

**From Consensus to Chaos:
An Historical Analysis of Evangelical Interpretation
of 1 Timothy 2:8-15 from 1945-2001**

by

Stephen P. Dray

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**FROM CONSENSUS TO CHAOS: AN HISTORICAL
ANALYSIS OF EVANGELICAL INTERPRETATION
OF 1 TIMOTHY 2:8-15 FROM 1945-2001**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THEOLOGY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

BY

THE REV. STEPHEN P. DRAY

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

PERIODICALS

Rarely cited journals are generally referred to by their full title. However, the following abbreviations are used:

AJA: American Journal of Archaeology

BA: Biblical Archaeologist

BAR: Biblical Archaeological Review

BETS: Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society

BJRL: Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester

EMQ: Evangelical Missions Quarterly

EQ: Evangelical Quarterly

ERT: Evangelical Review of Theology

ET: Expository Times

EuroJTh: European Journal of Theology

JBL: Journal of Biblical Literature

JETS: Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society

JSOT: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament

JSNT: Journal for the Study of the New Testament

NTS: New Testament Studies

SBET: Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology

TB: Tyndale Bulletin

TLS: Times Literary Supplement

TrinJ: Trinity Journal

TSEBull: Theological Students Fellowship Bulletin

WTJ: Westminster Theological Journal

WORKS OF REFERENCE / FREQUENTLY CITED ESSAY COLLECTIONS

After Eden: After Eden: Facing the Challenge of Gender Reconciliation. Ed. M. S. van Leeuwen. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans: 1993.

After Pentecost: After Pentecost: Language & Biblical Interpretation. Ed. C. Bartholomew, C. Green & K. Möller. Carlisle. Paternoster, 2001.

ANCL: Ante Nicene Christian Library. Eds., A. Roberts & J. Donaldson. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, various dates.

Feminist Papers: The Feminist Papers: From Adams to de Beauvoir. Ed. A. S. Rossi. New York: Bantham, 1974.

HDB: Dictionary of the Bible. Ed. J. Hastings. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1898.

Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon: Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon. Eds., D. A. Carson & J. Woodbridge. Leicester: IVP, 1986.

Hermeneutics, Inerrancy and the Bible: Hermeneutics, Inerrancy and the Bible. Eds., E. D. Radmacher and R. D. Preuss. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984.

IBD: *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary.* Ed. J. D. Douglas. Leicester: IVP, 1980.

IDB: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible.* Ed. G. A. Buttrick. Nashville: Abingdon, 1962.

ISBE: *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia.* Ed. G. W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979.

LoF: ed. *Library of the Fathers.* Oxford: Henry Parker, various dates.

MWA: *Men, Women and Authority.* Ed. B. Edwards. Bromley: Day One, 1996.

PG: Migne, J.-P. ed. *Patrologia Graecae.* Paris: Montrouge, various dates.

PL: Migne, J.-P. ed. *Patrologia Latinae.* Paris: Montrouge, various dates.

Post Evangelical: The Post Evangelical Debate. G. Cray and others. London; Triangle, 1997.

RBI: *Renewing Biblical Interpretation.* Ed. C. Bartholomew. Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000.

RBMW: *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood.* Eds., J. Piper & W. Grudem. Wheaton: Crossway, 1991.

RoW: *The Role of Women.* Ed., S. Lees. Leicester: IVP, 1984.

Scripture and Truth: Scripture and Truth. Eds., D. A. Carson & J. D. Woodbridge. Leicester, IVP, 1983.

TDNT: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament.* Eds., G. Kittel & G. Friedrich. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, various dates.

Two Views: Two Views on Women in Ministry. Ed. J. R. Beck & C. L. Blomberg. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001.

WAB: *Women, Authority & the Bible*. Ed., A. Mickelsen. Downers Grove: IVP, 1986.

WiC: *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*. Eds., A. J. Köstenberger, T. R. Schreiner & H. S. Baldwin. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995.

WiM: *Women in Ministry: Four Views*. Eds., B. Clouse & R. G. Clouse. Downers Grove: IVP, 1989.

SECTION A:
SETTING THE SCENE

PREFACE

The present thesis is devoted to an analysis of evangelical interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:8-15 during the period from 1945 to the present: a period in which, while two broad and conflicting understandings of the passage emerged out of the previous consensus,¹ detailed interpretation moved from one of general agreement to a chaos of conflicting views. While this observation explains the title of this work it does not indicate the rationale for undertaking the study, the question being addressed, the methodology adopted to accomplish it or the thesis being argued. The following paragraphs are devoted to outlining each of these in turn.

Given the above phenomenon, the specific question addressed here asks what were the factors that prompted early consensus, what acted as catalysts to review and ongoing change and what shaped the developments in evangelical interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:8-15 up to the present.

This subject was chosen for a number of reasons: mostly personal and existential ones. As a student now in the sixth decade of life and having been involved in evangelical Christianity (in a variety of forms) from the 1950's, personal involvement in the period described here has been high. Moreover, discussions of the role of women have, during this period, often been regarded as central to the issue of evangelical self-definition. Avoiding such debates has been impossible and, at different times, in the last twenty-five years has prompted both personal research and publication of the results of such study. Lying at the centre of all such discussions have been discussions of 1 Timothy 2:8-15 since this passage has traditionally been seen as the "clear" text which, above all, determines the Scriptures' teaching on the role of women.

Latterly, teaching the Pastoral Epistles and biblical interpretation to students in an evangelical higher education college has brought into focus the fact that, for all the discussion, no substantial attempt has been made to "step back" and try to explain the factors and forces at work that lie behind the changes that have taken place in the interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:8-15. Hence the interest in the analysis of the passage as indicative of broader changes within evangelical interpretative practices. Further, it is believed that such an approach enables the study to be undertaken more objectively.

Two introductory areas require explanation. Firstly, Evangelicalism, as chapter one highlights, is a contested concept. It was, thus, necessary to establish that it was possible to define it sufficiently to give it analytical rigour. Secondly, while the need for exhaustive description might be unnecessary, it was essential that the alleged change from consensus to

¹ These are the complementarian or hierarchical and the egalitarian views. They are explained more fully below.

plurality could be established and the major areas of disagreement determined. This provided the rationale for chapter two and, it was decided, these tasks could be undertaken best by adopting two different approaches. The former was to offer a comparison between the major interpreters at the beginning and end of the period. The latter was to provide an analytical survey of the range of opinion in the intervening years. In this way, while some repetition was almost inevitable, evidence for the changes could be doubly established.

Turning more specifically to the research question and sub-questions, it was decided that the most effective means of analysis was to isolate the three sub-questions and devote separate sections of the thesis to them.

Exploration of the historical context that lay behind the early consensus quickly established two facts. First of all, the post-1945 consensus was in essential agreement with the view that had been held, almost universally, by the Christian church from the time of the Fathers. Secondly, lay and renewal-inspired movements throughout church history (as well as other prominent individuals) had often challenged this consensus. These observations shaped the emerging analysis: on the one hand evidence for such conclusions needed to be provided while on the other it was necessary to explain how a lay renewal movement, which Evangelicalism is, seemed so readily to assume the consensus view.

Chapter three emerged from these reflections. The foremost part was designed to demonstrate the basis for affirming the essentially universal consensus in the interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:8-15. The latter section seeks to show that lay and renewal movements and

individuals (especially those within Evangelicalism) had formerly challenged this consensus. Secondly, it seeks to find an explanation for why the movement, which in the light of these observations might have been expected to be sympathetic to the greater involvement of women in leadership within the church, adhered so strongly to the traditional consensus. It was concluded that an analysis of wider societal and ecclesiastical factors provided the major explanation for early post-Second World War adherence of Evangelicals to the traditional view.²

In exploring the factors that prompted and sustained a re-examination of and early re-interpretations of 1 Timothy 2:8-15 study indicated that, once again, changes in western society, developments within Evangelicalism itself and wider ecclesiastical trends appeared vital. Chapter 4 was written to support these claims.

Many of these factors remained present into the new century and these might have been traced in greater detail. However, rather than concentrate upon them, it was decided to devote the remaining analysis to exploring those factors which (stimulated by these wider changes) appeared to shape the subsequent debate once these catalysts for change had started to work. This prompted the question as to how this might best be undertaken. Three possibilities seemed to exist. Firstly, it might be possible to identify major themes and explore them systematically with little attention to any diachronic analysis. However, the weakness that was identified with this method was that it would divorce the discussion from the developments and radical changes that took place and which historical analysis might

² From this point onwards “the War” refers to the Second World War, unless otherwise indicated.

helpfully identify. This, it was concluded, would offer an insufficient explanation of the phenomena under discussion.

A second alternative was to adopt a full-blown historical analysis: to tell the story as it developed. Initial study suggested there was some value in such an approach. For example, it was possible to identify certain fairly discrete periods through which evangelical discussions of 1 Timothy 2:8-15 proceeded. Thus, until about 1969 there was no serious “new” discussion of the passage and until the later 1970s re-interpretations were little more than alternative explorations of the lexical and syntactic data. The following ten to fifteen years brought into focus the historical context that lay behind the text and the cultural ‘embeddedness’ of the author: the latter a factor which affected the question of the contemporary application of the passage. Finally, this period was succeeded by the present one in which questions generated by modern interdisciplinary hermeneutics have had an increasing impact. It was recognised that such observations could shape the order in which the various issues identified as important in the interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:8-15 were discussed. However, it was concluded that this method would tend to undermine the degree of rigour that could be applied to the analysis of each of these developments.

It was finally decided to adopt a third approach: one that provided a systematic and discrete analysis of the different factors while, at the same time, it attempted to provide historical “depth” to the discussion. It was recognised that this would sometimes engender some repetition (or over-emphasise the discreteness of each area subject) but this was deemed preferable to the significant losses to overall analysis that would occur if one of the

other two approaches were adopted. Consequently, the analyses in chapters five to nine identify five major factors that have shaped interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:8-15. Influenced by the observations made in the previous paragraph these are located in the order in which they first impacted the discussion of the text.

The last methodological question that remained was how best to undertake the discussion within each chapter. It was concluded that the most effective method would be a “zoom-lens” technique sensitive, at the same time, to major historical developments. The disadvantages of this approach were recognised as threefold. First of all, it would be difficult to avoid some overlap in discussion: historical periods are not as discrete as historians might wish. Secondly, discussion of the interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:8-15 might have to await sometimes-lengthy analysis of relevant context. Thirdly, such analyses might prove both brief and lacking in critical depth. Nevertheless, it was concluded that this method was preferable to any alternatives. The problems of historical periodisation are, anyway, inescapable, interpretation of a phenomenon demands adequate contextual analysis and the descriptions of the context, it was concluded, could be rendered adequate to the degree of analysis required to answer the question addressed in this thesis.

Finally, several general methodological issues require a brief reference. Firstly, a word is in order as to the selection of the period to be studied. The choice of the final date was easy: the present. The selection of 1945 was made on two grounds. The ending of the War in that year is widely recognised as an historical watershed (a fact reflected in numerous historical texts), and, as will be argued below, it also marks the point from which,

approximately speaking, Evangelicalism experienced an impetus to renewed commitment to scholarly endeavour and began to experience the general growth that characterised it world-wide for the remainder of the century.³

Once the period was defined, it became necessary to determine the parameters within which sources would be sought. Ultimately, the sources chosen are *mainly* published works by evangelical opinion-formers and scholars during the period. The reason for this choice was as follows: while it would have been possible to extend the net far wider and embrace sermons, parish magazines and the like, this would have proved an almost impossible task and, while it might have highlighted “grass-roots” opinion, would have deflected attention away from the most widely influential discussions and over-emphasised views that might prove to have been marginal and ephemeral. An explanation of the fact that most of these sources are in the English language is given at 1.4 below.

The thesis concludes that while two broadly identifiable approaches emerged in Evangelical interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:8-15 during the period under discussion, the detailed interpretative opinions on issues within the text moved from widespread consensus to considerable pluriformity in the years from 1945-2001. The thesis demonstrates that the early consensus was the result of social and ecclesiastical conservatism in the post-War period but that this consensus was undermined by changes in both these areas and the increasing confidence and openness of emerging evangelical scholarship. The resulting discussion shows that the particular shape these developments took were the result of changing attitudes in Evangelicalism itself: especially in theology (especially of Scripture)

On this see the statistics in P. Johnstone & J. Mandryk, *Operation World* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001), 3-5.

and interpretation. The latter is manifested in evangelical interaction with linguistics, historiography, cultural context and modern hermeneutical theory.