

## A Reaction to Pastor Daniel Leyrer's Paper Entitled *A Response to "Women and the WELS"*

In May 2018, we authored and published an essay entitled "Women and the WELS: Connecting Church Practice with Scriptural Teaching." Since then, the Southeastern Wisconsin District presidium commissioned Pastor Daniel Leyrer to write a response to our essay. While we respect Pastor Leyrer as a pastor and theologian, his response contains both straw man arguments and circular reasoning. What follows is our reaction to his paper.

### Under *Hermeneutical Weaknesses*

- #1. Pastor Leyrer's argument begs the question. His argument *assumes* that 1 Corinthians 11:3 should be translated "woman" rather than "wife." Most current translations of the Bible are ambivalent on the question, with several translations using the word "wife."
- #2. The argument again begs the question by *assuming* there is only one way to translate the Greek words, "aner" and "gune." There is no consensus among Bible scholars on how to translate these two words. The argument further *assumes* that Adam and Eve must be understood as representative of male and female genders when they were, in fact, husband and wife.
- #3. This argument misrepresents our essay, "Women and the WELS," which never "intimated" that the Greek words "aner" and "gune" should be understood as husband and wife "every time." Further, our essay **does** repeatedly point to context as critical, as even a casual reading of the essay will note.
- #4. Pastor Leyrer seems to overlook the fact that the WELS doctrinal statements **are** applied to life beyond marriage and the church and, in that sense, make man and woman "generic" in interpretation.
- #5. This argument misunderstands our essay, "Women and the WELS," significantly. Our essay acknowledges that single women and men **are** addressed in St. Paul's words to the church. Our essay does **not** suggest that 1 Timothy 2 only addresses married men and women. At issue is *why* the apostle makes his case. It is legitimate to suggest that it is God's concern for marriage—not gender—that his injunction regarding men and women in the church is to "reflect and reinforce" his concern for marriage.

### Under *Exegetical Weaknesses*

- #1. 1 Corinthians 14:35 **does** have the linguistic marker "idious" (translated "their") for husbands (not "men") and is universally so translated. So how does the context of verse 35 not impact verse 34?

- #2. Bible scholars virtually universally admit that we cannot know for certain what St. Paul intended with the word “nomos” (translated “law”) in 1 Corinthians 14:34. Our essay, “Women and the WELS,” merely suggests that an understanding of the word as marriage law is as likely as other understandings.
- #3. Regarding linguistic markers, an “Exegesis of 1 Timothy 2:11-15” by the faculty of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary makes this observation: “When the noun appears without an article it is indefinite” (therefore signifying “woman” or “man” rather than “wife” or “husband”). It should be noted, then, that in 1 Corinthians 11:3 there is an article with “aner,” suggesting that the word be translated “husband” and by extension “wife” for “gune.” This is, in fact, how several translations render the verse.

When there are linguistic markers such as the article or the word “idios,” it is clear that the translation should be “husband” and “wife.” This does not mean that only when there is such a linguistic marker should the translation be husband and wife. In other cases the context should guide the translator. Examples of passages that do not have the linguistic marker and yet seem clearly to refer to husband and wife include: Luke 14:20, 1 Corinthians 7:27,29,39, 1 Corinthians 9:5, and 1 Timothy 5:9. In each of these cases, the context demands understanding husband and/or wife. Our essay, “Women and the WELS,” attempted to demonstrate that context argues for an understanding of husband and wife in 1 Corinthians 11:3—the critical verse to this whole subject.

- #4. While Pastor Leyrer makes the argument that the “hapax legomenon” (a word used only once in the New Testament), namely “authentein,” in 1 Timothy 2 *could* be translated as neutral, he wisely does not argue that it *should* be so translated. From Martin Luther to nearly every lexicon in use today there is no basis for arguing *should*. Even the quotation Pastor Leyrer adduces from Armin Panning’s study is forceful—“thrusting oneself forward, asserting oneself.” This meaning of the word, let alone the more forceful “control” or “domineer” that lexicons suggest, can hardly justify the application which denies women a vote in congregations.

#### Further Observations

- a) Pastor Leyrer does not address the issues of application in the WELS doctrinal statements. The applications of 1 Timothy 2 which deny women the vote and other roles in the church was one of the two main issues raised by our essay, “Women and the WELS.”
- b) There is no attempt in Pastor Leyrer’s “response” paper to justify the WELS doctrinal statements’ application of a so-called “order of creation” to roles and relationships in society. This was also a concern in our essay, “Women and the WELS,” and it remains vital to how Christian women live and work in a contemporary culture.
- c) The response paper does not address several other issues raised in our “Women and the WELS” essay. Among these are:

1. The fact that an “order of creation” is a relatively recent doctrinal discovery (if this is a doctrine, wouldn’t it have been recognized earlier than the mid-1900s and by a Lutheran rather than Reformed theologian?).
2. The fact that Martin Luther’s writings agree with most of what our essay, “Women and the WELS,” asserts.
3. The fact that nearly all current Bible translations are uncertain whether 1 Corinthians 11:3 should be translated as wife and husband or woman and man.

### In Conclusion

Pastor Leyrer’s response paper raises some legitimate questions. We believe that they should be addressed in a broad study within the WELS of man/woman roles and relationships. Our essay, “Women and the WELS,” does not make the claim that it is the only way to understand the issue and the passages under question, only that there are legitimate alternatives to the basis for and wording of the WELS doctrinal statements.

Like a criminal conviction, doctrine should be “beyond a reasonable doubt.” The so-called “order of creation” doctrine does not pass this test. And the application of this assumed doctrine, which restricts the use of women’s gifts in the church, certainly does not pass such a test either.

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