33–34. This is always marriage in the biblical sense between one man and one woman established at creation.

<sup>45</sup> Zerbst, 40.

<sup>36</sup> CTCR, *Women in the Church*, 24 (citing Stephen Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ* [Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1980], 28).

<sup>37</sup> The man and woman lost the image of God and were no longer righteous, holy or knowing God as God would have them know Him. “This concrete essence of the divine likeness was shattered by sin; and it is only through Christ, the brightness of the glory of God and the expression of His essence (HEB. 1:3), that our nature is transformed into the image of God again (COL. 3:10; EPH. 4:24).” Keil-Delitzsch, vol. 1, 64.

<sup>38</sup> Adam blames God and his wife (GEN. 3:12); Eve blames the serpent (GEN. 3:13); and so creatures who covet divinity and reject accountability to God begin blaming. CTCR, *The Creator’s Tapestry*, 17–19.

<sup>39</sup> Lockwood, 509.

<sup>40</sup> CTCR, *Women in the Church*, 24.

that men and women at worship should conduct themselves modestly and sensibly in keeping with the customs of the time and, above all, in accordance with God's will and design.<sup>46</sup> Hence, the created distinction between men and women should be honored in the church.<sup>47</sup> "The ultimate significance of the head covering consisted in its potential for expressing a particular differentiation between men and women. Paul's concern therefore is not simply with the maintenance of outward conduct. For order and unity in the family there must be leadership, and the primary responsibility for such leadership is that of the husband and father."<sup>48</sup>

- **1 Cor. 14:34–36:** Paul sees nothing disgraceful in submission (properly and biblically understood) for either men or women. It is, first and foremost, the position assigned to God's creatures in relation to their Creator.<sup>49</sup> Paul has wives primarily in view here when addressing order in the church.<sup>50</sup> His counsel to the women in Corinth is not merely a matter of personal opinion (or prejudice!) but is supported by God's Word. Paul appeals to the Torah in a general way, but the parallel in 1 Tim. 2:11–12 shows that he especially has in mind the Genesis account or the order of creation.<sup>51</sup>
- **Gal. 3:28:** Here Paul speaks about the order of redemption in Christ. This clearly does not negate the

order of creation, as attested by Paul's discussion in other passages referenced here.<sup>52</sup>

- **Eph. 5:21–33** (in consideration with Col. 3:18–19): Here Paul encourages the willing submission of a wife to her husband. In this case, he bases his argument not on the order of creation but on the headship of Christ over the Church.<sup>53</sup> This passage does not subject all women to all men. Rather, it reminds Christian wives to submit to their husbands for the sake of Christ ("as to the Lord"), in other words, as a crucial and practical way of living out their faith in Christ.<sup>54</sup> The analogy of Christ's relationship to the church as "head" makes it clear that the husband's headship involves authority. This authority, like Christ's, is portrayed by Paul in a positive, healthy, constructive, loving and protective way. The husband is not to dominate, exploit or embitter his wife (Col. 3:19). Rather, he is to love her with a sacrificial love like that of Christ, which was a sacrifice unto death.

Commenting on Eph. 5:21–33, Gene Edward Veith says: "The wife's vocation is to submit to her husband. The husband's vocation is to give himself up for his wife." Ephesians 5, says Veith, "gives us a picture ... of a husband who sacrifices himself — his wants, his needs, his strength, his very life if it comes to that — for the good of his wife."<sup>55</sup>

Similarly, in commenting on Ephesians 5 in its report on *Human Sexuality*, the CTCR says: "As the church's

<sup>46</sup> Lockwood, 282.

<sup>47</sup> "By the expression 'nature itself' (1 Cor. 11:14) Paul means 'the natural and instinctive sense of right and wrong that God has planted in us, especially with respect to sexuality.' This sense has been implanted since creation, although it has become obscured and is not always reliable because of the fall into sin. Just as nature teaches (11:14) men instinctively to shrink away from doing what our culture labels as feminine, so it teaches women to dress and behave in distinctively feminine ways." Lockwood, 376–377. "The created distinction between man and woman should be honored in the church ... . We are not disembodied spirits; consequently, spiritual maturity in Christ will lead us to become mature women and men in Christ. Our dress and outward appearance should appropriately reflect our gender identity; to blur these distinctions is to bring needless shame upon the community. In a time of rampant confusion about gender identity in our culture, Paul's teaching on this matter is timely for us. A healthy community needs men and women together (v. 11), not a group of people striving for sexless neutrality." Lockwood, 378–379.

<sup>48</sup> CTCR, *Women in the Church*, 29.

<sup>49</sup> Zerbst, 47.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>51</sup> Lockwood, 509. See also R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966), 616–617, and Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 153.

<sup>52</sup> Zerbst, 35. "Many modern interpreters try to set the order of redemption in opposition to the order of creation, and argue that the two are antithetical or incompatible ... . But such a conflict is foreign to Paul's theology. Paul sees the two orders as complementary, and the Christian life is to be lived in obedience and harmony within both orders." Lockwood, 376.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas M. Winger, *Concordia Commentary: Ephesians* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2015), 605.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 602–603. See also R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966), 625.

<sup>55</sup> Veith, *God at Work*, 80–81. Wives are not given an explicit directive to sacrifice themselves for their husbands in this passage, although there is no scriptural directive prohibiting women from giving of themselves in such a sacrificial way. It should be noted, however, that some have drawn implications regarding women in combat from Ephesians 5, suggesting that only husbands (not wives) can properly serve in a vocation that involves the wielding of the "sword" and risk sacrificing their lives for their spouse without violating their God-given vocation. For example, a 1998 resolution by the Southern Baptist Convention opposing women in combat cites Eph. 5:23–24 as a key passage in demonstrating "the divinely assigned role and responsibilities of self-sacrificial male headship of the family" [emphasis added] and explicitly connects this to "the moral justification for combat service by men rather than women." (See [sbc.net/resolutions/1089](http://sbc.net/resolutions/1089).)

Head devoted Himself totally to the needs of His church, so the husband is to devote himself to the needs of his wife. And as the church yields itself completely to the love, care, and direction of the Lord, so the wife is to yield herself to her husband.”<sup>56</sup>

The “mutual submission” spoken of in Eph. 5:21, emphasizes the CTCR, “must not be interpreted to mean that there ceases to be hierarchy within marriage. The call to mutual service presupposes that an ordered relationship between husband and wife exists. Under the principle of mutual service, however, hierarchy within marriage is viewed not as a political relationship of the ruler over the ruled but as an arrangement whereby the welfare of the other may be served. The Christian husband will therefore understand that the position of headship has been entrusted to him for the exercise of sacrificial love toward his wife ... The Christian wife will understand that, in requiring that she be subject to her husband, God has put her in a position of supporting her husband in his responsibility to care for those who belong to his household. Such a relationship, which cannot be equated simply with obedience, carries with it the honor of accepting a role which the Son of God Himself assumed before His Father (1 COR. 15:28).”<sup>57</sup>

- **1 Tim. 2:11–15:** Paul again uses the word “submission” in the context of distinctions established between man and woman in creation. The order of creation is not invalidated by the fall into sin. Paul appeals to Genesis 2 and 3 as a basis for order both in the home and in the church.<sup>58</sup> “The Church does not set aside the order of creation; the Church, along with the Christian family, should be one of the (few) places where the order of God’s creation is still respected, honored, and upheld.”<sup>59</sup>

Whereas Paul urges the Christian husband to love his wife, Peter (1 PETER 3:7) calls on him to honor his wife

and regard her “as a fellow heir of the grace of life.”<sup>60</sup> A husband is to live with his wife as “the weaker vessel.”<sup>61</sup>

As noted above, Paul’s primary concern in these passages is to show how the order of creation, rooted in the reality of God’s creative work and will, applies to the relationship between husband and wife in marriage and to the question of order in the church, especially with reference to the pastoral office. With regard to the latter, the LCMS has consistently held that “those statements of Scripture which direct women to keep silence in the church and which prohibit them to teach and to exercise authority over men [1 COR. 11 AND 14; 1 TIM. 2:11–15], we understand to mean that women ought not to hold the pastoral office or serve in any other capacity involving the distinctive functions of this office” (1969 Res. 2-17).

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.

This is important to keep in mind when considering Scripture passages (in this case, specific texts in the Old Testament) relating specifically to war and combat in Israel and in the ancient Near East. Clearly, military practices and attitudes in ancient Israel also reflect the reality of male-female distinctions rooted in the order of creation. Throughout the Old Testament, for example, it is simply taken for granted that fighting in war is a vocation strictly limited to men. Only males were counted to go to war (NUM. 1:2–3; DEUT. 3:18; 2

<sup>56</sup> CTCR, *Human Sexuality*, 29.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Zerbst, 53–54. See also R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966), 562–574, and Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin Jr., *The New American Commentary: 1, 2 Timothy, Titus* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 100–101.

<sup>59</sup> Charles A. Gieschen, “Ordained Proclaimers or Quiet Learners? Women in Worship in Light of 1 Timothy 2,” in *Women Pastors? The Ordination of Women in Biblical Lutheran Perspective*, Matthew C. Harrison and John T. Pless, eds. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 84. Gieschen goes on to discuss the meaning of “saved through child-bearing”: “The historical context points to the probability that Paul is affirming childbearing as an important role in women through these words ... as an important God-ordained role of women established in creation that is not set aside through redemption.” Ibid., 86.

<sup>60</sup> “It is a much higher thing to honor than to love. Honor includes not only love, but also deference, humility, and modesty directed (so to speak) toward a majesty concealed within them.” *Luther’s Large Catechism*, KW, 401.106–107.

<sup>61</sup> “Because the pagan culture allowed for abuse of wives and her rights were reduced due to the fact that they were not as strong as men, Peter discourages any such exploitation. Christian knowledge will accord the wife all the consideration and thoughtfulness which God intends for one redeemed by Christ.” (R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John, and St. Jude* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966), 139. Referring to wives as “the weaker vessel” is not a derogatory phrase, but is a reference only to the relative difference between men and women in terms of size and muscular strength. See Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 122–123, and I. Howard Marshall, *1 Peter* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 103–104.



SAM. 24:9; 1 CHRON. 21:5; 2 CHRON. 25:5). In the historical books of the Old Testament, male armies abound, and there is never any suggestion of women serving as combatants (GEN. 14:14–15; NUM. 31:3, 21, 49; DEUT. 20:5–8; JUDGES 7:7; 1 SAM. 23:8–37; 2 CHRON. 17:10–19). Even heathen armies did not include women (1 SAM. 4:9–10). The idea of women serving in combat was used as an object of ridicule (NAH. 3:13; IS. 19:16; JER. 51:30). Women and children were specifically excluded from combat (DEUT. 3:19–20; DEUT. 20:13–14; JOSH. 1:14–15).

One specific text cited in 2013 Res. 2-12A as relevant to this issue is Deut. 22:5: “A woman shall not wear a man’s garment, nor shall a man put on a woman’s cloak, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD your God.” This passage is interpreted by some as a specific admonition against women wearing the fighting garments that a man would wear in combat. In fact, the Old Testament directives in this regard extend beyond military garments and include every kind of domestic clothing as well as use of other utensils (EX. 22:6 [stacked grain]; LEV. 11:32 [garment, skin or sack]; LEV. 13:49 [garment or skin]). Underlying this broader directive, however, is God’s concern that Israel, His chosen people, honor and maintain the distinction and order of the sexes as male and female established at creation.<sup>62</sup>

The accounts of Deborah and Jael in Judges 4 and 5 are often cited as suggesting that men-only combatants was not a strict rule or practice in the Old Testament. Deborah, however, was not a military commander and is not portrayed as being directly involved in the battle. Although Jael killed Sisera, this took place in her tent while Sisera slept and not (strictly speaking) in combat.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Keil-Delitzsch, vol. 1, *Fifth Book of Moses*, 409, and Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), 287–288.

<sup>63</sup> Deborah was a judge with prophetic gifts. She was not a military commander. In order to secure the rights of her people, she summoned Barak from Kedesh in the tribe of Naphtali to gather and lead an army of men against the Canaanite army under the command of Sisera. When Barak refused to go unless Deborah accompanied him, Deborah agreed but then foretold that Sisera would fall to the hands of a woman. Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh where he summoned the army; she accompanied the Israelite army to Mount Tabor, while Sisera gathered his army and chariots in the valley of Kishon. Deborah stayed on Tabor while Barak and his army went down to attack Sisera and his army. While Barak’s army won decisively, Sisera fled, eventually taking refuge in the tent of Jael, wife of Heber, a Kenite (non-Hebrew ally). Jael showed hospitality to Sisera, allowing him to lie down and rest in her tent. When he slept, Jael drove a tent peg through Sisera’s temple. Sisera was killed by a woman, but not in battle. Both Deborah and Barak then celebrated the event in a song (JUDGES 5). Consider C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, vol. 2, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & II Samuel* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, reprinted 1980), 301–306.

Moreover, commentators are in general agreement that the story of Deborah emphasizes the shaming of Barak, who fails to lead Israel in battle (JUDGES 4:9).<sup>64</sup>

Another Old Testament passage that may seem to suggest an inconsistency regarding women in combat is Judges 9:50–54. Here Abimelech and his army encamped against Thebez. The inhabitants fled to a tower, and while Abimelech besieged it, a woman threw a stone onto Abimelech’s head from the tower. In this case, the woman was not a regular combatant. Rather, it was a matter of self-defense in an emergency situation.<sup>65</sup>

While the Old Testament passages cited above are clearly descriptive of military attitudes and practices in ancient Israel, sound principles of biblical interpretation do not allow us to apply them simply or directly to the church (or state) today in some strict, prescriptive manner. At the same time, these Old Testament passages cannot simply be dismissed as meaningless or irrelevant to the issue of women in combat.

Thus far, our focus has been on *Scripture’s* teaching regarding male-female distinctions within the order of creation. As 2016 Res. 5-11A makes clear, however (in its final “Whereas”), Lutheran theology has always taken seriously the role played by human reason and natural law in supporting many scriptural truths and realities, especially in the realm of creation and the civil realm:

Lutheran Christians have a high regard for God’s gifts of human reason and natural law, and take very seriously the many reason-based arguments that have been made (by both Christians and non-Christians) against women serving in combat positions (e.g., the negative impact on the family; the necessary stripping away of modesty to be trained and perform combat functions; physical strength comparison between men and women in general; other physical and biological differences between men and women; mixed gender troop performance under combat conditions, etc.

The “Whereas” quoted above notes the relevance of human reason and natural law to the issue of women being employed in combat; the second “Resolved” of Res. 5-11A applies these same principles to the issue of conscription:

<sup>64</sup> See, for example, Trent C. Butler, *Word Biblical Commentary: Judges* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 98–109.

<sup>65</sup> Also, when Abimelech realized that he was fatally injured by a woman, he commanded his armor-bearer to kill him with his sword so he would not die at a woman’s hand.

*Resolved*, That due to deep and widespread concern among many members of the LCMS — rooted in biblical convictions, historic understandings of natural law, and reason-based common sense — about the negative impact of the conscription of women on individual consciences, marriages, families, and society as a whole, the LCMS in convention strongly oppose any legal action that forces the compulsory service of women in the military, also called the conscription of women, by mandatory participation in Selective Service registration, a draft, or by any other mechanism.

As 2016 Res. 5-11A rightly observes, reason and natural law recognize physical, hormonal and emotional distinctions between men and women. On average, males have greater physical strength than females, particularly upper body strength. Additionally, due to differing hormonal concentrations, males typically have higher aggression levels, and females have greater tendencies toward nurturing, supporting others and developing or building relationships. Furthermore, some men may have protective attitudes toward women that could cause unit and mission risk if women are involved in combat units. Studies have shown that all-male combat units perform significantly better than integrated combat units. They also reveal that women have significantly higher attrition rates due to injuries in combat-related situations.

While the death of any soldier is deeply tragic, and while both fathers and mothers play a crucial role in the family, reason and natural law recognize the likelihood (even certainty) that the loss of significant numbers of women in combat would negatively affect the morale not only of soldiers and the military but of society as a whole. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the witness of world cultures, both ancient and modern, is almost unanimous in maintaining a prohibition against women serving in combat.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>66</sup> [documentcloud.org/documents/2394531-marine-corps-force-integration-plan-summary.html](http://documentcloud.org/documents/2394531-marine-corps-force-integration-plan-summary.html). Some have held up as a contrary example the conscription of women and their use in combat by the Israeli military forces. However, it is only recently that they have been used in combat roles, and that has been restricted to two border patrol units. Consider the following: [washingtontimes.com/news/2015/may/25/womens-combat-roles-in-israel-defense-forces-exagg/](http://washingtontimes.com/news/2015/may/25/womens-combat-roles-in-israel-defense-forces-exagg/); [nationalreview.com/article/431239/israel-women-combat-experience-not-what-left-says](http://nationalreview.com/article/431239/israel-women-combat-experience-not-what-left-says); [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women\\_in\\_the\\_Israel\\_Defense\\_Forces](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_the_Israel_Defense_Forces); [msn.com/en-us/news/world/why-a-growing-number-of-religious-women-want-to-serve-in-the-israeli-military/ar-BBENRpp?li=AA4Zpp&ocid=spartan-ntp](http://msn.com/en-us/news/world/why-a-growing-number-of-religious-women-want-to-serve-in-the-israeli-military/ar-BBENRpp?li=AA4Zpp&ocid=spartan-ntp).

Reason and natural law recognize that when young men and women are in close proximity for extended periods of time, sexual relationships and tensions are inevitable. This can have a decidedly negative impact upon unit order and cohesion. Due to the increasing number of women serving in military units involving close-quarter habitation, there has also been an increase in cases and charges of sexual abuse.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, there is a markedly negative impact on military units when pregnancies occur. Women who become pregnant are immediately removed from naval vessels and units serving in combat zones. These military units are then left short-handed without replacements, sometimes for several months.

Most importantly, reason and natural law recognize that the family is foundational to society. Mothers are most often the primary nurturers of children. The military itself recognizes and acknowledges the unique and critical nature of this role by making special provisions for servicewomen who become pregnant.

The evidence summarized above from both the Old and the New Testament regarding male-female distinctions within the order of creation, supported by evidence from natural law and human reason, serves as a strong basis for explaining why and how “biblical arguments against women serving in combat positions have been marshaled by many Christians, including members of the LCMS, who strongly object to the Department of Defense’s decision, such arguments being based on specific texts (GEN. 1–2, DEUT. 22:5, AND EPH. 5:25)” (2013 Res. 2-12A). It is the conclusion of the CTCR that the *cumulative weight of the Bible passages and principles discussed above can legitimately be read by Christians to the effect that it is not in keeping with God’s created design, intention and will for women to be employed in military combat or to be compelled to serve in the military in any capacity*. The CTCR here affirms its support of the Synod’s position that “due to deep and widespread concern among many members of the LCMS — rooted in biblical convictions, historic understandings of natural law, and reason-based common sense — about

<sup>67</sup> The prevalence of sexual harassment and abuse of women in the military is an undeniable and deeply regrettable reality. A 2014 Rand study found that roughly 5 percent of all military women had been sexually assaulted in the previous year and 22 percent experienced sexual harassment. Women were far more often assaulted or harassed than men. See [rand.org/pubs/research\\_briefs/RB9841.html](http://rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9841.html). The DoD’s most recent report on sexual assault, for the year 2016, indicated a slight decrease in sexual assault against women, as 4.3 percent of military women reported a sexual assault in that year. See [sapr.mil/public/docs/reports/FY16\\_Annual/FY16\\_Annual\\_Report\\_FactSheet\\_4\\_Aug\\_17.pdf](http://sapr.mil/public/docs/reports/FY16_Annual/FY16_Annual_Report_FactSheet_4_Aug_17.pdf).

the negative impact of the conscription of women on individual consciences, marriages, families, and society as a whole, the LCMS in convention strongly oppose any legal action that forces the compulsory service of women in the military, also called the conscription of women, by mandatory participation in Selective Service registration, a draft, or by any other mechanism” (2016 Res. 5-11A).

In Part III of this report, the CTCR offers practical resources and guidance to Christian women (especially LCMS women) who, depending on their specific circumstances and possible changes in U.S. law regarding conscription, may find it necessary to object formally and conscientiously to participation in combatant and/or noncombatant military training and service. Guidance to pastors and others who seek to support the actions and decisions of conscience-bound women in these circumstances is also offered in this final part of the report.

We must add, however, that for other reasons discussed above — for example, the distinction between the two kingdoms, the inherent complexities of biblical

interpretation, and the absence of specific and explicit biblical mandates regarding the service of women in the military — it is also possible to understand how Christians, including members of the LCMS, can in good conscience support and defend “the informed consciences of women who have carefully considered their station in life and Holy Scripture 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.

The discussion above raises a rather obvious and yet critical question: How can Christians who are equally committed to the authority of God’s Word affirm the proper use of human reason and natural law in supporting the teachings of God’s Word and, sincerely seeking to be guided by this inspired and infallible Word, arrive at different conscience-bound conclusions about the issues discussed in this document? In order to address this question, we must also consider what Scripture itself teaches about the critical role played by conscience in seeking to discern God’s will for the lives and behavior of His people on the basis of His Word.

### *Scripture’s Teaching about Conscience*

**S**CRPTURE ASSERTS THAT ALL PEOPLE have the law “written on their hearts” (ROM. 2:14–15). The conscience, therefore, serves as a guide to distinguishing right and wrong. Conscience is not an infallible guide for sinful people living in a fallen world,<sup>68</sup> but it is by no means to be dismissed, taken lightly or ignored. In the New Testament, the term “conscience” signifies “more than strong feeling and emotional reaction to an issue or a task,” but rather “moral response in depth on the basis of conclusions reached by evaluating the ethical aspects and implications of a given issue or situation (CF. ACTS 23:1; ROM. 2:15; 1 COR. 8:7, 10, ETC.).”<sup>69</sup> Scripture strongly warns against acting in a way that is contrary to one’s conscience, calling it sin (ROM. 14:23). Paul urges

us to have a good conscience (1 TIM. 1:5) and asserts that by acting against their conscience “some have made shipwreck of their faith” (1 TIM. 1:19). Consider these specific texts:

- **Rom. 14:2–3, 13–23:** Paul here addresses the matter of conscience in the context of a very real-life issue for Christians of his day: eating certain foods in relation to Old Testament dietary restrictions. Everyone is free in this respect (v. 2). Yet, they should not judge the other with respect to adiaphora (those things which God has neither commanded nor forbidden) but which God has left in the realm of Christian love (v. 3, 13). We have full Christian liberty in all matters of adiaphora, and this should never be discounted. Yet, in each case, we look to what will provide the greatest benefit for our neighbor, seeking to build up each other (v. 19–20). Everything that is not from faith is sin; what is not done in faith is not done to the glory of God (v. 23).<sup>70</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Our conscience has been obscured as a consequence of original sin, which makes it harder for us now to discern what is sinful (1 COR. 2:14; EPH. 4:18). Therefore, the conscience must be informed and guided by God’s Word (DEUT. 8:3; PS. 119:105; 2 TIM. 3:16–17). For the CTCR’s critique of a recent view of and appeal to “conscience” that is not rooted in and governed by the authority of God’s Word, see the April 2012 CTCR report on the 2009 social statement of the ELCA: *Response to “Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust,”* [lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=1820](http://lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=1820).

<sup>69</sup> CTCR, *Guidelines for Crucial Issues in Christian Citizenship* (1968), 7–8, [lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=366](http://lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=366).

<sup>70</sup> See R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 831–854, and Martin H. Franzmann, *Concordia Commentary: Romans* (St. Louis:



- **1 Cor. 8:1–13:** Here Paul speaks about the issue of food offered to idols, particularly eating at a feast for an idol. Some defile their conscience by acting against it. Paul speaks of their conscience “being weak.” A weak conscience is one that is not fully clear as to whether an act is right or wrong. That person is then more easily influenced by the behavior of others, which could cause him or her to act against his or her conscience.<sup>71</sup> Paul has a twofold concern: that the weak should not judge the strong, and the strong should not despise the weak. Any decision regarding adiaphora involves showing love for another person for whom Christ died and must consider whether the choice will build up or cause spiritual injury (v. 9–12).
- **1 Cor. 10:23–33:** Here again, Paul addresses the issue of conscience in the context of the eating of meat sacrificed to idols, particularly eating meat sold at the market or served privately at a pagan’s home. All things are lawful, but not all things are beneficial or build up. In cases of adiaphora, one is to consider the interest and well-being of others (v. 23). We are not to slander those who think or act differently in such matters (v. 20). Whatever we do, we do it to the glory of God (v. 31).<sup>72</sup>
- **2 Cor. 6:3:** For the sake of the Gospel, pastors are to avoid any “obstacles” that would cause others to stumble. This includes not turning matters of adiaphora into divine mandates that would create unnecessary conscience-related barriers to the proclamation of the Gospel.<sup>73</sup>
- **1 Tim. 1:5, 19:** A good conscience comes only through a sincere faith (EPH. 2:8–9) and a clean heart (Ps. 51:10) that clings to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the promises of God in Baptism (1 PETER 3:21) and not by following false teaching, myths and endless genealogies.<sup>74</sup>

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Concordia Publishing House, 1968), 245–258.

<sup>71</sup> “Preserving a good conscience is part of a Christian’s high responsibility. Paul testified before the Sanhedrin and the Roman authorities that he had always maintained a good conscience before God and other people (ACTS 23:1; 23:16) ... Not only should each Christian strive to live before God and his neighbor with a good conscience, but he should also try to keep others in the congregation from the burden of a strained conscience. This is part of what it means to live as sanctified people.” Lockwood, 285. Also, consider Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, 337.

<sup>72</sup> See Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, 418–428, and Lockwood, 249–355.

<sup>73</sup> Lenski, *ibid.*, 1062–1063.

<sup>74</sup> R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colos-*

According to Scripture, it is never right (or, as Martin Luther famously observed, safe) to go against one’s conscience. “When a Christian is persuaded that he faces a choice in conscience, he must be certain in his own mind that his conscience is informed by principles which conform to God’s will. For he has the burden of not violating his own conscience.”<sup>75</sup> A weak conscience is one that is not fully certain as to whether an act is right or wrong. It is therefore continually uncertain, in doubt and easily swayed. Whenever dealing with matters of adiaphora, one should strive to do no spiritual harm to another for whom Christ died. All things are lawful, but not all things are beneficial. And whatever one does in matters of adiaphora is to be done by faith in Christ and to the glory of God.

This brief review of Scripture’s teaching regarding conscience affirms that, according to Scripture itself, it is indeed possible for Christians who are equally committed to the authority of God’s Word and who seek sincerely to be guided by it to come to different conclusions about God’s will for their lives and actions in certain situations where there is no explicit or absolute “thus says the Lord.” This was true not only in St. Paul’s day (with regard to questions like eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols), but it is also true in the church today with regard to a whole host of complex questions that fall into the realm of adiaphora. To cite just one example within the churchly life of the LCMS, in 1995 the Synod in convention adopted Res. 3-05 to address ongoing discussion and debate in the Synod concerning woman suffrage in the voters assemblies of LCMS congregations. In this resolution, the Synod formally and officially “declare[d] that honest Christian conscience can and does exist on both sides of this issue, but such difference of opinion is not divisive of Christian fellowship” — fully recognizing that those on both sides of this issue based their conscience-bound convictions on the inspired and infallible Scriptures.

In a similar way, the Synod rightly acknowledges in 2016 Res. 5-11A that Christians (including those within the LCMS) can, have and do come to differing conscience-bound positions on the issue of women serving in combat. This is particularly the case for those who are most impacted by this issue, both actually and/or potentially: Christian women.

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*sians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 502–504, 531–532.

<sup>75</sup> CTCR, *Guidelines for Crucial Issues in Christian Citizenship*, 8.

A Christian woman (married or not) may come to the conscience-bound conviction that what Scripture (together with reason and natural law) says about the order of creation, while completely valid and true, is not decisive on the issue of women in combat. Reasons for arriving at this conclusion might include the fact that scriptural discussions of this issue are primarily concerned with the role of women in marriage and the family and with order in church, and that Scripture does not make explicit every implication or application of the order of creation for life in the civil estate (including service in the military).

On the other hand, a woman (whether or not she is a wife or mother) could also come to the conscience-bound conviction that God does *not* want her to serve in the military based on the ample scriptural evidence we have surveyed here regarding male-female distinctions rooted in the order of creation, as well considerations supported by reason and natural law. A woman who is a wife and/or a mother also has a primary, God-given vocation that could further bind her conscience against her service in the military. This is especially true if her husband does not approve of such service or if such service would put her life (or the life of her unborn child or children) at risk, thus directly harming or threatening her primary God-given vocation as wife and/or mother. In this connection, it should be noted and emphasized that The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has consistently held (and continues to hold) on the basis of Scripture that “the living but unborn are persons in the sight of God from the time of conception (JOB 10:9–11; PS. 51:5; 139:13–17; JER. 1:5; LUKE 1:41–44).”<sup>76</sup> This conviction alone could well bind the conscience of a woman (especially a wife or potential mother) against being employed in combat or being conscripted into military service of any kind, since service in combat or in the military could potentially threaten not only her own life but also the life of her unborn child, before she or “the powers that be” are even aware of the existence of this child whom Scripture teaches (and she believes) is a “person in the sight of God from the moment of conception.”

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<sup>76</sup> 1979 Res. 3-02A. This position has been re-affirmed by the Synod in numerous official resolutions and statements throughout the years. For a strong and compelling argument against the conscription of women rooted primarily in convictions regarding the sanctity of human life from the moment of conception, see Andrew A. Sicree, “A Miscall to Arms: Why Selective Service for Women is Immoral,” *Touchstone* (September/October 2017), 55–58.

## PART 3:

# Practical Considerations

### *Supporting Our Christian Sisters and Brothers in Matters of Conscience*

**I**F THE LAW IS CHANGED so that women in the United States are required to register for the draft, it is important to remember that the U.S. government, through both the Selective Service System and the Department of Defense, provides for conscientious objection, which should<sup>77</sup> include women whose consciences are bound with respect to women serving in combat or being conscripted to serve in the military in any capacity.

The Selective Service System provides guidance for those who desire to register for conscientious objector status.<sup>78</sup> All conscientious objectors are still required to register with the Selective Service System. Conscientious objection is identified in the Department of Defense Instruction on “Conscientious Objectors” (DoDI 1300.06) as: “Opposition to participating in any form of war or the bearing of arms due to sincerely held morals, ethical or religious beliefs, or a combination of such beliefs.”<sup>79</sup> A registrant making a claim for conscientious objection is required to appear before a local board to explain his (or her) beliefs. This may include providing written documentation or appearances by people who can attest to the claim. The local board will decide whether to grant

or deny a conscientious objector classification based on the evidence a registrant has presented. If a favorable decision is not granted, it may be appealed to a Selective Service District Appeals Board, and this decision may be appealed to the National Appeals Board.

Two types of service, determined by the individual’s specific beliefs, are available to conscientious objectors in the event that the draft is again implemented. The person who is opposed to any form of military service may be assigned to alternative service (conservation corps, caring for the very young or very old, education or health care). The person whose beliefs allow for service in the military but in a noncombatant capacity will serve in a branch of the armed forces but will not be assigned training or duties that include using weapons. The length of such service will normally be 24 months.

In the event that a person volunteers or is conscripted and inducted into a branch of the armed forces, he or she may also apply for conscientious objector status following the instructions referenced above in DoDI 1300.06.<sup>80</sup> There are two classifications:

**Class 1-O Conscientious Objector:** A member who, by reason of conscientious objection, sincerely opposes participation in combatant and noncombatant military training and service in war in any form and for whom such beliefs play a significant role in his or her life.

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<sup>77</sup> The word “should” is used since to this point it is hypothetical and has yet to be tested.

<sup>78</sup> <https://www.sss.gov/consobj>

<sup>79</sup> [fas.org/irp/doddir/dod/i1300\\_06.pdf](https://fas.org/irp/doddir/dod/i1300_06.pdf). It should be noted that DoDI 1300.06 on “Conscientious Objectors” was revised July 12, 2017 (the previous version was dated Aug. 21, 2006). The revisions were modest, but the precise wording is important, especially when it comes to such an important issue of conscience for many.

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<sup>80</sup> See footnote 79.

**Class 1-A-O Conscientious Objector:** A member who, by reason of conscientious objection, sincerely opposes participation only in combatant military training and service and for whom such beliefs play a significant role in his or her life.

The procedure involves a written application that includes an explanation of the person's specific reasons for conscientious objection. The applicant will be inter-

viewed by a military chaplain and assigned an investigating officer who conducts a hearing on the application. If the application is received favorably, the Class 1-O Conscientious Objector is honorably discharged and the Class 1-A-O Conscientious Objector is assigned non-combatant duties.

### *Guidance for Individuals and Pastors*

**T**HIS DOCUMENT SERVES to provide an aid for those women who may now or in the future be in a position of needing to apply as conscientious objectors, either because they volunteered to serve in the U.S. armed forces but believe it is wrong for women to serve as combatants, or in the event that the U.S. government enacts draft registration for women.<sup>81</sup> Such applicants should also be prepared for civil disobedience and its consequences if conscientious objector classification is denied after all appropriate appeals are made.<sup>82</sup>

The following points are offered as a guide in presenting a case for conscientious objector status based on Holy Scripture and supported by natural law and human reason.<sup>83</sup> The applicant would demonstrate that she:

- Has been brought to faith in Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior through Holy Baptism (ACTS 2:38–39; ROM. 6:3–4; 1 PETER 3:21) and the message of Christ (ROM. 10:17);
- Is guided by Holy Scripture (2 TIM. 3:16) and a good conscience (1 TIM. 1:5, 19);
- Believes that God created human beings male and female. They are differentiated and complementary (GEN. 2:7, 18). The order of creation is reflected in

the relation of husband and wife in the home and carries over to life in the church and in society (1 COR. 11:2–16; 1 COR. 14:34–36; 1 TIM. 2:11–15; 1 PETER 3:7; ALSO CONSIDER EPH. 5:21–33);

- Believes that in the Old Testament, service in the military (and, therefore, in combat) was a vocation strictly limited to men (NUM. 1:2–3; DEUT. 3:18; 2 SAM. 24:9; 1 CHRON. 21:5; 2 CHRON. 25:5). Women and children were specifically excluded from military service and combat (DEUT. 3:19–20; 20:13–14; JOSH. 1:14–15);
- Believes that scriptural teachings regarding male-female distinctions rooted in the order of creation are supported by natural law (PS. 19:4; ACTS 14:15–17; ACTS 17:26–27; ROM. 1:19–20), which can and should shape and guide our conscience;
- Affirms that natural law, together with the witness of Holy Scripture, attests to the following:
  - Men and women are created different with sexual distinctions that are anatomical and hormonal;
  - The family is foundational to society and mothers are the primary nurturers of the family; and
  - Until very recently, no other society in the history of the world has conscripted women into military service or incorporated them as combatants.<sup>84</sup>
- Understands that The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, through 2016 Res. 5-11A, formally and officially supports women who, for reasons of conscience, file for conscientious objector status:

<sup>81</sup> Understandably, the U. S. Government and the Department of Defense take the matter of conscientious objection very seriously. A person's position in this regard must be deemed to be "firm, fixed, sincere, and deeply held" on the basis of "a moral, ethical, or religious belief" (DoDI 1300.06, section 3.1). A person's reasons for not wanting to participate in a war (either as combatant or noncombatant) must not be based on politics, expediency or self-interest. Also, a person's lifestyle prior to making his claim must reflect his current claims. (See <https://www.sss.gov/consobj>.)

<sup>82</sup> See footnote 19 above. Civil obedience in this regard is also a very serious matter: See Andrew A. Sicree's article "A Miscall to Arms" (cited in fn. 76 above) for a discussion of the stiff penalties that can be incurred in case of non-compliance with Selective Service registration.

<sup>83</sup> According to Scripture itself (e.g., ROM. 2:14–15), natural law and human reason can also serve to shape and inform one's conscience.

<sup>84</sup> On the service of women in the military in modern Israel, see fn. 66 above. Since 2015, the United States is not the only country moving to include women in combat roles. Other countries include Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Norway and Poland.



*Resolved*, That the LCMS in convention acknowledge the Department of Defense Instruction 1300.06: Conscientious Objectors (DoDI 1300.06, May 31, 2007), where two classifications for a conscientious objector are recognized (Class 1-0 and Class 1-A-0) and stand resolutely with any woman who holds “a firm, fixed, and sincere objection to participation in war in any form or the bearing of arms, by reason of religious training and/or belief;” (DoDI 1300.06 paragraph 3.1) and be it further

*Resolved*, That the Word of God and the LCMS in convention supports individuals in the LCMS who conscientiously object (1) to a woman’s service in the military in general or (2) to a woman in the military being required to serve in a combat capacity.

Below in figures 1 and 2 are sample statements of understanding and counseling regarding both class 1-O and class 1-A-O conscientious objections based on guidance given in DoDI 1300.06 (dated July 12, 2017):

**Figure 1: Receipt of Counseling Concerning Designation as a Class 1-O Conscientious Objector**

I have been counseled concerning designation as a conscientious objector. Based on my training and belief, I consider myself to be a conscientious objector within the meaning of the statute and regulations governing conscientious objectors and am conscientiously opposed to participation in combatant and noncombatant training and service. I request discharge from military service [or exemption from conscription into military services]. I fully understand that if this request is favorably received, I will not be eligible for voluntary enlistment, re-enlistment, extension or amendment of current enlistment, or active service in the Military Services by reason of my Class 1-O conscientious objector classification.

**Figure 2: Receipt of Counseling Concerning Designation as a Class 1-A-O Conscientious Objector**

I have been counseled concerning designation as a conscientious objector. Based on my training and belief, I consider myself to be a conscientious objector within the meaning of the statute and regulations governing conscientious objectors and am conscientiously opposed to participation in combatant training and

service. I request assignment to noncombatant duties for the remainder of my term of service. I fully understand that on expiration of my current term of service, I am not eligible for voluntary enlistment, re-enlistment, extension or amendment of current enlistment, or active service in the Military Services by reason of my Class 1-A-O conscientious objector classification.

Those women whose consciences are not settled in this regard should prayerfully search the Scriptures and consult their family members, pastors and others so as to come to a firm conviction on this issue. Again, it is hoped that this document will serve as an aid.

Those women who are not conscience-bound against women serving in combat and who desire to serve in a combat specialty within the armed forces should evaluate their motives and physical qualifications for desiring to serve in this vocation. Some questions<sup>85</sup> may include:

- Can I faithfully and conscientiously bear witness to my faith in Christ and my unqualified commitment to “live under him in his kingdom” (*Luther’s Small Catechism*, Explanation of the Second Article) in and through the left-hand kingdom vocation of military service?
- Is this service or vocation sought out of love for God and my neighbor and not simply or primarily for self-interest or career advancement?
- Am I physically, mentally and emotionally qualified for this specific service?
- Am I prepared for the greater potential for sexual assault and/or harassment that exists for women in military service?
- Can I, in good conscience, willingly participate in training that prepares me to take human life?
- How might such service affect others whose consciences are troubled by this issue?
- Do I have other vocations that would be affected by such service, particularly as a wife and mother?

Pastors should be prepared to provide counsel to their parishioners as well as to others who come to them regarding God’s Word and matters of conscience.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>85</sup> These kinds of questions could well also be used by men as they consider a vocation in the armed services.

<sup>86</sup> “We put no obstacle in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in

In the event that women are required to register for the draft, pastors will need to be ready to assist those women who are conscience bound against serving in combat or being conscripted into military service to apply as a conscientious objector. Hopefully, this study will prove helpful.<sup>87</sup> Also, pastors and their congregations can provide care and assistance if individuals are compelled to engage in civil disobedience in the event that their application is denied. Furthermore, pastors can offer valuable guidance for those women whose consciences are not clear on this matter, assisting them to come to a firm, God-pleasing conviction. Finally, pastors can encourage their parishioners to exercise good citizenship in the left-hand kingdom and to voice their views to their elected officials regarding the conscription of women as well as the impact of women serving in the military (whether as combatants or noncombatants).

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every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise" (2 Cor. 6:3–8A).

<sup>87</sup> Contact the LCMS Ministry to the Armed Forces for assistance in navigating through DoD regulations concerning any matters relating to the service of LCMS members and the military.

## A FINAL WORD

**W**HILE THIS STUDY is intended to provide guidance regarding women's service in the military with specific reference to issues such as the relationship between the two kingdoms, the scriptural order of creation, vocation, conscience, human reason and natural law, it should be remembered that these issues — however important — do not constitute the central and primary message of God's Word. The concluding words from the CTCR document *The Creator's Tapestry*, although written in the context of addressing issues related to marriage and human sexuality, provide apt closing words here as well:

In the end, our discussions and affirmations regarding our creation as male and female and our church's public teaching and practice must find their place within the life of faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, the greatest challenge for us is to speak about those matters from the standpoint of the Cross. We dare not forget that the heart of the Christian message is not guidance for marriage or sexuality [or possible vocations in the military] or any other current issue, but the truth of an irreparably broken world that finds forgiveness, hope, and salvation only in Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection.

Whatever we say about sexuality [or specific vocations in the earthly realm], it must not overshadow the Gospel of Christ and His Cross. After all, the culmination of any true appreciation

of our creation as male and female goes beyond the blessings that come of our sexual embodiment for this life, as much as we rejoice in the gifts of marriage, disciplined sexuality, and sanctified masculinity and femininity.

All these are good things — good gifts of God to be honored. Yet, there is no higher honor given to humanity as male and female — no greater good — than that which was identified at least as early as St. Augustine (354–430 AD). Augustine's insight was that in the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, God honors and blesses His work of making man, male and female. By the means of Mary's embodiment as a woman, and our Lord Jesus' embodiment as a man, the whole of humanity, both male and female, plays a role in nothing less than the salvation of the world.<sup>88</sup> If God Himself gives such dignity to man and woman, then each of us, whether male or female, is also called to live within his or her individual, sexual personhood, uniquely, yet toward God's own eternal purposes within the tapestry He has woven.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> See Augustine's *Eighty-Three Different Questions in The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 70, 42 and also his *The Christian Combat*, in *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 21, 228–239, as referenced and quoted in Thomas C. Oden, *Life in the Spirit*, (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), 8.

<sup>89</sup> CTCR, *The Creator's Tapestry*, 56.

