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Women in Ministry... the un-told story



Dear friends,

In July this year our church will discuss the issue of the ordination of women at its National Synod. The process of discussion has already been a long one. For some it has been confusing. Some people have found it hard to listen to people who think differently. For some people it has been exciting as agreement is found, or as they have gained new insights about God and God's church.

Why this package?

At the series of forums that were held to discuss the issue, we heard concerns raised and requests made for more information to be provided. This collection of papers attempts to address some of those concerns. We have not attempted to make this a "balanced" collection; it is instead a thoughtful collection from people who have reached the conclusion that Scripture does not prohibit the ordination of women, and an exploration of some of the evidence.

What is in the package?

Different people have different questions, and different ways of learning, and so we have included a range of materials from personal stories through to theological articles. In providing this range we hope that each person will be able to find pieces that are relevant for themselves. Think of it as a smorgasbord, and this letter as a guide to help you find something to your taste.

The articles have been colour-coded. The gold papers address factual questions and practical issues that have been raised: Which other Lutheran churches ordain women? Won't this split the church? Who looks after the children? There are a number of articles addressing specific theological questions on the issue. Of these, the green pieces of paper are shorter and easier to read—discussion starters. The blue sheets deal with the same issues by digging deeper. Another way into the discussion is to listen to the experiences of other people; some members of our church have shared pieces of their personal story with us. These appear on the violet sheets.

Using the package

We would be delighted if you would share this package with your congregation by promoting, distributing and discussing it. We have left the articles separate so that they can be individually distributed, pinned up on noticeboards, photocopied etc. Three of the articles include questions to show how these articles and any others in the collection might be suitable for small group discussions or Bible studies.

We hope you enjoy the collection, and enjoy sharing it with others.

Every blessing as you contribute to this fascinating journey of a church talking things through.

In Christ,

who gathers up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (Ephesians 1:10b)

Women's Ministry Network,
May, 2000

The Women's Ministry Network is a gathering of women and men of the Lutheran Church of Australia, who are concerned that women's gifts in ministry be recognised alongside those of men. Participants come from all states of Australia and New Zealand. Included in the group who worked to gather this collection are Linda Allan, Allie Ernst, Merla Garrett, Ingeborg Hickey, Margaret Hunt, Mitzi Joswig, Helen Lockwood, Peter Lockwood, Deborah Myers, Leigh Newton, Helene Schultz, Cynthia Spurr, Sandra Wittwer and Tanya Wittwer.

We wish to thank all those who have assisted us with the preparation and distribution of this package: those who were willing to write for us, or have their material reproduced; those who so generously supported the funding of this venture; Dr Ishmael Noko, Priscilla Singh and Ingrid Krähenbühl from the Lutheran World Federation for their assistance and encouragement; Greg Haar for his creativity and for his patience, Jeff Sawade for the photography and Barry Piltz for assistance with printing.

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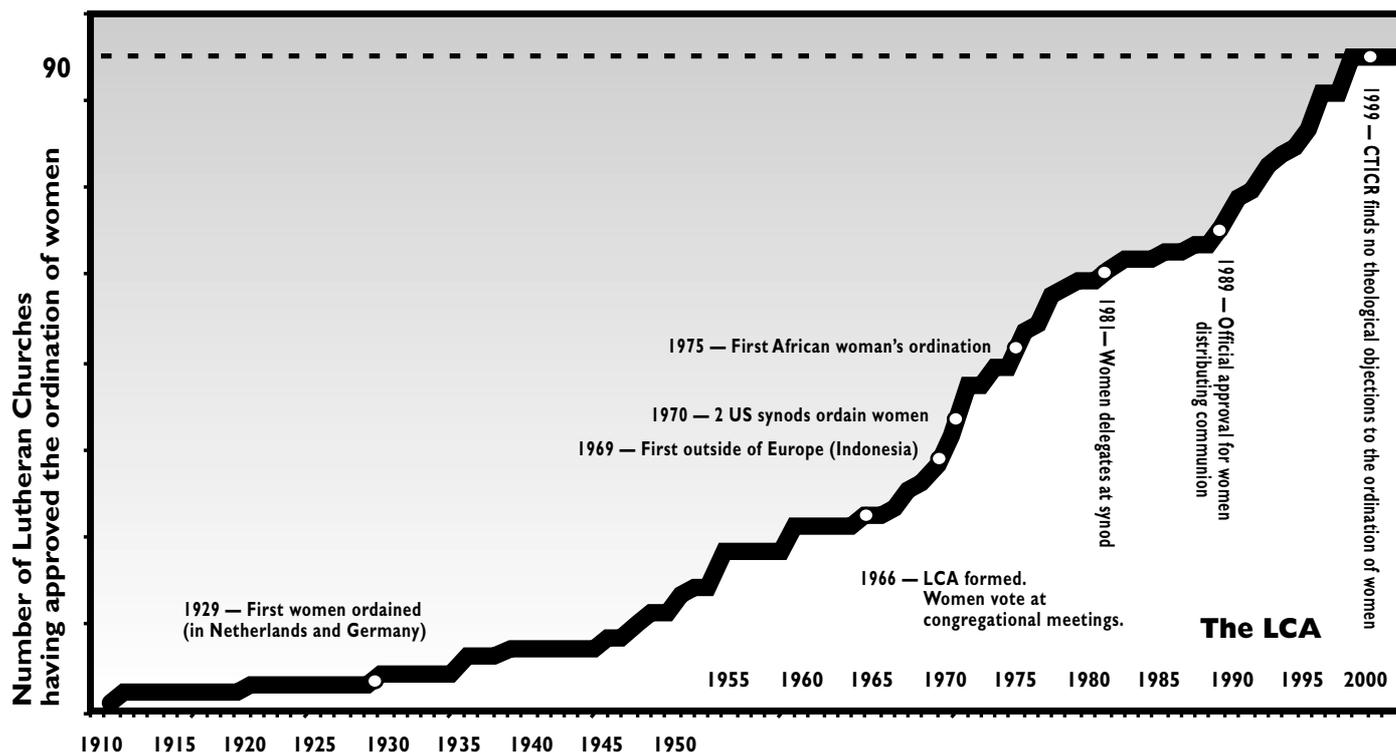


* Please note: Location of churches is approximate only - Data May 1999

Lutheran World Federation member Churches...

- Churches who ordain women (**bold**)
- Churches who are in the process of ordaining women (**bold italics**)
- Churches who do not ordain women (plain)
- Churches who do not ordain women but accept ordained women from abroad (*italics*)

The Ordination of Lutheran Women around the globe



Do other Lutheran churches ordain women?

Yes, Lutheran churches in many parts of the world ordain women. The first recorded ordination of a woman to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament in a Lutheran Church was in 1929, in the Netherlands.

What percentage of Lutheran churches ordain women?

The most reliable information we have is from the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). While the LWF does not include all the Lutherans world-wide, 94.2% of Lutherans are members of churches which do belong to the LWF (approximately 59.5 million out of 63 million in 1999). Of the 128 member churches of the LWF, 90 ordain women, 34 do not (and we are uncertain of the remaining 4). The map overleaf shows most of the member churches of the LWF, marked to show which ones do and do not ordain women.

There are 22 Lutheran churches with more than half a million members; 19 of these ordain women, and 3 do not (the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, the Malagasy Lutheran Church, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea).

Are there any women Bishops or Presidents in Lutheran churches?

The first woman to be elected President of her church was Ms. Ilse Labadie of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Suriname in 1986, and reelected in 1997. Ms Labadie passed away in June, 1999.

Since 1986 a number of women have served in this capacity:

- President Ms. Barbara Blum *Federation of the Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Switzerland and the Principality of Liechtenstein*
- President Rev. Victoria Cortez (1990) *Lutheran Church of Nicaragua Faith and Hope*
- Bishop Maria Jepsen (1992) *North Elbian Lutheran Church (Germany)*
- Bishop April Ulring Larson (1992) - *Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (USA)*
- Bishop Rosemarie Kohn (1993) *Church of Norway*
- Bishop Andrea DeGroot-Nesdahl (1995) - *Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (USA)*
- Bishop Sophie Petersen (1995) - *Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark*
- Bishop Lise Lotte Rebel (1996) - *Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark*
- President Rev. Josephine Tso (1996) - *Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hong Kong*
- Bishop Christine Odenberg (1997) *Church of Sweden*
- Bishop Caroline Krook (1998) *Church of Sweden*
- Bishop Rev. Dr. Margot Kaessmann (1999) - *Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hanover*
- Asst. Bishop Rev. Pang Ken Phin (1999) *Basel Christian Church of Malaysia*



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WHO WILL DO THE COOKING FOR THE FELLOWSHIP LUNCH?

Mary and Tim Muller

We have often heard people talking about practical concerns regarding women's ordination. They have been asking questions like: what happens with pregnancy and maternity leave? How can a woman pastor be on call or sufficiently available when she has children and a house to run?

In other fields of work, and also in churches that have been ordaining women for some time, these issues have been grappled with and solutions found. Over time the LCA has seen some changes for male pastors and their spouses in church and family life.

It seemed to be quite straightforward in times past. There was an expectation that the pastor (male) would be fully focussed on church life, always on call, and that his spouse would give her full support to make this happen. As well as running the home, and being the main carer for children, she was expected to be actively involved in church life, and to not have outside employment.

There was an expectation in many parishes that she would chair the women's guild, play the organ, organize the Sunday School. One pastor's wife shared with us how she had already been elected chair of the women's guild before arriving in the new parish, without any consultation with her. Pastor's wives often functioned as secretaries, typing bulletins, worship orders, parish messengers. The church office often functioned from the manse, without paid secretaries as many congregations now have. With the expectations placed on the pastor's wife, really the congregation employed two church workers for the price of one, without acknowledging that. A retired pastor recently shared that he wished that his salary could have been split with his wife - partly for tax purposes, but especially to acknowledge her major contribution to parish life. Even so, many pastor's wives found satisfaction in serving in this way, as partners with their husbands, even though there was rarely recognition for their service.

This was a neatly ordered way of life that mirrored society, where, for example, a woman working in a bank would resign from her employment when she married, and be a support to her husband in his career. It was the commonly held view that a married woman had her role to run the home, be the main carer for any children, and support her husband. Women were seen as ancillary to their husband's career, and rarely were seen as having a career of their own.

Some single women had "careers", but often in roles that supported men, who were seen as having the more important roles - like male doctors and female nurses, and male managers and female secretaries. Many people's interpretations of the Bible supported a strong male headship model for society, church and home.

Now many pastor's spouses in the LCA have careers, and there has been gradual acceptance by the church. These women now have more freedom to choose how they will be involved in the life of the church, like other lay people.

Regardless of the outside work the spouse is doing, we think that many church members still regard the pastor's work as having priority or precedence over the spouse's work, and that women are still seen as the main providers of care for the children of the family. These days there is much more consultation between pastor and spouse when a call comes to another parish, but it's generally the spouse who would give up her paid position and look for work in the new location. It's still quite rare that a pastor would follow his wife with her work move.

This kind of thinking raises further questions about women serving as pastors:

If the woman pastor is married, would her role now have priority over her husband's work, especially for being on call for the needs of the parish?

Would her career have priority when considering a call, and her husband need to follow her from parish to parish?

Would her husband take over being the main carer for any children?

Who would do the cooking/baking for the fellowship lunch?

Who would be on the cleaning roster?

Actually, these questions come from a "priority" way of thinking, with quite rigid views about roles: the man's career has priority over the woman's, who supports his work, but with the woman being a pastor, the work of the





ordained person has priority over that of the lay person, who supports the pastor.

We believe that there is a need to do away with priority thinking and to become more flexible, more partnership oriented. This means to cultivate partnership between male and female, and between pastors and lay people, including the pastor/spouse marriage. True, it is not as clear-cut as it used to be. It takes more energy to work it out, and to keep working it out, but it is far more freeing, more creative, allowing God more space to call people into the use of the gifts they have been given in family, church and society.

Its a challenge well worth grappling with.

We believe that introducing women's ordination into the LCA will be a major step to freeing up structures and challenging thinking to bring a new wind of freedom for proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and living it.

We have done some grappling ourselves.

We were open to Tim giving up pastoring for a while and Mary doing full time work, although at this stage we have not found this to be an easy option. Our most ideal, especially when the children were younger, would have been for both of us to work half time in our respective careers and to more equally share the parenting and the inside and outside household chores. At the present time, Tim is working full-time as a pastor, and Mary half time as a registered nurse. As our children are getting older our team approach to the mundane everyday duties now can include them, and that is exciting. We have tried to become more multi-skilled and we are bringing up our three boys the same way. Tim is very capable of running the place and caring for the children. If Mary is at work and Tim gets an emergency call out of regular hours (which rarely happens) he can arrange back up care for the children. Both of us believe that our life calling is firstly to each other and our children and then to our respective work; we have heard too many stories of pastor's children who have felt neglected by their pastor fathers. This doesn't mean that we take our work lightly, and that we don't work hard at it. Like many people in our busy technological world we are constantly juggling our time with each other, with our children, time to be by ourselves, time with work. Within this we are constantly communicating and reevaluating. It isn't always easy, but it certainly isn't impossible. Actually, we find it very enriching.

Every family needs to work out what is best for them.

We would like to share a little about some U.S. friends. Dianne* and Michael* are both pastors. After they graduated, Dianne worked full time in a Lutheran Domestic Violence Centre and Michael's position was a part time one in an inner city congregation.

When children came along Dianne cut back her hours for a while. Now that their children are at school, they have moved to another city, where Dianne is a full-time University Chaplain and Michael is a houseparent and part time musician. Down the track Michael may choose to accept a call to a full-time pastoral position.

Another couple, Melinda and James, are both pastors, with 2 children. Melinda works part-time in a parish team ministry and James works full-time as associate pastor to the local bishop.

Our friend Juliet is a pastor, who works full-time as a high school chaplain, and her husband Enrico is a houseparent, providing the majority of the care for their three children at this stage.

In an Anglican parish in Adelaide, South Australia, there is a clergy couple who share one salary, each working half time.

There are many ways of working which can vary for each family through the years.

We feel the LCA and its congregations needs to develop greater flexibility in how pastors are employed, regardless of any change in ordination practice. Should women be ordained there would need to be provision for maternity leave. While pregnancy and giving birth are not illnesses, the existing provisions for male pastors who need to have some time off for health reasons give us possible models for maternity leave.

Yes, increased flexibility leads to increased complexity, but there will also be more scope for the involvement of lay people in ministry, working in partnership with their pastors. And our LCA will be far richer when it allows the variety of experience and gifts that pastors of both genders will bring to ministry. Like other lay people, the female pastor' lay spouse will be free to choose his involvement in the church.

It's a wider picture that we believe does not in any way conflict with the Bible, but is a wise response to being in ministry and mission in our modern world.

**we have not used the real names of our friends*



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GOSPEL NOT GENDER

Peter Lockwood

- ***The ministry is about the salvation of all people, not the gender of the pastor***

God instituted the ministry so that people could be brought to faith through the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments (Augsburg Confession 5). Pastors are *servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries* (1 Cor 4:1), their office and role arising from nothing else and nothing less than God's desire that *everyone be saved* (1 Tim 2:4).

- ***The servanthood of pastors is gender-free***

The Lutheran doctrine of the ministry directs attention away from the minister to Christ who serves and shepherds the flock through his called and ordained representatives. When disciple's minds were preoccupied with thoughts of authority and leadership, Jesus showed that he was among them *as one who serves* (Luke 22:27; John 13:14). As servant first and foremost, the pastor's role is totally gender inclusive.

- ***Pastors represent Christ incarnate as a human, not Christ the male***

Lutherans claim that the authority the pastor has is the authority of the office, which is the authority of the word of God, not the authority of the pastor by virtue of qualities such as celibacy (a major issue at the time of the Reformation) or gender (the issue now). It is the Lutheran understanding that pastors stand in the place of Christ (in persona Christi, Luke 10:16). In the incarnation Christ became fully human. Both men and women are made in the image of God, but Jesus is the image of God par excellence. The most effective way for the pastorate to reflect Jesus Christ, the true image of God, to the church, is by including both men and women in the ranks of the pastorate.

- ***Paul's Jewish readers***

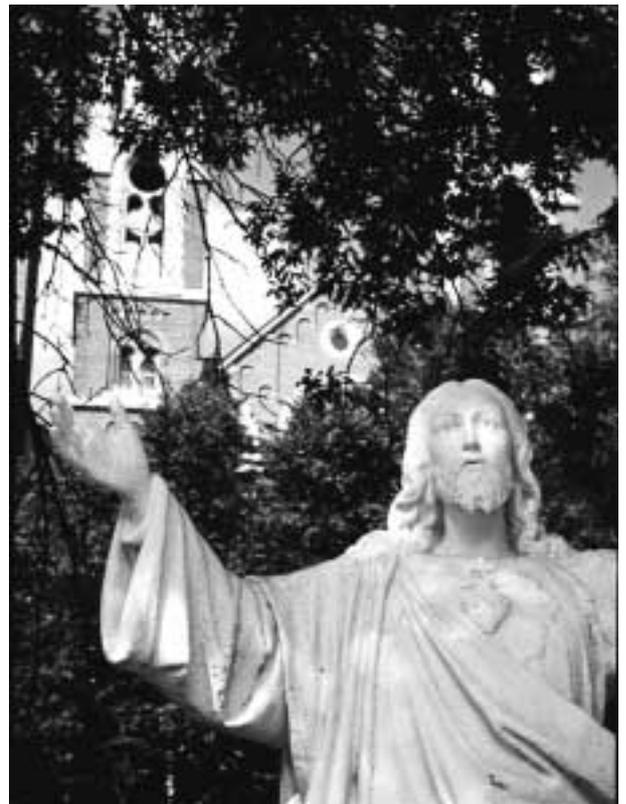
It is important to remember that Paul's words about the silence and submission of women (1 Cor 14:34,35; 1 Tim 2:11-15) were addressed to people who were brought up as Jews. It is widely acknowledged that Paul worked first and foremost among his own Jewish people, even though he is called the apostle to the gentiles. For Jewish folk it was unthinkable for a

woman even to become the disciple of a rabbi, let alone a rabbi, or teacher, in her own right. But Paul encouraged them to learn, to become disciples. Allowing them to teach would have brought the church into disrepute and hindered the spread of the gospel. Paul's primary concern was that the good news of Jesus spread among those like himself who had been raised as Jews (1 Cor 9:20); and at that time it was shameful for Jewish women to take a leading and teaching role in worship (1 Cor 14:35).

- ***Paul's words about women are the words of Paul the pastor, not Paul the apostle***

At Corinth and Ephesus (Timothy was a pastor at Ephesus) it appears that women believed that the gospel freed them to join the men in leading worship.

In calling them to be silent and submissive, Paul is giving pastoral advice for a specific time and place, not apostolic rules for the church of all time. First, neither text speaks of the ruling applying till Jesus returns. Secondly, when the word translated as *to permit* is used elsewhere in the New Testament, it applies only to one off situations (e.g. Mark 5:12,13 cf 1 Cor 14:34; 1 Tim 2:12). The same is true here; the command only applies *for the time being* and





to avoid offence (Augsburg Confession 28). In the same way, the apostles and the Holy Spirit prohibited the early church from eating meat with blood in it (Acts 15:28,29), another command designed to protect Jewish sensitivities, a command whose force lapsed after a short time. And thirdly, each of the texts we have traditionally used to forbid women from becoming pastors speaks of acceptable behaviour for Jewish-Christian believers at the time of writing (see especially 1 Tim 2:9). Sensitivities are totally different as we enter the 21st century. Today people are offended by practices that exclude women from positions in society at large and in the church. These practices restrict the gospel's free course.

• ***The spirit continues to break down barriers***

Males and females are equal before God, because they are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-28). Paul says that in Christ *there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male and female* (Galatians 3:28). But the social implications of this biblical truth are only worked out slowly and painfully. Greeks (foreigners) were made equals of the Jews at the time of the New Testament (Acts 15), the slave trade ended in England in the late eighteenth century thanks to Wilberforce and Pitt, and the 20th century saw the emancipation of women. The Holy Spirit leads the church into all truth (John 16:13).

• ***Women as Jesus' true disciples***

Numerous texts make it clear that Jesus shocked his contemporaries by his equal treatment of women (e.g. Mark 7:24-30; 14:3-9; Luke 10:38-42; John 4:27-42; 11:17-27; 20:16-18). But far more than that: when the male disciples failed to understand the central role the cross was to play in Jesus' ministry, and thought of discipleship as leading to positions of honour and glory, it was the women who understood that discipleship meant total self-giving in service to God and the neighbour (Mark 8:34-38; see Mark 12:41-44; 14:3-9). Women alone followed Jesus all the way to the cross (Mark 15:40,41); the men fell away and hid behind locked doors. Only women are said to serve Jesus (Mark 1:31; 15:41) in imitation of Jesus who served by giving his life as a ransom for all (Mark 10:45). The benefits of the service that Jesus offers to all people by dying on the cross are received in the service that is offered at the table of the Lord, which in turn flows into the table service (community service) offered by the women. The three forms of service are an

inseparable whole. To say that women may not officiate at the table of the Lord is to separate the inseparable. Here Mark is showing that women are qualified to carry on the ministry of our Lord in all respects.

• ***Enhancing the ministry***

If women could be ordained, the pool from which pastors are drawn would grow considerably. Also, it has been shown time and time again that when men and women are engaged in a common vocation (a mixed school staff, for example), communication and cooperation, resolving conflicts and sharing gifts for the benefit of the community, are far more in evidence than when the workforce are all of one sex. And finally, whereas it is said that the church offers ample opportunities for lay women to contribute their gifts and ministry to others, the public ministry of preaching and sacramental administration is denied them. More importantly, the church, consisting of young and old, and men and women, is denied their ministry and is the poorer for it.

Questions for Group discussion

1. Ask each person in the group to share an experience of a pastor they have had.
2. What was this experience like? Was it positive or negative? What was significant about it? What did you learn from it? What did you learn about God?
3. Read through the article, if you haven't yet done so. What do you think about what the article said? Did you gain any new insights? Are there parts which don't make sense to you? Is there anything you disagree with?
4. What do you think it would be like to have women pastors in the LCA? How do you think different people in your congregation would react if your pastor was a woman? What would be different? What would be the same?
5. Pray for the church as we discuss this issue, that we may be wise, faithful to the Spirit's leading, united with each other, courageous not fearful, compassionate, loving and patient with each other.



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HOW THE BIBLE LEADS ME TO SUPPORT THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN

Tanya Wittwer

Interpreting the Bible

How do we know what we know? How do we know about God, about God's will, about living as God's people? Our first learning is from those who incarnate God for us by showing us love and talking of a loving God our parents, maybe a pastor or teacher, a special friend, a partner. We also learn from being in the community of faith and participating in the liturgy and ritual of the church. We learn from the direct teaching of our parents, our Sunday School teachers, our pastors. And we learn from our own life experiences as we walk in relationship with God. Alongside all of these, the Bible shows us God's will. We believe it to be "divinely inspired", given to us by our loving God. But there is a problem.

The Bible doesn't always have clear answers to the questions we ask. Sometimes it will say nothing on a given subject and to obtain guidance we need to apply principles and understandings from other issues. Sometimes it will say something in one place, and then show a different, or even contradictory point of view in another. Because this is the case we need a set of guidelines on how to interpret the Bible.

There is no single set of guidelines accepted by all the theologians of our church. The guidelines that I use suggest that the God-intended Biblical message is most likely to be heard when

- the basic moral and theological principles of the whole Bible are given priority over specific statements that seem to contradict or sit in tension either with these principles or with other specific texts;
- the historical and cultural contexts of specific texts are considered seriously;
- we pay attention to the diversity within Scripture, so that the "conversation" that occurs on a given issue between the various books is listened to, and if a choice has to be made, priority is given to the message of the Gospels because they give direct witness to the life and teaching of Jesus Christ.

Stating these same guidelines from a negative

perspective, the God-intended Biblical message is least likely to be heard when:

- specific texts on a given subject are used legalistically to silence the over-arching moral emphases of the Bible (for example 1 Timothy 6:1-6 on slavery, given priority over "Love your neighbour as yourself", to argue that slavery should be continued);
- numerous texts, taken from here and there in the Bible, are sewn together into a patchwork quilt which doesn't take account of the different cultural fabrics and historical textures of each patch;
- it is assumed that all texts are of equal significance and must be harmonized into one, logical truth.

While each of us accepts the Bible and its teaching, in the task of understanding it and applying it to our lives we all begin from different places. Because we are immersed in our own society, we cannot always see the things we have learned from the society around us. Because they have become ingrained in us, we cannot always remember why we believe certain things.

Careful listening is needed if we are trying to understand the point of view of another person. Words may not mean the same thing to different people. For example, two people may say that they interpret the Bible "literally": one may mean by this that they try to discern the intended meaning of the author, which implies having an understanding of the culture into which it was written; another may mean they interpret it according to the meaning that seems natural to them.





The Bible and ordination

It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore the *Why?* of ordination. The Bible talks about leadership and ministry in a variety of places, and there are stories of particular leaders and specific people in specific ministries, but the practice of ordination is not something that the Bible specifically addresses. For the purpose of this paper it is accepted that ordination is the way the church sets aside people for public ministry.

What do we know about men and women in relation to God?

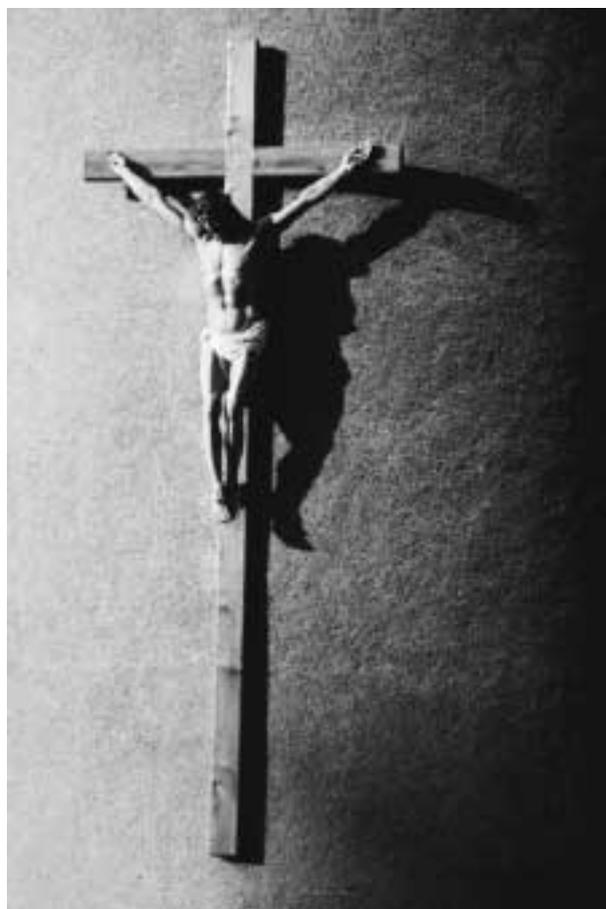
The early chapters of Genesis record stories of the beginning of humanity, which we understand to hold truth about God, the world, and our relationship to both. In the first creation account we read, *Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image..." ... So God created humankind in God's image, in the image of God were they created, male and female God created them.* (Genesis 1:26, 27, NRSV) The story makes the claim that the woman and the man are created in the image of God. Both are blessed, both are given stewardship over the earth.

In the second creation account we read that the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. Later we read *Then the Lord God said "It is not good that the man should be alone: I will make a helper as his partner".* (Genesis 2:7 & 18, NRSV) Translating from the Hebrew words into English, some of the meaning of the story is lost. The Hebrew tells us that the 'adam' is formed from the 'adamah'; the groundling is formed from the ground, the earthling from the earth. Later, when the helper ('ezer') is formed, the groundling becomes *ish* and *ishah*, male and female, husband and wife.

That the companion is to be "ezer", "helper", has been used as an argument that a woman's role is merely to assist her husband. The story is not saying this, but speaking instead about relationship, companionship and mutuality. The same word is used also of God; God is our 'ezer'.

What do we know about God in relation to male and femaleness?

As we know that women and men are created in the image of God, we know that God is not male or female. Sometimes it is hard to remember this when



we refer to God almost exclusively as *him* and *he*, and with words like *Lord*, *King*, *Master* and *Father*. It is useful to recall that there are also feminine images of God in the Bible. The image of God as the one who conceives, gives birth and nurtures young may be found in Isaiah 42:14, Job 38:29, Isaiah 66:13 and Deuteronomy 32:18. Luke 15:8-10 is the story of the woman searching for the lost treasure. The images of God from the stories that "sandwich" this one are familiar: the caring shepherd and the waiting father. Less familiar is the image of God with a broom.

Going back to the Hebrew language again, we can also see the feminine dimension of God's nature in the words for the Holy Spirit (*Ruach Hakodesh*) and for God's visible presence among the children of Israel (*Shekinah*). Both of these terms are feminine gender terms, reinforcing that God is not simply masculine.

Some people have felt that men are somehow more "God-like" than women, and therefore that women should not serve as leaders in public ministry. This



is not a Biblical concept. We can only catch a glimpse of the true nature of God from the images available to us, and we confine and limit our understanding if we look only at the masculine images. We limit our understanding of God, and we limit our understanding of ourselves.

Women in the Old Testament

Alongside the great and vulnerable men of the Old Testament are great and vulnerable women. Miriam provides leadership to the Exodus people together with her brothers. Deborah is a judge of Israel. Ruth stands with David as an ancestor of Jesus.

Jesus and Women

Jesus demonstrates in his actions and relationships a respect for all people, regardless of gender. Stories of women being healed and asking for healing for others sit together with similar stories featuring men. He uses parables from the daily lives of women as well as of men. Jesus discusses theology with men and with women—remember the Samaritan woman and Mary (Martha's sister).

While the twelve apostles were all men, a larger group of disciples, men and women, travelled with him and shared in the ministry (eg Luke 8:1-3). Both men and women are present throughout the passion accounts, and together men and women accompany Jesus body to the grave. In each of the Gospel accounts, it is women who are first given the news of the resurrection, to be shared with everyone.

Women and the early church

From the glimpses of the work of the early church that we catch by reading the letters of the New Testament, we know that women as well as men were actively involved in leadership and in the support of the Christian movement. Paul relied on women for practical and spiritual support in his missionary journeying. Lydia's house, for example, was the base for the first congregation. In Corinth, Priscilla worked as a colleague of Paul. Phoebe is described as deacon, friend and helper.

It is also clear that the liberating power of the risen Christ, in his followers, led to situations which grated on some of the people in the congregations, and perhaps caused concern regarding the perception of those outside of the church. There are some passages in Paul's writings, often quoted as part of an anti-



women's ordination discussion, which may be examples of this (eg 1 Corinthians 14:34-35). As was stated at the beginning of this paper, where there is an apparent contradiction between specific texts and overarching principles, the overall themes of the Bible are given precedence.

It does seem clear that despite local difficulties, the early church shared the vision written in Paul's letter to the Galatians (3:27,28) *As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.*

What is the nature of ordained ministry?

Another of the over-arching principles found in Scripture is that the leadership to which God calls is a leadership of humility and service. The pastor who proclaims God's word and administers the sacraments is doing so as a representative of Christ. The style of leadership is clearly demonstrated by Jesus when he washes the feet of the disciples: *"For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you". (John 13:15).*

On the basis of my understanding of the wholeness (and brokenness) of humanity in God's sight, of a God who epitomises the best of maleness and femaleness while being beyond either, and of the nature of the church and of service to that church, I believe that God calls women into the service of ordained ministry, as well as men.



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THE GOSPEL AND WOMEN IN THE MINISTRY

Norman Habel and Shirley Wurst

Introduction

The role of women in the ministry is an important issue within the Lutheran Church of Australia. The Church's document, *Women in the Ministry*, was produced to facilitate study and discussion of this issue. This summary is intended as a constructive contribution to a candid and prayerful exploration of women's role in the ministry of the LCA in the late twentieth century.

There are many ways of approaching this issue. Our approach is to apply the Gospel principle to the question of the role women in the ministry of the Lutheran Church of Australia.

The Gospel principle

- An essential Lutheran starting point for considering the role of women in ministry in the Lutheran church is the Gospel.

What is the Gospel?

- Applying the Gospel principle outlined above involves exploring the role of women in all facets of ministry so that the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is promoted and enriched.

Women and Gifts of the Spirit

- Any doctrine or practice which limits any of the gifts of the Spirit to people of either sex diminishes the Gospel by establishing a human law that attempts to limit the power of the Gospel.

Women and Ministry

- To limit the call to ministry to any particular group or sex is to attempt to define and limit the field of the Spirit's activity.
- Each ministry in the name of Christ is a ministry of affirming, empowering service, not authoritative control.
- Any rule which seeks to limit the opportunity of any group within the body of Christ to serve to the fullness of her or his God-given capacity promotes the law and diminishes the Gospel.

Women and the New Creation

- Any regulation that permits only men to stand before God and lead worship belongs to the old dispensation of the Law and diminishes the Gospel.
- Any interpretation which reasserts the subordination of women in accordance with the old dispensation diminishes the Gospel in the new creation and revives the old order, and curse, of the Law.

Women and Ordination

- Women have gifts of the Spirit which enable them to perform these functions in the service of the Gospel. To exclude them from this service is to limit the ministry of the Gospel.

Conclusion

Including women in the full range of ministries in the church of Christ promotes and enriches the Gospel of Christ. Women are called by the same Spirit of Christ to serve in the ministry; the Spirit bestows the same gifts on women to perform this ministry. Any rule which limits the ministry of women is effectively a law and thus carried over from the old dispensation and therefore not Gospel.

- Faithfulness to the Gospel demands that we enable women to enjoy the full possibilities for ministry in our church, including the public ministry of word and sacraments.

Anything less is *not acting consistently with the truth of the Gospel* (Galatians 2; 14, NRSV).





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AN EQUAL PARTNERSHIP

He shall rule over you

Peter Lockwood

It is said, on the basis of 1 Corinthians 11:3 and other NT texts, that there is a biblical order of creation by which women are to be subordinate to men.

The texts used to support this notion invariably appear in what is known as household codes, reflecting traditional understanding at the time of writing rather than an unbudging order of creation. Also the subordination of women is not argued independently, to establish it as a fixed biblical principle. Rather Paul employs the contemporary position on the role of women to support the main point he is making, that women should wear something on their heads during worship (11:2-16). When we turn to the creation and fall stories in Genesis 1-3 it becomes clear that the Bible cannot be used to support the notion of the subordination of women.

Men and women are both made in the image of God (Gen 1:26-28). The fact that Eve is made after Adam in the second creation account cannot be used to argue for her secondary status. The Genesis 2 account is told to emphasise at every point the fact that the two are made for one another, to complement one another, to serve one another, and to live together in a partnership of mutual interdependence. Just as the Bible is clear that it is not only men who are made from the dust of the earth, but also women (eg Ps 104:29), the dust symbolising their fragility and their mortality, so also it could be said (even though the Bible doesn't) that men have been taken from the ribs of women, symbolising their togetherness as one flesh.



Doesn't the fall story make it perfectly clear that men are meant to exercise dominion over women, and that women are called to be submissive? Doesn't God punish Eve after the fall with these words, he (your husband) shall rule over you? (3:16).

There can be no doubt, for Eve's misdemeanours God punishes her with desire for her husband, coupled with his rule over her. What does this mean? Is it a heavenly and perpetual decree that men shall have dominion over women, or husbands over wives? It has certainly been read that way often enough, and might I say harmfully enough.

What does this mean for us?

- In answering this vital question it is helpful to look at Genesis 4:7. There God tells a vengeful Cain that sin is couching at the door; its desire is for him, but he must master it. This is the only other occurrence of the word 'desire' in Genesis, and it is employed in closest association with the verb 'to rule, or have dominion'. So the two words desire and to have mastery both appear in Genesis 3:16 and 4:7. What does this mean for us? Sin's desire in the case of Cain is the desire to gain the upper hand; that is, for vengeance to take control of his life. Cain is counselled to master the desire of sin.

- A number of things become clear. First, a battle is raging in his heart between two opposing forces: sin and conscience, human nature and the will of God, bad and good. Call the opponents what you like. Secondly, the desire has little to do with sexual desire, although that is certainly the force of the word when used in the Song of Songs.

- If we now look at Genesis 3:16, it follows that the author is speaking first about Eve's desire to dominate Adam rather than her physical desire for the brute; and then the author is acknowledging the fact that the male will generally get the upper hand over the female throughout history, physically, economically, and politically. How else can we read St Peter's statement that the woman is 'the weaker sex'? (1 Pet 3:7, NRSV).



What are the implications of this understanding?

- This interpretation seems to suggest that the so-called punishments of Genesis 3 are nothing but descriptions of the common lot of humankind. Surely God's words to Adam and Eve are also to be understood as punishments, and not merely as observations about human nature and behaviour. At this point the verbs are particularly unhelpful when looking for an unequivocal answer. The imperfect tense that is used is the simple future, and hence the verbs do in fact describe the way things will be for ever and a day (or the way things have been from day one); but the imperfect is also used for a requirement, and hence in this context a punishment. It is not a case of either-or, but a case of both description and prescription.

- Does that mean that male dominion is not only an accurate description of the human lot from time immemorial, but is also prescribed by the fall account and therefore needs to be adhered to strictly, or lovingly by those who think that that is possible? Genesis 3:16 describes perfectly the perennial battle of the sexes while at the same time prescribing, as Eve's punishment for her (equal) part in the fall, the destiny of constantly coming off second best in that battle.

- Now look at the other punishments: increased pain in child-bearing and an increase in the number of pregnancies (the literal Hebrew), men wresting their living from the accursed soil, which has been depleted in energy and infested with thorns and thistles, with sweaty brows, and a final destiny in the dust from which all humans were made. If these are eternally decreed, they are not to be challenged or overturned. Calm resignation to God's immutable will would mean no weedicides (I agree), no air-conditioned tractors (I disagree), no pain relief in childbirth (likewise), and no birth control (see the punishment consisting also of an increase in the number of pregnancies, v 16). All of these, and more, have been enforced at different times, and in some cases to this day, throughout the history of the church. But the punishment with the greatest resilience has been male rulership. The punishments have been borne and lifted from us in Christ, and hence they no longer apply. We are free to attack all

manifestations of male control and mastery over women with the same vigour that we attack the weeds in our garden.

- The male-female equality and mutual servant-hood of creation and fall have yielded in some societies to matriarchal patterns, in others to patriarchal patterns, and in others to genuine attempts at equal partnership. In Christ, none of these suffices, not even egalitarianism, which leads inevitably to a sense that I am not getting my fair share, or my partner is not putting in equally. The male-female relationship patterned on Christ involves mutual servant-hood, whereby we outdo one another in showing love. This is radically a-cultural or trans-cultural. In Christ there is a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). Punishments following the fall have been borne by him and lifted from our shoulders. In him the mutual servant-hood of creation is restored. The one who washed his disciples' feet (Jn 13:5) and said he was among us as one who serves (Lk 22:27) has set the new agenda.

- There definitely is, in my opinion, a biblically sanctioned order of creation, that has humans under God tending the created realm. Within the human realm the focal authority figure is the parent (see the fourth commandment), with parenthood patterned on the ultimate rule of God. All positions of authority within a given society are said, according to ancient church tradition, to be situated in the place of the parent (Latin: *in loco parentis*), not in the place of the father, or men in general. The church is the precise place where leadership is demonstrated for the world to see in sacrificial servant-hood and loving parenthood.



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DISCIPLES, COMPANIONS, WITNESSES: Women in the gospels

Peter Lockwood

One of the main arguments used to oppose women's ordination is that Jesus only called men to be his disciples and he only commissioned male apostles. Surely Jesus would have included women in their ranks if he had wanted women to become pastors in the church. To this it must be said that the twelve disciples do not represent the clergy in embryo and hence God's design for a male clergy. They are first and foremost the new people of God, as the twelve tribes of Israel were God's people of old. The call and commission of the disciples is the call and commission of the church, not the clergy. Secondly, not one word from Jesus' lips could be read as excluding women from the public office or as a call to submit to male clergy. And thirdly, Jesus and the evangelists who record his ministry take great pains to portray an array of women disciples in a vastly more positive light than the twelve men, in what can be read only as a deliberate attempt to counteract the privileging of males at the time of Jesus. Their discipleship is practised at his direction, their exercise of apostleship at his behest, and their servanthood in imitation of their Lord.

Overview

It is generally acknowledged that Jesus accords women high regard during his earthly ministry. He shows inordinate compassion in the face of marginalisation and judgmentalism (eg Luke 7:36-50; John 8:1-11). Women are privileged to hear the most profound revelations of Jesus' person and work. No man is present when the woman at the well hears Jesus say he is the source of the water of eternal life (John 4:13,14), or that he is the Messiah, in fact God

incarnate (4:25,26). Martha is alone when Jesus tells her that he is the resurrection and the life (11:25). And these women respond to what they hear. Martha makes a triple confession of Jesus, as 'the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world' (11:27). Unlike Peter's confession of Jesus as Messiah (Mark 8:29) and Son of the living God (Matt 16:16), Martha's more complete confession requires no correction and no addition. From her lips comes the profound acknowledgment that God has entered this world's history by becoming a human being in the person of Jesus, the confession that calls into question the docetism of John's audience. John's gospel shows no male disciple leading people to faith in Jesus through their witness to the word of life, as Jesus prays his disciples would do (John 17:20,21); but the testimony of the Samaritan woman leads a large number of Sychar villagers to Christian faith (4:28-30,39). The annunciation (Luke 1:26-38) could well be understood as a call narrative, the call of Mary to bear God's Son for the world, and to name him Jesus so the world may acknowledge him as saviour (Luke 1:31). Nobody has ever been called to a more exalted office, nobody has ever borne Jesus' body and blood more intimately, nobody has named him more decisively.

With the exception of the beloved disciple (John 19:26), women were the only followers of Jesus who accompanied him through the agony of the crucifixion (John 19:25; Matt 27:55; Mark 15:40), and then lovingly attended his burial (Matt 27:61; Mark 15:47). The risen Jesus appeared first to Mary of Magdala, and then commissioned her to bring the news of the resurrection to the other disciples (John 20:11-18; see also Matt 28:7; Luke 24:10). Junia may have been prominent among the apostles (Rom 16:7), but from the outset Mary of Magdala has been known as the apostle of the apostles. She is usually the first one named in lists of Jesus' female followers (eg Mark





15:40; 16:1); she is the first lamb named by the risen Lord Jesus and counted as a member of his flock (John 20:16). No elaboration is required of the numerous gospel stories where women are held up as examples of faith and fervent prayer, hope and sacrificial love. Let two accounts suffice, however, of attempts to degrade gospel women in the church's history. Typically Mary of Magdalene has been called a prostitute and the Samaritan woman a person of dubious morality, despite there being not one shred of evidence in support. And to this day Bibles title the story at John 8:1-11, "the woman caught in adultery", when it is a story of scribes, Pharisees and elders caught in their hypocrisy.

Reservations

Honoured, exemplary, privileged, called to fill vital roles in Jesus' ministry, so the women of the gospels; but the church has never felt comfortable. At Sychar the disciples 'were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?"' (John 4:27). Embarrassed silence accompanies Jesus' engagement with women. Alternatively, their testimony is dismissed as inauthentic; their right to preach the gospel is abrogated. 'These words seemed to [the male disciples] an idle tale, and they did not believe them' (Luke 24:11). As then, so today, it is hard to handle Jesus' handling of women; and we quickly grasp at Paul's reference to a command of the Lord supposedly forbidding their public speaking (1 Cor 14:37).

Discipleship in Mark

Each facet of Jesus' relationship with women mentioned above provides basis for an extended demonstration that Jesus could not and would not exclude women from the public ministry as we practise it today. But here I shall look at one aspect only of one gospel only, discipleship in Mark. To be a disciple, according to Mark, is to follow in the footsteps of Jesus all the way to the cross, footsteps marked by self-denial

and giving one's life (8:34-38). On the way the true follower will be made into a fisher for people (1:17).

This can be done only as one fully understands Jesus' person and work: messianic king, suffering servant, giving his life as a ransom for many (1:11; 10:45). In the gospel according to Mark, only women get discipleship right.

Male disciples

Those called to follow are twelve men (3:13-19). They make poor followers. They constantly misunderstand his parables (4:13), and their eyes fail to see, their ears to hear, and their hearts to understand the miraculous feedings (8:14-21). Finally Peter declares Jesus to be the Messiah (8:29), but together with James and John and the others he thinks only of a victorious king who will confer on his followers positions of power and prominence (8:31-33; 9:30-32; 10:32-45).

King yes, suffering servant no. Theology of glory yes, theology of the cross no. Bartimaeus is given his sight and follows Jesus on the way (10:52), but the disciples lack what it takes to endure to the end (13:13). One betrays him (14:10,11,43-46). Another denies him (14:26-31; 14:66-72). They sleep and sleep again instead of staying awake and watching with him during his anguish in the garden of Gethsemane (14:32-42).

And after Jesus' arrest the disciples with one accord desert him and flee (14:50), rather than following him to the cross during his dread night of greatest need.

Female disciples

One could be forgiven for thinking that Mark does not think of the twelve with pride. Who then does measure up to Jesus' high standards, if his true ambassadors are to serve in imitation of their Lord? A typical Markan device is to tell two matching stories separated by significant material, or to separate the beginning and the end of a





story by means of additional narrative that helps interpret the story. A central feature of Mark's passion narrative is Jesus' eschatological discourse in chapter 13, where he describes the signs of his coming and speaks of the hardships to be endured by his followers before his return in glory. Among other things Jesus says that 'the good news must first be proclaimed to all nations' (13:10) and 'the one who endures to the end will be saved' (13:13). These are key words, key expressions. The discourse is bracketed by stories of two women, the poor widow who spends everything she has when she makes her offering at the temple (12:41-44) and the woman who anoints Jesus in Bethany (14:3-9). Numerous parallels indicate that the stories are paired, such as the references to poverty and abundance, extravagant giving, and the bewilderment and criticism of the onlookers.

More significantly, however, both stories connect intimately with Jesus' descriptions of true discipleship. The poor widow spends her whole livelihood (12:44); she gives her life, which is precisely what Jesus calls his disciples to do (8:35) in imitation of himself (10:45). Here is the self-sacrificing commitment of discipleship.

What about the understanding of Jesus' person and work? That is reflected in the anointing at Bethany. The woman acts as an Old Testament prophet, anointing the designated king upon the head before his enthronement (eg 1 Sam 10:1; 16:13). But she goes beyond the crown and also looks to the cross. Unlike Peter she understands Jesus' messianic authority also in terms of suffering and death. The broken jar is a symbol of death (Eccl 12:6; Jer 13:12-14). Bodies were anointed for burial. And Jesus himself tells the woman's male critics that the woman 'has anointed my body beforehand for its burial' (14:8). The disciples, who were called to lose their lives in service (8:35), sharply criticise the woman for the wastage (literally: the loss) of the ointment

(14:4). She has spent everything she has for Jesus. The irony is not to be overlooked. The woman has done what the disciples are called to do, and they criticise her for doing so. The woman's understanding of Jesus' person and work is perfect, embracing as it does both crown and cross; and her commitment to him is complete. Here we have discipleship that takes the disciple all the way to the foot of the cross. Under the cross stand the women who replace the men as Jesus' disciples, an inner three consisting of Mary Magdalene, another Mary, and Salome, and many other women in addition (15:40,41). Mark carefully notes that they followed him all the way from Galilee to Jerusalem, not forsaking him before the end like the men.

Female servants

In serving him, the women serve as Jesus served (Mark 10:45; 1:31; 15:41). Not once is the reader told that the twelve disciples served. But a specific connection is made between Christ's sacrificial death on the cross, the eucharist, and the table service rendered by the women. Christ's service offered on the cross is reflected in the table service rendered by the women, where bread is offered, and the table service of the eucharist, where the bread of life is offered. It is no accident that women alone are described as serving. Mark has depicted them as true 'servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries' (1 Cor 4:1). They alone are shown doing what disciples are called by Christ to do (15:41).

Female witnesses

The final dimension of discipleship according to Mark is proclamation of the good news of Jesus to all the nations (13:10). Proclamation consists of clear and living evidence that Jesus' followers are willing to give themselves in total self-sacrifice; this lived proclamation results in the acclamation of Jesus as Son of God and messianic king. In the discourse about final things





Jesus speaks in rapid succession of proclaiming the gospel to all the nations (13:10) and enduring to the end (13:13). Before and after the discourse the reader is shown two women who are willing to give their all, to spend their life, and to endure to the end. The manner in which discipleship is manifest is the most important ingredient in gospel proclamation, according to Mark. Good news, proclamation, and the whole wide world are then brought together delightfully in the final verse of the story of the woman at Bethany. 'Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her' (14:9). Just as their life of costly service is the women's greatest sermon, the death of Jesus is also his greatest witness to the good news. One representative of the nations of the world, the centurion at the foot of the cross, acclaims Jesus as Son of God simply because the way that Jesus dies prompts him to do so (15:39).



Lest we think of the women exclusively as silent witnesses, however, Mark tells us that after the women have seen Jesus on the cross and have seen the tomb where his body is laid, they also see in the tomb a young man clothed in white who tells them to proclaim to the disciples the resurrection of Jesus who will be seen in Galilee (15:40,47; 16:4,5,7). They are commissioned witnesses of the resurrection. Their voice is to be heard, now as much as then.

A final word

Then again, lest we think of women too highly, at the expense of men, Mark ends his gospel with delightful irony: 'So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid' (16:8). Balance is restored. Women are no less fallible than men, but also no less called to serve at table and to proclaim the good news by self-denying discipleship and public proclamation.



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TEXT AND CONTEXT

Rolph Mayer

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The Scriptural authority for the case against women's ordination is based on I Cor. 14:34-35 and I Tim. 2:11-15. In stating the case for the ordination of women, I too accept these passages as inspired by God, and therefore authoritative.

But how is it possible for someone to accept them as such and still be pro women's ordination when the words of St. Paul are so clear? The answer lies in that, in interpreting Scripture one must look not only at what the words mean literally in isolation, but also at their context and their purpose or goal.

The context of I Cor. 14 which will be the main focus, was briefly, that the worship was disorderly and bringing the new faith into disrepute. Paul's solution to this problem included the silencing of women (wives).¹

Those who oppose women's ordination say that women should therefore remain silent because the texts say so; and the texts say so because for women to teach and preach the apostolic word in public is contrary to God's order.²

Those who favour the ordination of women say that Paul commanded the silencing of women for the sake of orderliness and cultural appropriateness, so that the Gospel be heard and not publicly discredited. To achieve these goals, in the Corinthian situation, silencing the women was necessary.

In today's society, public speaking by women is neither culturally offensive nor conducive to disorder. Public preaching of the Gospel by women does not therefore discredit that Gospel today. Some say not to allow women to preach is more likely to discredit the church and its Gospel. In other words, the goals of I Cor. 14 may be more effectively achieved today by doing the very opposite of what was necessary then.

Because this may look like twisting the truth, let us take another example: Psalm 15. The psalmist asks "Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary?"

One answer is those who lend money without charging interest. Does this mean that the LLL³ by charging interest on loans is ungodly? We obviously need to look at both the context and the goal of the text. In the psalmist's time, the rich lent money at high interest to the poor when they were in desperate straits, and then foreclosed on them when they were least able to pay. The money lenders were loan sharks. The goal of the psalm was a better deal for the poor, and the means to achieve this was to have no interest on loans.

In summary:

1. The context

Oppression of the poor resulting in loss of land and freedom

2. The means

No interest charged

3. The goal

So that the poor may have a fairer deal

The goal is the significant point of the text.

Now let us look at the LLL example:

1. The context

Manse dwelling pastors or their widows have no roof over their heads when they retire/die.

2. The means

LLL lends money at 5% interest for housing

3. The goal

So that retired pastors or their widows can have a roof over their heads.

If the LLL were to take God's Word literally and not charge interest, its lending power to pastors and their widows would be severely restricted as capital would soon run out. By charging interest, that is, by doing the opposite of what God's Word says literally, the LLL by fulfilling its intention obeys God's Word.



Let's look again at the context of I Cor. 14. It seems that the unrestricted behaviour of women in public worship, speaking and interrupting even their husbands as the Spirit allegedly moved them, resulted in chaotic worship and cultural offence.

Already in I Cor. 11 Paul refers to shameful, disgraceful, and dishonourable behaviour. One can assume that Paul in I Cor. 14 wanted to silence women because their behaviour was also seen as shameful and dishonourable.

Cultural norms are extremely powerful in all societies and are the fabric that holds society together. In Aboriginal or Asian societies for example, there are strong taboos relating to who may speak to whom and how and when and where. To break these taboos can both shock and alienate.

Throughout the Epistles, both Paul and Peter emphasise that Christians must not do anything that will bring them and therefore the Gospel into disrepute. They know only too well the readiness of people to believe the worst about any new, minority religion.

But does a woman pastor today, who preaches a well-crafted sermon in a well-ordered liturgy, bring the Church into disrepute in the eyes of the community?

Is the silencing of women in our cultural situation therefore necessary to achieve the goals of I Cor. 14: 26-36: namely, orderliness, sharing the Gospel, encouraging all, and bringing peace?

But what about verses 37-40 where Paul writes that his words are a command of the Lord? Surely, what the Lord commands for his church is for all time?

In terms of goals, yes. But in terms of means, as we have already seen, not necessarily.

So, the command of the Lord taken literally in one place and time may not be valid in another, except in terms of its goal.

My comments also apply to I Tim. 2 where in verse 4, Paul outlined goals: that all may be saved and come to know the truth. The testimony of the lifestyle of Christians is an important means to achieving these goals. The words "women are to be modest and sensible about their clothes and to dress properly" (v.9) relate to cultural appropriateness. We can assume that the same purpose lies behind v.11: women should learn in silence.

Thus to ordain women is not to ignore these texts, or to declare them irrelevant, but to take them seriously and regard them as authoritative in terms of the goal "that everything must be done in a proper and orderly way."

Questions for group discussion:

1. a) Why are some customs in your congregation, which were previously considered to be inappropriate for women, now common practice? Eg women wearing hats; pregnant unmarried girls making public confession; women publicly purified following childbirth; women not: receiving communion if obviously pregnant, reading the lessons, distributing communion, voting; being synodical representative, being congregational treasurer or Sunday School superintendent.

b) Can you think of other customs that have discriminated against women or restricted their participation in congregational life?

c) Can you think of customs that have discriminated against men or restricted their participation in congregational life?

2. If you knew that all the restrictions related to the above customs were based on biblical prohibition would that change your view about any of them? On what grounds do you make that distinction? (You may need to check with your pastor for the relevant biblical references.)

3. The writer asks the question "Does a woman pastor today, who preaches a well-crafted sermon in a well-ordered liturgy, bring the Church into disrepute?" What is your opinion? Share your ideas in the group.

(March, 1996)

¹ It is not clear from the Greek text whether women in general or only wives are to be silent.

² There is a divine order and worship should reflect that divine order which is valid for all time. Therefore, regardless of time or cultural change, that divinely ordained order must be preserved.

³ Lutheran Laypersons League.



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CHURCH FATHERS, WOMEN AND ORDINATION

Maurice Schild

In the last chapter of Romans we read greetings extended to quite a number of early Christians, among them nine women: Phoebe, Priscilla, Mary, Junia, Tryphana, Tryphora, Julia, and the mother of Rufus and sister of Nereus. Pastor Ray Schulz made the case for Junia being a woman apostle.¹

Women were certainly involved in early church structures, but as the church became more hierarchical and under the influence of the early church fathers, women disappeared from church history. Her story was not written down; his story has survived.

Today these church fathers are perceived to have been less than kind to women in general. They were influenced not only by the Bible, but also by Greek philosophy, and this tradition including its misogyny, was passed on.

In the Middle Ages the idea that a woman is somehow less than a complete male and therefore cannot be ordained as Christ's representative, came into Catholic thinking.

In the light of women's perceived inferiority it is interesting to look at a woman mystic of that era, Hildegard of Bingen. She went on preaching tours, and advised princes, bishops and popes, and her

impressive works on theology and vision, mineralogy and science, art, music and poetry were included in the published works of the Fathers. There were also other women mystics during this period: Elisabeth, Gertrude, Julian, and Margery.

Although the Middle Ages gave us the spiritual heritage of women mystics including Hildegard of Bingen, from our point of view there are many things that disturb us about the Church in this period.

Many of the practises of the church with its male clergy neither communicated the gospel nor encouraged participation. For example, worship services in Latin, a language the common people could not understand; no sermon; no general prayer; prayers rushed and mumbled²; a tinkling bell to indicate the moment of transubstantiation; and inaudible words of institution.

Why didn't the reformers also deal with the question of women and the ordained ministry? It was not the question they were looking at, and the culture of their day was not demanding a decision, as it had not been sensitised to this issue. Similarly, the church's stand against the practice of slavery was still in the future.

The reformers had a range of opinions on the subject of women. Calvin, for example, abandoned the view of woman as 'a defective male'. Calvin is the only 16th century theologian who viewed women's silence in church as determined by human rather than divine law. Calvin did not ordain women, but envisaged it as a possibility for the church in the future.

Martin Luther had no time for the widespread misogyny and denigration of women common to his age. His positive view of woman did not however lead him, or the church that followed him, to ordain women despite his statements about the priesthood of all believers. In 1523 he wrote

...there is no other proclamation of the Word than that which is common



Discussion starter



to all... no other priesthood than that which is spiritual and universal... the ministry of the Word is the highest office in the church... it is unique and belongs to all Christians, not only by right but by command.³

Luther limited the pastorate to men for the following reasons:

St Paul says in Gal. 3:28, you must pay no attention to distinctions when you want to look at Christians. You must not say: "This is a man or a woman; this is a servant or a master; this person is old or young". They are all alike and only a spiritual people. Therefore they are all priests. All may proclaim God's word, except that, as St. Paul teaches in 1 Cor 14:34, women should not speak in the congregation. They should let the men preach because God commands them to be obedient to their husbands. God does not interfere with the arrangement. But He makes no distinction in the matter of authority. If, however, only women were present and no men, as in nunneries, then one of the women might be authorized to preach.⁴

Because of his attitude to the priesthood of believers, it would appear that had Luther read the texts in relation to their cultural context, he would have

admitted both sexes to the ordained ministry.

Finally, Paul called himself an apostle because he had seen the risen Lord and was commissioned by him to preach the Gospel. Women were the first to see the risen Christ and were commissioned by him to go and tell the disciples, making them (the women) the apostles to the apostles. How can the church now restrict the preaching office to men?

Questions for group discussion:

1. *Lutheran churches in every continent in the world, except Australia, ordain women. What do you think are the reasons for the Lutheran Church in Australia being unwilling to ordain women? Your pastor would be able to fill you in on various aspects of the relevant church history.*
2. *Discuss how changes in Australian society since World War II have had an impact on the role of women including in the church at large. For example, you could consider the effect of:*
 - a) *mass communication decreasing our sense of isolation from the rest of the world;*
 - b) *increased education for women;*
 - c) *changing social attitudes and cultural values.*
3. *From your own experience of men and women can you see any reason why women should not be ordained?*

(February, 1996)

¹ Published in Expository Times, 1987.

² The origin of the term hocus pocus.

³ Luthers Works, Vol. 40, p. 22, 23.

⁴ Luthers Works, Vol. 30, p. 55.



together proclaiming the word

A Question of Unity

Graham Harms

The question of whether the LCA should ordain women as well as men has generated debate and intense feeling, almost without precedent in the 30-odd year history of the LCA. Although this has been a painful experience for many people, and a somewhat threatening issue for some, in many ways it has also brought some important benefits to the church. We have engaged passionately in theological debate (I guess it takes a theologian to highlight that!); we have had to think through our approach to many matters connected with church and ministry as well as the role and status of women in the church; we have perhaps realized how little we understood some of the things we simply take for granted; many people have taken steps to become better informed.

In the process, some people have no doubt been overwhelmed by the complexity of what they thought was a pretty simple matter, including many pastors. Most people have had to rethink long-held positions, and some have changed their minds as a result of listening to talks and studying the material produced by the church. Others have not changed their views, but have become even more convinced than before that what they thought was right. This has happened on both sides of the present debate, and is all quite healthy and normal.

How important is unity?

At the same time, some have become concerned that airing our differences like this has highlighted how disunited the LCA has become. We used to agree, and now we seem to be polarizing going one way and others another. Some on both sides of the issue have even said that they will leave the LCA if the synodical vote goes the other way. They claim that the gospel itself is compromised if we allow/don't allow the ordination of women. These views have been expressed to me in very forceful terms by people on both sides of the issue, and I believe that all these people were completely sincere in their beliefs.

Unity in the church is a matter of great importance. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit, the desire of our Lord, part of the essence of what the church is—we confess that in the Nicene Creed, and in the Lutheran

Confessions — 'one holy, catholic and apostolic church' because there is 'one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all' (Eph 4:1-6). Living in unity is leading a life worthy of our calling, according to St Paul in that passage.

What kind of unity?

Of course, that doesn't mean that everyone has to think the same on every matter—that would be impossible. In the Lutheran Church, we are very careful to distinguish between what does and doesn't divide in the church. Matters of personal taste and style obviously are not properly regarded as divisive—choice of architectural style, music, vestments, meeting schedules or the way we schedule debt repayments are all of some importance, but we would regard anyone who left the church because of one of these as being a bit careless of the unity of the church. On the other hand, if a pastor preaches that Christ didn't rise from the grave, or if a local church council rules that the Lord's Supper will no longer be celebrated in their church, then the gospel itself is at stake, and we would support anyone who couldn't stay. Even in these extreme cases, leaving, or dividing the church would be done reluctantly, and only after every effort had been made to sort out the problem. And the Lutheran Confessions clearly state that the gospel is the key issue — 'it is sufficient for the true





unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it, and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word'. (AC VII:2) We can and do tolerate a wide variety of private opinion, even in theological matters, as long as the gospel is preached and enacted in the sacraments.

Of course nearly everything we do and say in the church has *some* connection with the gospel (hopefully!), and it is easy to come to the conclusion that the things we care deeply about are the central issues on which the church stands or falls. But frankly, we are fairly easily deceived in this, because we care so deeply about our own ideas and feelings. It may not seem right if the pastor doesn't robe for a service, but the gospel is still effective in the congregation even if some can't think of anything but the absence of those robes. It may not seem right to think of a woman where only men have stood before, but that also doesn't make it wrong. We have to even be careful of the way we use Bible passages to show we were right all along! It's just that most of us are so easy to convince!

Cause for division?

Is the ordination of women a cause for division, a cause for leaving the LCA? Only if ordaining women prevents the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. This does not seem to me to be the case. There can be arguments on both sides as to whether this is the best way of providing for the work of the gospel among us - and I would expect the synodical debate to take that up before making a decision. But the 'best way' is not a matter for division. Will the saving gospel still be heard if a woman preaches it? Assuredly, since it is the gospel itself which is effective in bringing people to faith, as a means of grace, as an instrument of the Holy Spirit, not the person who proclaims it. The church has formally recognized this for nearly 2000 years, and that basic principle is reaffirmed in the Lutheran Confessions.

Will the body and blood of Christ be distributed to the people of God for the forgiveness of sins if a woman administers it? Yes, for the same reasons. Does the person of the pastor alter the validity or the effectiveness of the gospel in either preaching or sacraments? No, those means of grace were established

by Christ as an avenue which the Holy Spirit *would* use for the creation and maintaining of saying faith, and no human factor can prevent God from achieving his purposes the Word never returns empty.

The gospel unites us. Only the gospel can divide us —not human traditions, rituals, customs, what we have become used to, or even what we always thought was true.

Don't be afraid —and please don't leave!

The church is a precious gift of God to the world, and it thrives on unity. Fracturing the voice of the church through denominational division has not made the gospel more credible to the rest of the world. We have worked hard under the Holy Spirit to bring Lutherans in this land into unity and to maintain it, and I have the impression that the vast majority of our members like it that way. If you are considering leaving the LCA over this issue, please reconsider. This sort of thing has happened too often in the past. Men (mostly) who were utterly convinced they were doing the right thing divided the church and led many with them. In most cases, later historians have pointed to the personalities of the leaders as important factors in those splits. They were sincere enough, but had they thought through the issues properly, with the hindsight of history, they might have had regrets. The church has certainly regretted their actions.

That doesn't mean we should strive for uniformity —unity allows an enormous degree of variety and diversity. No congregation would ever be forced, for instance, to have a woman as their pastor: some would welcome that, others would not. Most congregations would not even have the opportunity to do so in the near future because of a lack of availability.

People on both sides of this issue are brothers and sisters in Christ, not just members of a sports club. Unity is not just an option for us, but part of the essence of what it means to be Christian, to be a member of Christ's body. We all need one another, not the least because our different views on non-divisive matters like the ordination of women help to enrich us and challenge us to deepen our understanding, our theology and our capacity to listen to the voice of Christ though others.



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The Ordination of Women in the LCA? A Positive Answer

Dr Vic Pfitzner

*Adaptation of a presentation at St Pauls Lutheran Church,
Nunawading, Sunday 19 July, 1998*

A. Introduction

1. In recent history the question of whether also women may be ordained in the LCA has been debated within the Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations for over a decade. Some documents of the CTICR have already been made available to members of the church. A subcommittee (chaired by the writer) produced a *report* in April 1991 after three years of exacting study of the issues involved. In 1992 the Commission issued a booklet prepared by Dr John Strelan, entitled *Women and the Ministry*, that was designed to promote discussion in congregations of the church. More recently, the Commission has produced *position papers* outlining an argument both for and against the ordination of women in the LCA. At the end of 1999 the CTICR made a recommendation to the Church that there were no theological reasons prohibiting the ordination of women. The matter will be presented for decision at the next General Convention.

2. There is no more **emotive issue** in the LCA today than this one. Though some people have no strong opinion on the matter and are waiting for the church (meaning others!) to reach a decision, it is a painful debate for many members of the church and is so for a number of reasons:

- Some are bewildered at the proposed rejection of past practice and see this as inevitably involving the rejection of the authority of Scripture itself;
- Others are frustrated by what they see as the slowness of the LCA to follow the lead of most Lutheran Churches in allowing women to be ordained;
- Some fear that a change in practice will have domino effect leading to, for example, the loss of trinitarian theology or the triumph of feminism in the church;
- Some lay people are dismayed that pastors and theologians of the church (also within the Commission on Theology) continue to be divided on this issue;
- There is always the threat that the issue could split the Church—thus the suggestion by some that we should not even be debating the issue.

3. We Lutherans all want to argue on the basis of Gods revealed truth in the authoritative Scriptures. Yet all of us come to this debate with our own **personal history and agenda**. My own history includes aversion to women in the public ministry as a result of experiences first as a teenager then as a student in Germany. More recently I have developed a growing understanding of the just claims of Christian women who have been disempowered and marginalised in the church (I do not like using the broad term *feminism*) and a horror for what has been perpetrated in the name of male headship. A re-examination of the texts and another (this time happy) experience of having a woman as my pastor in the United States about a decade ago led me to abandon my previously held view that the ordination of women is not the Lord's will for his church today. I am now convinced to the contrary. My own personal pain is not only that close friends and relatives hold an opposing view, but that I fully understand that view as one who once held it (this is not said in any spirit of superiority!)

B. Reading the evidence (*hermeneutics*)

1. Lutherans read scripture with **special glasses** that help us to focus on Christ. He is the heart of the scriptures. We eagerly distinguish between (but do not separate) law and gospel. Since both law and gospel serve Christ, and since God's will is consistently one, we also believe in the unity of revelation in the scriptures; thus scripture interprets scripture. Unclear passages must be explained with the help of clear passages. The argument below will attempt to remain true to these hermeneutical principles. Instead of showing how these principles work in theory, we shall leave their application to the actual study of the texts.

2. Though it may be expressed in new ways, the **gospel is unchangeable**; it must be so for the church stands or





falls on the gospel. If its foundation is not the rock of the gospel the church cannot hope to endure for all time as Christ promised Peter it would (Matthew 16:18). The meaning and validity of the **law** is more difficult to define because 'law' can be understood in various ways. Law can mean the total claim of God on human beings; ethical command (especially as in the Ten Commandments); ritual requirement (used thus especially in Leviticus and Hebrews); sign of the covenant; regulations for the ordering of human life—the rabbi of Jesus' day would add 'the oral tradition' (see Mark 7). Paul shows in Romans and Galatians that the law is no longer valid as the basis of the new covenant, of the new righteousness and of life with God. Christ is the end of the law in two senses: he is the goal to which the law points; he brings its old function and its curse to an end. Hebrews shows how Christ also supersedes the old ritual law. Where do the texts regulating the behaviour of women in the New Testament churches belong? The argument against the ordination of women must demonstrate *beyond any doubt* that these are unchanging cultic regulations. It is just here that the problems begin, since the texts will not bear the weight of the argument that they are eternally valid regulations for the church of all time.



C. *From scripture to doctrine*

1. Whether one is for or against women holding the public office, the argument cannot be developed without **making inferences** from texts and combining evidence from the New Testament into a coherent argument. There is no statement in the New Testament that we must baptise children. We conclude that this is God's will from a number of clear scriptural truths, especially those teaching the universality of sin and the universality

of grace. All are sinners; all need the grace that is available in baptism. Similarly, the argument for women being allowed to hold the public office cannot produce a biblical text that says it must be so, but argues inferentially. It seeks to show that

- the texts in question make perfect sense in the context of the early church's mission;
- a male dominated apostolate and local ministry made perfect sense in the early church but is not an eternally binding order;
- there are clear indications both in the teaching of Jesus and in the teaching of the apostle Paul that women are equally heirs of the kingdom and

co-workers in the spread of the gospel;

- legitimate implications for the ordering of ministry can be drawn from the gospel without turning the gospel into law.

2. It has been said that only the argument for the ordination of women has to prove its case. Such an assertion works with an **assumption**: that the New Testament clearly speaks against women occupying the public ministry then and in all ages. That assumption needs to be challenged. The argument in this presentation follows the basic points raised by the contra argument in order to show how the **evidence can be read differently**.

3. At issue is not only how we arrive at doctrine, but also **whether there can be new doctrine**. Here some careful distinctions are necessary. The Lutheran Confessions have a clear teaching in the *Augsburg Confession* Article V on the divine institution of the public office, on what it administers (word and sacraments), and on the power at work through it (the Spirit). Whether women may be ordained is a question about the ordering of ministry that is not directly addressed in the Lutheran Confessions. To conclude that we may ordain women today does not mean that the church has been guilty of heresy in not doing so in the past. That we have drawn wrong conclusions and not drawn correct ones from Scripture does not mean that we repent of the past, but embrace new insights as gifts of the Spirit who leads people to understand the Truth (see John 16:13).

4. I would assert that also the **failure to ordain women today cannot be called heresy**, even if the LCA were to decide in favour of the practice. Clearly, there must be ministry, but there is no command that women *must* be ordained. The Lutheran Church

3. What we should seek is the **historical-contextual meaning** of Scripture. It helps little to speak of the literal meaning of biblical texts. Even those against the ordination of women still have to explain what the words mean: 'The women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak'. A literal reading of 1 Corinthians 14:34,35 would suggest that *wives* should not speak, since it is shameful for them to do so, and they can in any case carry on a discussion at home with their *husbands* about what has been said or what has happened in church. Our own church has never taken these words literally in the sense that women (not wives!) can say nothing in church. A sensitive historical-contextual reading of the texts in question is required; one that shows what the texts in question meant for certain Christian communities in the past before attempting to apply them today.

4. At the heart of the dispute is not so much, or not merely, the original meaning of the texts, but how they are to be applied in the church today. We need to distinguish between **original sense and present application**. Both 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 (women wearing a head covering) and 1 Corinthians 14:33-40 (women speaking in church assemblies) deal with much that is specific to the Corinthian situation. We do not have to transplant everything in these texts across twenty centuries, from one historical setting to completely different historical settings today, to remain faithful to issue that Paul is addressing: concern for good order in public worship.



in Australia has had a word and sacrament ministry—with men only. To continue this practice would not be false teaching, but to perpetuate a regrettably narrow application of the church's teaching on the ministry. It would continue to see only half the members of Christ's Body as potential ministers to all members of that Body.

5. The **doctrine** of the church, as contained in its public teaching, confession and practice, is **not static** in the sense that it is ever 'finished'. Formulating doctrine did not finish with the early church, nor did it finish with the Reformation. New circumstances and new questions require new answers. New insights can lead to new conclusions.

This is not to say that past confessions become relative—in fact, they become even more important as a safe anchor for the ship of faith while plumbing new depths around the ship! Nor does it mean that doctrine becomes a shifting sand dune, blown with the wind of current theological opinion. It means a growth in faith and understanding that leads to greater praise of and bolder witness to the Triune God who is the author of all truth.

D. Tradition and Ecumenicity

1. It is an indisputable fact that for over eighteen centuries catholic, orthodox Christianity has not permitted women to hold the public office. Both the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches have affirmed that **tradition** in recent times. That is an impressive tradition, one in which the Lutheran Churches also stood united until the Swedish Church first broke ranks and began ordaining women early in this century. But Lutherans, of all people, should know that tradition and past practice alone do not determine what our practice today should be. The Church of the Reformation knows that the church must always be reformed.

2. Similarly, the practice of other churches is not determinative. The so-called **ecumenical argument** is capable of differing applications. Does it mean conforming to the practice of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches, even though our doctrine of the ministry is different? (The recent appeal of the pope for all Catholic theologians to reject the ordination of women to the priesthood is further evidence for the strength of the contrary view within the Church of Rome!) Does it mean conformity with other Lutherans? If so, with the majority who ordain women, or with those who do not?—In short, both tradition and ecumenical relations are important factors as the LCA makes its own decision, but they are not determining factors.

E. Interpreting the key texts First Corinthians 14:33-40

1. This text must be read with 1 Cor 11:2-16. Though the

latter is one of the most difficult texts in Paul's letters, some things are clear. Paul allows women to speak in public worship as long as they are clearly marked by the veil or some head covering. He develops his argument on a number of bases, not all of equal weight. He argues from creation, from social convention on what brings shame and disgrace or honour and glory, from nature and from recognised church practice. Clearly, the practice he is regulating belongs to *public* worship, not to what goes on in the privacy of the Corinthian's homes. Paul's point that women must be seen to be women, his reference to the angels as guardians of order in worship (that seems to be the meaning of the difficult verse 10) and the following teaching on the Lord's Supper all make this clear.

2. This passage stands, at the very least, **in tension** with Paul's ruling in 14:34 that the women/wives keep silent in the churches, meaning church assemblies.

To avoid a contradiction some argue that Paul is referring to inspired prophetesses in chap. 11 but to regular preaching in chap. 14. But Paul makes no such distinction. He insists against the charismatic Corinthians that the 'spirits of prophets are subject to prophets' (14:32). It is not a question of women being allowed to pray and prophesy because they *have* to speak by the Spirit in chap. 11.

3. There is even some tension between Paul's argument on the clear differentiation between men and women as created beings in 11:3-9 and their mutual interdependence 'in the Lord' in 11:11,12. Paul has **two starting points** for his view of the role of men and women in the church. The abuses at Corinth demand that he stress the created *difference* between men and women. This would explain why the baptismal formula of Galatians 3:28 appears in 1 Cor 12:13 without the phrase neither male nor female! (though Col 3:11 also lacks this phrase).

4. There is a **textual question** in 1 Cor 14:33-40. One tradition, chiefly western, places vv34, 35 after v40. In this reading Paul's appeal to the 'command of the Lord' (v37) would come before the command that women be silent. Even the appeal has variant readings, with some manuscripts having 'commands of the Lord', others omitting the word 'command' altogether. Now even if none of the variants are original, the changes are, as often, something like a first commentary on the text. In other words, early copyists also had problems understanding Paul's words.

5. The **context** of 14:34,35 is disorder in public worship: people seeking to outdo each other in speaking tongues and prophesying. We have already seen that the silence of women cannot be an absolute silence. Nor must 'speak' mean 'preach'. The following reference to asking questions of husbands at home indicates that





Paul has in mind the kind of discussions in the church that were also part of synagogal worship with which some of the Corinthian Christians would have been familiar (see Acts 18:1-4,8 for the Jewish beginnings of the Corinthian church). What Paul forbids is argumentative disputation by women, their disruptive insistence on being heard. The ultimate concern is for good order and not confusion in worship—see how vv 33a and 40 frame the discussion in the accepted verse order.

6. Paul speaks with apostolic authority here in 1 Cor 14:3-40, yet his appeals (as in 11:2-16) are not all on the same level. He cites common practice (v33b), the 'law' (though what law is referred to in v24 is unclear), what is 'shameful' (v35) and the command of the Lord (v38). He even seems to threaten exclusion from the faith community (v38). None of these appeals help us to determine with absolute certainty **whether Paul is laying down rules for all time**. We should note that his regulations include what he has said about speaking in tongues and taking turns to prophesy. A literal application of Paul's words would require us to allow speaking in tongues and prophesying by members of the congregation, with each taking their turn. But this we do not do. We have been selective in our application of the text.



1 Timothy 2:11-15

1. The **context** is again a situation of disorder. Teachers have entered the congregations promoting false doctrine (1:3), making members angry and argumentative (2:8; 6:4). This false teaching seems to have caught on especially among the women (1 Tim 4:7; 2 Tim 3:6,7) and led to idle gossip (5:13), pleasure seeking (5:6,11) and the love of expensive clothes and jewellery (2:9).

2. Some phrases or words in the text are **not perfectly clear** in meaning. The verb translated 'to have authority' appears only here in the New Testament. Outside the New Testament it can refer to aggressive, assertive or even violent behaviour towards others, so some commentators insist that Paul is not allowing women to teach in a certain way.

3. As in 1 Cor 11 and 14, we need to note carefully **the way Paul argues**. There is obviously an agenda behind the reminder that Adam was created first, but that Eve, not Adam, was the first to be deceived. Does this contain a swipe at the cult of Artemis in Ephesus, a cult that taught that Artemis was created before her male consort? Does the text seek to substantiate a common view that women are less reliable than men? Another scenario is more likely in my view. Like the Corinthian church, that at Ephesus had its origins in Judaism. While Paul also has general community standards in mind (see how the appeal to modesty and sensible behaviour frames the passage in 1 Tim

2:9,15) he is speaking to young Christians who come out of a synagogal background. The biblical evidence he uses in vv13,14 is what would be familiar and convincing to them.

4. The rejection of an **argumentative, assertive speaking of women** in worship has some things in common with 1 Cor 14:33-35. Women/wives are to remain *silent*; they are to show *submission* (the two texts do not expressly say that the women are to be subordinate to the men); they are to be learners/questioners. Respectful silence, letting men take the lead, declining to argue with the male leaders of the congregation - all this is not only understandable for a young church it is necessary so that the mission to bring God's saving will to all people (not only 'men'; 1 Tim 2:4) will not be placed in jeopardy by offensive behaviour.

5. What is modest, sensible and seemingly with reference to clothing (v 9) refers, like the length of one's hair, to **norms and standards** in society generally, but specifically within Judaism. A woman leading in the worship of the early church was just as impossible as was a woman leading in synagogal worship. Our world is decidedly different. Of course, we are not blindly to follow community standards. But we should be sensitive to the perception of 'outsiders' that the world is often ahead of the church in actually honouring and treating women as equals.

Galatians 3:26-28

1. The final phrase in this baptismal formula, 'there is no longer male *and* female' is clearly a **reference to Genesis 1:27**, to the original creation. Paul here points to the results of the new creation in Christ by virtue of baptism. He does not deny that there are still Greeks, Jews, slaves, free people, men and women. Rather, the new creation means that they have a new status of unity and equality before God.

2. Is this **merely a faith statement**? Some insist that it describes only what we are before God, not in our social relationships. Yet this radical formula obviously did have social implications. Onesimus may not have ceased to be a slave, yet Paul expected Philemon to treat him very differently now that he had become a Christian (Philem 15-17). Early Christians could not change whether they were of Jewish or Gentile background, but Paul expected each side to embrace and treat the other side as equal in honour and standing (Rom 15:7-9; Eph 2:11-22). Husbands and wives remained men and women, but their relationships were now determined by the love, respect and mutual submission that they shared as partners in the gospel (see Eph 5:21-33).

3. The text does not say women must be ordained! That would be to turn gospel into law. What is legitimate is to draw **practical conclusions from the gospel**. The church is not a preserve for



male supremacy of men and women in the family of God. The mutual interdependence of wives and husbands in marriage (1 Cor 7:4) should be matched by the complementary service of men and women in the Body of Christ, using the gifts that the Spirit has freely given without gender differentiation.

4. Why did the early church not immediately draw all possible practical conclusions from Gal 3:28? One obvious answer was that expectation of Christ's immanent return did not allow for great changes. But there is another more important reason.

Though the gospel was radical, the Christian movement was very conservative in its practice when moving out into the world from the Jewish mother-soil. The **prime concern was always mission**.

A few examples may help to show how mission expediency rather than gospel principle determined mission practice, without the principle being given up.

- Paul could still circumcise Timothy, though he maintained that circumcision counted for nothing (Acts 16:3; Gal 6:15; 1 Cor 7:19);
- The Gentiles were to be free from the Jewish law, yet the Apostolic Council decreed that aspects of it be observed also by Gentile converts (Acts 15:7-11, 19-21)—this edict, issued with the Spirit's authority (15:28) was not repealed; it simply lapsed;
- Paul intimates that the gospel and the one needing to hear the gospel were his prime concern; he would be a Jew to Jews and a Gentile to Gentiles (1 Cor 9:19-23). Far from promoting social change, his rule was that people stay where they were when they received the gospel (1 Cor 7:17-24).

F. Headship and subordination

1. In Greek the word head is not synonymous with 'leader' or prime authority. It denotes **the source** from which something originates. Thus God is the head of Christ and man is the head of woman since Eve came from Adam (see 1 Cor 11:3-12). Christ is head of the church as its self-giving Saviour. The husband is head of the wife also in the sense that he is responsible for her welfare. That Christ as head of the church is also its Lord does not mean that the husband, by analogy, can lord it over the wife.

2. God as Creator has ordered his creation. So we speak of government and the family as **orders of creation**. The order is the form or structure within which we live. How we live in that structure as Christians is determined not merely by the structure, but by our life in Christ. Not law but love is to guide husband and wife in marriage (Eph 5:25-33).

3. **Subordination** is something enjoined of all Christians. They are to 'be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ' (Eph 5:21). The form of the verb suggests a voluntary submission under others, not by compulsion and not according to a fixed scheme. It does not mean that the wife must place herself under the husband. Then slavery would have to be called a created

order, but that is certainly not what 1 Peter 2:18 implies when it calls on servants to be submissive to masters. Submissive behaviour is a way of showing special honour and respect to the other partner, but it does not mean surrendering all authority and leadership to the other partner.

G. The maleness of Jesus and the apostles; ministry in the early church

1. That Jesus and the apostles were male is a fact, **not a prescription**. Women in Judaism could not function as priests in the temple or as leaders of the synagogue. They could not study Torah with a rabbi nor could they be full members of the community at Qumran. It is easy to understand why Jesus as the promised messianic king had to be male; it was equally necessary that the apostles be male.

2. Jesus' apostles (in the narrower, technical sense) were those who witnessed the risen Lord and were commissioned by him for witness to the world. Since it involved eyewitness testimony and personal authorisation by Jesus, the apostolic office was both foundational and temporary. The **apostles died out**; no new apostles could be appointed. This means that public ministry of





word and sacrament is not a replication of the apostolic office, though it does continue 'the spiritual functions of the apostolate' (TA VI 6; DSTO A12). Pastors can witness to Christ only through the apostolic word. They represent Christ who is Lord of all, not the (male) apostles.

3. Some early authorities read **Junia** (feminine name) instead of Junias (male name) at Romans 16:7. If this reading is original, it still does not decide whether there was a woman apostle among Jesus' earliest witnesses. That Junia/s is a person 'of note among the apostles' could mean that he/she is well known *by* the apostles. Even the word 'apostles' could be used in the more general sense of a sent representative (see 2 Cor 8:23; Phil 2:25).

4. Nevertheless, it is clear that Jesus honoured women in ways quite untypical of a Jewish teacher; he treated women as disciples (unheard of in early rabbinic practice). Women ministered to Jesus (eg Luke 8:2). Similarly, **women were valued co-workers of the apostles**. Priscilla even took the lead from her husband Aquila in teaching Apollos (Acts 18:26). She, together with Euodia and Syntyche, were fellow-workers with Paul in his mission (Rom 16:3; Phil 4:2,3). Three women helped to establish the church at Rome (Rom 16:6,12).

H. The doctrine of ministry

1. The Lutheran Confessions make clear that the public office is a creation of the Lord for the proclamation of the gospel and the right administration of the sacraments. Though pastors must have an inner call, it is the outer call of the church that makes them pastors. As much as we seek people with gifts, the **gifts do not constitute the pastor's authority**. This is true also of the natural gift of gender. Pastors represent Christ in their humanness, not in their maleness.

2. Pastors speak and act as Christ's personal representatives (see Luke 10:16). In this they image Christ. They do not represent Jesus' maleness but his saving person in word and sacrament. Christ became human so that **male and female could be recreated in the image of God**. Christ is the perfect image of God (2 Cor 4:4) and those who believe in him, whether male or female, are renewed into Christ's image (2 Cor 3:18). Women who bear the new Christ-image can represent Christ as much as can men. To deny this is to limit the meaning of the incarnation and its blessed results for all people, male and female: the renewal of the image of God in Christ.

The coming General Pastors' Conference and Convention will be a test of the LCA, of how we think and debate theologically. I will be disappointed if the ordination of women is rejected, but I will not leave the church if that happens. The LCA is my spiritual home, and I hope it remains the home of all Lutherans who, like me, believe that women can represent Christ and serve the Triune God in public ministry.





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BIBLICAL COMMANDS

Peter Lockwood

By ordaining women is the church disregarding commands of Jesus and Paul?

The Lutheran church has always acknowledged that there are biblical commands that remain in force 'for a time' and 'to avoid offence' (Augsburg Confession 28), and then the commands lapse for a number of reasons. Some examples of this include

- Sabbath observance (Ex 20:8-11; Deut 5:12-15),
- the requirement that women wear hats in church (1 Cor 11:2-16),
- eating meat sacrificed to idols, or meat that has been strangled, or with its blood still in it (Acts 15:28),
- the instruction that only men should pray in public worship, and they should do so with holy hands uplifted (1 Tim 2:8),
- the prohibition on women wearing braided hair, gold, pearls, or expensive clothes (1 Tim 2:9).

Other commands have rarely been interpreted literally, but have been regarded as exaggerations for the sake of emphasis, or as metaphors to highlight the Christian lifestyle, for example Jesus command to

- gouge out an offending eye and cut off a right hand that offends (Matt 5:29,30),
- wash one another's feet (Jn 13:14), or
- let our light shine (Matt 5:16).

The church regards other commands as non-negotiable and permanent. They are not exaggerations. They are not metaphors for something else. They include the commands to

- baptise (Matt 28:18-20),
- preach the gospel (Rom 10:14-17),
- celebrate communion (1 Cor 11:26),

- admonish one another to love and good works (Heb 10:24),
- meet regularly for worship (Heb 10:25), and
- pray without ceasing (1 Thess 5:17).

The obvious question to ask is: By what criteria do we determine whether commands are temporary or permanent? Applied to the women's ordination debate, how can we tell whether the commands that require women to remain silent in worship and in subordination may lapse after a time or must stay in force till Christ returns? The following questions allow the reader to determine whether Paul's prohibitions on women speaking are (a) the words of Paul the apostle speaking authoritatively for the church of all times and all places, and hence always valid, or (b) the words of Paul the pastor addressing specific local congregational issues, and hence valid only for a time, but able to lapse when the prohibited behaviour no longer offends. The work we are doing here is called hermeneutics (biblical interpretation), which means asking first what the words say in their setting within the book of the Bible where they appear and in their historical setting, and secondly how the words apply today?

The command is always valid if it

- is said to be in force till the end of time (eg Matt 28:20; 1 Cor 11:26),
- serves to underpin and enhance the proclamation





of the gospel and the creating and sustaining of faith (e.g. Matt 5:16),

- is said to apply 'in all the churches' (see 1 Cor 14:33),
- is not simply a personal opinion but is a direct command of Jesus or Paul (see 1 Cor 14:37).
- contains no verbal clues that the command is limited to the time and place of writing, or it
- gives no other indication that the command arises out of a specific problem in the life of the congregation Paul is writing to.

The two texts employed to prohibit women's ordination in the LCA are 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-14 (see Theses of Agreement VI.11). Clearly, at the time of union the LCA did not favour the notion that Paul's words in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy were to be understood as pastoral directives for a specific occasion. However, we are at liberty to question that assumption. Regarding their status the Theses of Agreement say about themselves: 'The Theses of Agreement are always under the authority of the Word of God, and therefore there must always be a readiness to submit them to the critical scrutiny of God's Word and accordingly confirm them, or amend or repudiate them when further study of God's Word shows them to be inadequate or in error' (TA A26). TA VI.11 says the prohibition of women from the public office is an 'apostolic rule' that 'is binding on all Christendom'. Those who support the ordination of women disagree. They have applied the tests of permanent applicability (above) to 1 Corinthians 14:35,35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-14 and concluded that the texts fail the test required to qualify as permanent apostolic prohibitions binding on all Christendom.

- Neither text says that the prohibition lasts till the end of time.
- The prohibition on women's speaking in church hinders the spread of the gospel in a society which no longer tolerates discrimination against women.
- The phrase in 'all the churches' (1 Cor 14:33) cannot be said to apply unquestionably to Paul's words about women being silent and submissive (vv 34,35). In several Greek manuscripts verses 34 and 35 appear at the end of the chapter, in which case 'in all the churches' deals with Paul's regulations concerning tongues speaking and prophecy.

- Similarly, the 'command of the Lord' Paul speaks of (v 37) appears more likely to apply to his insistence that those who are disrupting worship at Corinth (unruly tongues speakers, women interjectors) obey his regulations regarding who may speak and under what conditions.
- The verb 'to permit', used in both texts (1 Cor 14:34, 'they [women] are not permitted to speak'; 1 Tim 2:12, 'I permit no woman to speak'), everywhere else in the NT applies only to temporary, or one-off, situations (see Matt 8:21; 19:8; Mark 5:13; John 19:38; Acts 21:39,40; 26:1; 27:3; 28:16; 1 Cor 16:7; Heb 6:3). Its wider usage should govern the way it is understood in the two texts. Another word that indicates Paul is dealing with customs peculiar to his own day and time is the word 'shameful' (1 Cor 14:35). An outspoken woman in public was regarded as bringing disgrace to her husband.
- One of the major problems Paul was addressing in his letters to Timothy was the inroads being made by a libertarian group in the church at Ephesus, where Timothy was pastor, in which group many women were included (1 Tim 2:9-15; 4:7; 5:13-15; 2 Tim 3:6,7). The bulk of the congregation were Jews formerly. Paul had enough trouble getting them to accept that women were allowed to study the scriptures (2:11) let alone move them to a point where they would accept women as teachers with authority over a man (2:12). The offence would be too great, the gospels free course hampered to a huge extent. 'To the Jews', Paul said, 'I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews' (1 Cor 9:20).

Paul's concern in both texts is evangelistic. He is intent on ensuring that worship is orderly and that positive community standards are maintained, so that people who come to church may be led to faith (1 Cor 14:22-25) or be built up in the faith (1 Cor 14:3-5,14), so that finally everyone may be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4). Those ends were met in Paul's day by calling for women to be silent. In our day they will be met as their lips are unsealed in our public worship.



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NOT A PHOTO, BUT A SKETCH ...

Rufus Pech

Our Lord Jesus had virtually a trilingual upbringing. Aramaic was spoken in the Galilean Jewish home but common Greek was the language of commerce in the wider community and the scriptures were read in classical Hebrew—the 'literary ancestral language'. This was rather like my own childhood situation: a local dialect of German spoken in the home, Aussie English the language of the dominant culture and the scriptures read in 'Luther Bible German'. Jesus was aware that his birthplace was elsewhere and very early he recognized his true roots to be 'in my Fathers house' (Luke 3:41-50).

For twenty years or more I have watched the discussion and listened to the arguments for and against the ordination of women to the ministry of the gospel within the Lutheran Church of Australia, originally from a safe distance in Papua New Guinea, and since retirement, from the Canberra sidelines. I have always felt comfortable with the concept of gender equality in ministry and leadership. But I'm sure that within the LCA, if it is to be true to itself, a consensus can only be formed and agreement reached on the basis of the biblical evidence.

First and foremost we have to agree on what is the Bible's basic, normative teaching about the male-female relationship. For that, we have to do what Jesus did: go back to the beginning, to the opening chapter/s of the Bible, to Genesis: The Beginning. Jesus' primary concern, first as a student, then as a teacher, was to uncover God's eternal will and purpose 'from the beginning'. In the matter under discussion, we see him doing this in the parallel accounts of Mark 10:4-8 and Matthew 19:4-6. And since we are a part of the church that is one, holy, universal and apostolic, the basic witness of the apostles Peter and Paul will conclude the chain of evidence.

Genesis 1:26-31 and 5:1-2: the Beginning

The longer I ponder the concluding verses of the opening chapter of the Jewish Torah, which is also the first chapter of the Christian's Bible, the more I marvel that any priest of a patriarchal society like Israel's could produce such a balanced non-sexist confession of how God, in the beginning, established the most basic human relationship, that of male and female. Can any of us doubt that this climax to the account of the creating of the cosmos, is preeminently God's inspired Word?

I will refer to the key concepts in their English, Hebrew and Greek (and occasionally, Latin and German) forms.

1. *English: man; Hebrew: adam; Greek: anthropos; Latin: homo; German: Mensch.*

Except for modern English 'man' these words clearly designate: a human being (as a specimen of the race); a person (man or woman); in the plural: mankind, the human race, humankind, people.

2. *E: male & female; H: zaker & negbah; Gk: arsen & thely; L: vir & femina; G: Mann & Weib*

Gods intention to create *adam* as a pair of equals (26) becomes explicit in the action: 'male and female he created them' (27).

3. *E: image & likeness; H: tselem & demuth; Gk: eikon & homoiosis*

The term 'image' is primary; the term 'likeness' limits it: tells us the image is not a complete mirror image; not a photo but a sketch. Luther uses one work to cover both terms: *Bild* (a picture).

Both male and female have this divine image, bear this likeness. Both are an *incomplete* likeness; for they are also different from each other. But they are *equally* made in God's image; their differing male and female likenesses are equally valid (27). Nor are the members of any one race more like God than any other. There is only one human race and every human belongs to it!

It is clear that these likenesses are *not physical*, but relational. They are as much a result of God's word of blessing (28) as they are of God's word of creation (26). The likeness to God means that they are/can be in intimate *relationship* with God and with each other.

As a special part of God's creation they are to develop relationships with the whole earth including its plants and trees (ecology): but more particularly with fish and birds,





Gen. 2:4b-3:24—the story of Adam and Eve

At first (2:7ff) the story is about *adam* 'the human', nameless. In v.22 'a woman' is taken from the man's rib. It is man the poetic lover who calls her 'woman' *ishah* ('mate') because she was taken out of 'man' *ish* 'man/husband'. Then to the end of the story its about *adam* 'the man' (only twice, 3:6,16 referred to as *ish* - 'husband') and *ishah* - the woman 'wife'. Only later after judgment has befallen the erring couple, does *adam* name his wife 'Eve' (Gk *Zoe*) 'because she would become the mother of all the living', 3:20. She is called that once more (4:1) when she became pregnant to her no-name husband.

So the translator's problem is: When do we dignify *adam* the man and start calling the first male 'Adam'? The *Septuagint* Greek refers to *adam* at Genesis 2:16 as God instructs him in the care and use of the Garden, and then again at 2:19 when the animals are brought for him to name. At v.23 jubilant Adam calls his rib-mate *Gyne* (woman/wife). The *KJV* introduces us to Adam in Genesis 2:19, as he first exercises authority by naming the animals. How the tables are turned! Adam has a responsible job and a proper name: his wife has to wait until he names her 'Eve' (Gk *Zoe*) in Genesis 3:20. Full marks go to *Dr Luther*. He translates *adam* with *Mensch/Mann* until in Genesis 3:8-fallen Adam hid himself and his wife in shame from God. Only then are they 'Adam and Eve'- equals at last!

Conclusion: The joy and tragedy of Genesis 2-3 describes the marital relationship of man and woman as established by the Creator and as damaged by their fall into sin. Marriage is still under God's protection but subject to abuse by humans. Though translators struggle with its terminology, the story itself is not sexist.¹ Neither is it a place from which to draw arguments for or against women's ordination or subordination.

Mk 10:5-8//Mt 19:4-6 Jesus teaching on male-female equality

It is striking that the Bible describes male and female (Gk *Arsen-thely*), to my knowledge, only in the Gen 1 and 5 parallels and in these gospel parallels. Our Lord himself makes that connection by quoting from Genesis 1:5 and Gen 2:24, 'At the beginning of creation God "made them male and female". "For this reason a man will leave his father and his mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh". So they are no longer two but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let no human (*anthropos*) separate'.

Jesus receives everything that was said about male-female equality at face value, despite the radically different context with which he is confronted. For him the normative truth of Gen 1:26-30, reiterated in 5:1-2, as the expression of God's eternal will and purpose in this matter, is applicable to all human social contexts and situations.

It is another matter to decide whether it is wise and smart, in each and every situation, to enforce God's will: that 'What God

livestock and wild beasts, because these, like the human, have the breath of life in them (30b, cf 2:7b).

English: subdue (earth) & rule over (animals); *Hebrew:* kabash & radah; *Greek:* katakyrieusate & archete

Three aspects are under Gods blessing on *homo sapiens*, as male and female work together as equal partners (true 'mates').

The first is the management of their own fertility, as they increase their own kind to 'fill the earth', (Genesis 1:28a). I have the impression that in this we are proving to be 'overachievers'.

The second is the taming the vegetated earth and acting as the wise head(s) of all other living/breathing creatures (Genesis 1:28b). Pioneering and colonising, science and technology are all aspects of the equal partnership of males and females. How wise are we in sustainably developing this planet?

In the third, God sets the ecological parameters and limits for the first two. God said: 'I give you every seedbearing plant...' and 'To all the beasts, etc. I give every green plant for food'. *And it was so... it was very good*. It is God's will that humans share the earths resources of food and habitat equitably with all the other species. How are we managing, as male and female partners? We still need to pray: "Your will be done, here on earth as it is in heaven". with regard to the environment.

Genesis 5:1-2 is a powerful summary of the basic teaching of 1:26-31.

When God created humankind, he made them in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them and he blessed them and named them "*adam*" ('humankind') when they were created.

So 'Adam' is neither just male, nor androgynous, but 'male and female'. And equally so, equal in rights, powers and responsibilities, together as partners, as mates.



has joined together, let no one separate'. Our hardness of heart may frustrate it, but cannot render it invalid.

Jesus did not send his female disciples out two by two or call them as his apostles! Well, there were no precedents in Jewish society for such things. He did however welcome the initiative of one of them in anointing him as the Servant King! He did entrust three of them with the message of his resurrection and the responsibility of passing on instructions to his male disciples — especially to Peter!

Acts 2 the inauguration of Gods New Age

At Pentecost the Holy Spirit came to the whole worshipping gathering which included the older and some younger women in explicit fulfilment of Joel's prophecy. Peter opens his explanation to the multi-lingual crowd by quoting:

'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters will prophecy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophecy'. (Acts 2:17-18)

The gift of the Spirit on 'all flesh', the endowment with the gift of prophecy (preaching) for both male and female disciples and across the whole age range, could scarcely be more explicitly all-inclusive. Peter's confident statement was not contradicted by his hearers, because the evidence was there for all to see.

And Peter closes his appeal with the words: 'The *promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off - for all whom the Lord will call*'. (cf 1:8) That promise includes forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit (2:38-39).

And, to borrow from Paul: the promise which is 'for all' includes the ninefold fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-3) and a selection from his open-ended list of *charismata* (personal endowments) — distributed to each one as the Spirit chooses (1 Cor 12:4-11); not as humans (*anthropoi*) may wish to restrict or deny that divine freedom.

We live in the New Covenant era, God's New Age of redemption, restoration and fulfilment, through the blood of His Son. But 2000 years on, our generation has lost the sense of wonder at the newness, the freedom, the difference of this era from that of the Old Covenant of detailed laws and rules. To regain that freshness, let's go back to Paul, the greatest theologian of the generation when the Christian Church was born.

Galatians 3:25-29 Gods children through faith

'Now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian [the Law] for in Jesus Christ you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew nor Greek, there is no longer slave nor free, there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if



you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise'.

In this new era, faith in Christ has superseded the obedience to the law, that is the Mosaic Covenant mediated to the common people (laity) by a levitical, patriarchal priesthood. This passage contains Paul's normative teaching of the basic equality of all believers, regardless of ethnicity or culture, gender or status. Here Paul consciously bases the value system of an inclusive New Testament Christian Church, on the order which God established at creation (Gen. 1:26-30) - before there were such things as disparate languages, ethnicities, cultures, classes or castes. In the beginning there was only the gender distinction between male and female both made in the image and likeness of God.

For Jesus, living under Jewish law, God's provision for his humanity in Genesis 1 included the original, God-spoken and therefore normative word on gender equality in relation to God and each other, while Genesis 2 established the God-willed indissolubility of the marriage of a male and a female.

But for Paul, no longer living under the law, Genesis 1 also teaches the equality of all believers within the circle of the church, both local and global. The inequality between the man and the woman which followed their fall into disobedience, is done away with for all those who trust in Jesus Christ, God's Son. All alike are counted as 'children of God', 'for by baptism they have been clothed with the goodness of Christ'. So now 'all of you are one in Christ Jesus' (Gal. 3:28b).

It has been argued that this expansive, groundbreaking passage has nothing to tell the church about the inclusiveness of its ministry of the gospel; its teaching and preaching of the Word and its administration of the sacraments. This view does not take into account its closing statement: you are now part of Abraham's family, and you will be given what God has promised. What has God promised? 'I will bless you ... and [you] will be a blessing to others... Everyone on earth will be blessed because of you'. (Genesis 12:2,3). How and when can this chain of blessing reach



out to all? When all aspects of ministry are open to all, under the Spirit's endowment and guidance.

The history of the church tells differing stories of results on the three frontiers of ministry identified by Paul.

1. *'There is neither Jew nor Greek'* ('Greek' includes Romans, Scythians, Africans, Mediterranean Islanders and sundry barbarian peoples as well.)

From Pentecost Day, the Jerusalem church included 'Hebrews and Greeks', distinguished by language and culture more than by ethnicity. So the ministry of 'Greek' deacons soon complemented that of the 'Hebrew' apostles. These Greek-speaking deacons did not only 'serve tables' but they increasingly taught and evangelised and witnessed - and even died - for their faith (Acts 6-7; 8:26-40).

The Church at Antioch in Syria contained a multi-ethnic group of prophets and teachers: Barnabas, a Jewish Cypriot; Simeon Niger (black); Lucius of Cyrene (Lybian); Manaen, foster-brother of Herod (Idumean?) and Saul, a Jew from Tarsus (Acts 13:1-2). From this group the Holy Spirit sent out the first 'overseas missionaries' to preach Christ to Jews and Gentiles of the North Mediterranean provinces. For almost 1000 years (until the tragic division between East and West) Greek and Roman bishops, priests and monks worked side by side with Irish missionaries in the conversion and churching of my/our ancestors, the Germanic and Slavic heathen peoples of Western and Central Europe. Their common mission charter was the command of their Lord to everyone, of every nation, everything that had happened.

2. *'There is neither slave nor free'* The prevalence of slavery marked the greatest social divide in ancient societies. How did the Christian mission bridge this divide between slave and free? In Paul's letter to Philemon he encourages his Christian friend to welcome back a runaway slave, now a brother Christian, into his household church, and to find an avenue of 'useful' service for him. Christians were then not in a position to abolish slavery, but they could set their slaves free or purchase a slave's freedom. Such ex-slaves became priests, monks and even bishops of city churches. Christians could not close the gap in society, but they did bridge it successfully in their churches by emphasizing the equality of slave and free in Christ.

3. *'There is neither male nor female'* This manifesto on behalf of the 'other half' of the human race was a tremendous challenge to the male-dominated societies, both Jewish and 'Greek'. In the New Testament we see how Paul welcomed and encouraged women to take up whatever leadership positions were open to them. Many freely opened their homes for the worship and instruction of Christian converts from all backgrounds, however dubious. Among his yokefellows, Paul counted husband and wife teaching teams (Aquila and Priscilla, or is it Prisca and Aquila?) and women working in tandem (Euodia and Syntyche). We could name many more; for just as with the male leaders, those

leading women whose names are known from the New Testament are just the tip of the iceberg. What we do know is that during times of persecution, women and girls featured prominently in the lists of effective Christian witnesses who were faithful till their martyr deaths.

When the persecutions ceased and the Roman Empire adopted Christianity as the chief hope and prop for its political future, church leadership patterns in the now prosperous and powerful established church became more markedly hierarchical, following detailed leadership models provided by Roman society and the Old Testament. But in Rome and in the 'West' generally, where the church had to fill in the social security gap left when the centre of the Empire was moved eastwards to the Dardanelles, there were still major roles for women to play in a continuing diaconate.

After the West Roman Empire collapsed and the 'Dark Ages' descended on most of the West, monasteries provided islands of refuge and learning. It was only in the sanctuary provided by their convents that females were equal to males in service, learning and authority - though separated and (ideally) celibate.

However, such limited equality was hardly the male-female pattern established by the Creator in the beginning. This pattern was asserted by the Saviour as the norm for God's New Age and provided for in the Church by the Spirit. The Spirit generously apportions his gifts, including those of teaching and leadership, to male and female without distinction.

The goal of male-female equality in church and society, established by the Creator, remains the same. But the Church's pupil report card reads rather like some of mine: 'He made a good start; but could do better'. Let me conclude by asking you to meditate with me on Deuteronomy 10:14-22, which has this admonition at its heart:

...do not be stubborn any longer. For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes.

¹ Just as a common Melanesian story of human origin is not sexist, which tells that the Primal Mother cut herself with a bamboo knife, saved the blood in two banana leaves, from which the first humans came forth. (It doesn't really matter which one hatched first!)





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MEANDERING THROUGH THE TRADITION

Inari Thiel

A question of interpretation

The question of tradition entails the perennial question: How do we read the tradition and the texts of the tradition? It is now widely acknowledged that interpretation involves a complex interplay of assumptions and inferences, and is not the straightforward operation we may once have imagined it to be, even in the case of contemporary texts¹. Consider, for example, the following fragment:

Chris and Pat are playing tennis. Chris serves. "What a serve!" exclaims Pat.

"Yes. I can't believe I did that!" Chris replies.

A simple story; but can we decide whether the serve was an ace or a fault? The text is ambiguous – though it may be a direct transcript of an eyewitness account of the event, we cannot tell whether the statements made by the participants are sincere or heavily ironic. In this case, we cannot even tell the sex of the participants. (What did you assume, and what does this reveal about your cultural conditioning?)

Assumptions are important in hermeneutics (= interpretation) precisely because they are by nature rarely identified and subjected to critical scrutiny. While there can be no reading without assumptions, we need to be vigilant in checking what our assumptions are and whether they are really appropriate, especially when dealing with texts and traditions from times and cultures very different to our own. Without this vigilance, we may unwittingly map the inequities and prejudices of our own culture onto others and thereby miss potentially liberating alternative visions.

There is also no writing without assumption, so we should also be sensitive to the unstated assumptions of the writers of the texts and traditions we are studying. When we write to people we know, or people with whom we share a common interest, we do not find it necessary to spell out all the background against which we expect them to interpret our text. What is usually the case is taken for granted, and what is novel is likely to be described as elaborated. For example, if I were telling you about Dennis Lillee's career in cricket, I might refer to his attempt to use an aluminium bat, but I would probably

not state explicitly that cricket bats are traditionally made of willow wood – I would presume that you knew that as well as I did. However, this might make the story much less clear to an American who overheard our conversation, or to someone who came across a copy of my letter several hundred years from now.

Early church tradition

Lutherans are sometimes wary of the uses of tradition in discernment, preferring to focus on the written scriptures. I do not want to downplay the importance of the scriptural record by any means; but I think it is well to remember that tradition precedes both individual texts and the collected canon, and the written texts we have record the already fairly well developed teachings and practices of a number of communities. That is, the early Christians were gathering, proclaiming the gospel, celebrating the eucharist, and so on, for some years before the texts we now know as the New Testament were written – so, for example, in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul writes of "the tradition [he] received" (possibly in his post-conversion catechesis) in relation to the origin and meaning of the eucharist. So we can legitimately speak of a tradition of women's ministry that may be discerned behind the texts, though it may require a careful reading with some of our presuppositions in suspension.

What, then, can we infer about the ministry of women in the early Jesus movement? First, it should be said that the movement was not homogenous, any more than it is now. Just as Lutheran christianity in Australia has a slightly different complexion to that of Lutheran christianity in Europe or Malaysia or North America, so the communities in Jerusalem and Corinth and Rome which were addressed by the writers of various gospels and letters each had their own ethos, their own cultural presumptions. Some were steeped in Jewish attitudes and practices while others were permeated with Greek culture, so it is understandable that different communities may have operated with different models of leadership and participation.

Some of the New Testament writings present congregations gathering in the homes of women, and it seems plausible that the householder would also have served as host in the ritual celebrations in her house. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza² suggests that when in Acts 6 "the Hellenists made a complaint against the Hebrews [that] in the daily distribution their own widows were being overlooked", the text is sufficiently ambiguous to leave open the possibility that what is referred to is the rostering of people to fulfill the role of





host/presider at the eucharist rather than, or as well as, the distribution of charity to them.

These inferences are grounded in imaginative reconstructions of some of the possible worlds behind the texts, and as such are merely live hypotheses rather than definitive proofs, but I think they are valuable as illustrations of what might be visible through the spaces in the text. Where the text is open, we must be cautious about plugging the gaps too tightly one way or the other – after all, it's good to leave the Spirit some space in which to play – and it's also fun to join in the game!

Another aspect of the game is intertextuality. In any culture there is almost certainly a common pool of stories/texts with which most if not all members of the culture are familiar; and one can often subtly suggest a particular connotation for the present story by making allusion to one which already has a certain function in the culture. So, for example, if we are all familiar with the rags-to-riches tale of Cinderella, I could link my story about one of our contemporaries to that motif by making reference to someone who was her “fairy godmother”, and you would anticipate that the end of my story would show a beneficial outcome for our mutual acquaintance.

Consider now the biblical motif of a call to discipleship, as related in Matthew 9:9. There is a simple three-part structure; an encounter (the teacher approaches the potential disciple); an invitation (the teacher calls); and a response (the disciple follows, entering the service of the teacher). Where do we find a parallel story in the tradition with which Matthew's community would have been familiar? It's there in 1 Kings 19:19-20, the calling of Elisha to be Elijah's disciple. Interestingly the structure is also there in the story of Jesus' encounter with Peter's mother-in-law, in Matthew 8:14-15.

Elisha goes to follow Elijah and be his servant; Peter's mother-in-law serves Jesus; and Matthew follows him. In my experience in our church, Peter's mother-in-law's serving Jesus is more likely to be interpreted as offering him tea and scones than as entering into a teacher-disciple relationship, but the text is open to either interpretation, and as I have shown, there is at least some warrant for choosing the latter.

However, there is at least one apparently unequivocal acknowledgment of a female leader of a worshipping community in the New Testament era, namely Phoebe, who is described by Paul as “*diakonos*” and “*prostasis*”, a minister and president of that community³. That this is mentioned in such a matter-of-fact way suggests that holding such an office was not particularly unusual for a woman, at least in Paul's experience. He also acknowledges other women who have been his fellow-ministers in the service of the gospel.

From the above, it will be apparent that the New Testament record is at best ambivalent about the leadership of women in christian communities; but at least we can say that the evidence does not rule out the practice, so any claim that women ministers have not been part of the earliest tradition of the church is false. However, we should remember that what we are discussing here is not ordained ministry as it is now practised in our churches. That concept is a much later development.

In the second to sixth centuries in the western-rite church (and longer in the east), women and men were commissioned for ministry in parallel rites⁴. Some of the evidence for this comes from documents relating to the Councils of Nicaea (325E) and Chalcedon (451E), the former acknowledging women deaconesses (ministers) among the clergy, and the

latter specifying that women could be ordained to the ministry when they had reached the age of forty, a modification of the earlier rule that set the minimum age at sixty⁵. However, the Councils of Orange (441CE) and Orleans (533CE) in the west repudiated the commissioning of women, which would hardly have been necessary if the tradition of women's ministry hadn't been well established⁶. The explanation for this probably lies in a combination of the church's liaison with imperial Rome, the Constantinian compromise, in which it adopted the trappings and ceremonial of the emperor's court, including the valorization of male power and hierarchical organization⁷, and an increasing division between sacred and profane.

The Middle Ages

In spite of this rejection of the traditional forms of women's ministry, women in the middle ages were accorded a good deal of autonomy, and often significant power, through their religious orders. Monasticism did not always involve strict segregation of men and women, and double monasteries (prevalent until the eighth century) were commonly under the sole control of an abbess, who recruited and educated both male and female religious, and often had jurisdiction beyond the monastery, equivalent to that of a bishop⁸.

The monastic life, with its opportunities for education and development of personal ministry gifts, provided an attractive alternative to the rigors of marriage and childbearing in many cases, though there was a good deal of variation among the religious houses, with some being quite repressive. Sometimes, too, parents sent their unwilling daughters into convents rather than pay the dowry necessary to have them married.

The Reformation

In some respects, the Reformation could be seen as undermining the status of women by eliminating the religious orders in which they found scope for the exercise of authority, and downplaying the veneration of Mary and the saints.





This not only stripped women of their temporal power, but left the realm of religious devotion directed exclusively to a masculine deity.

However, though Luther showed no inclination to admit women to the ordained ministry, there is much in the Lutheran Confessions that can be used to refute objections to the ordination of women. This is because, in an effort to curtail the personal power of the clergy, the reformers emphasized the grace and agency of God over any personal characteristics of the ordained minister. For example, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession [VII & VIII] states:

When the sacraments are administered by unworthy men, this does not rob them of their efficacy.

For they do not represent their own persons but the person of Christ, because of the church's call. As Christ testifies (Luke 10:16), "He who hears you hears me." When they offer the Word of Christ or the sacraments, they do so in Christ's place and stead. Christ's statement teaches us this in order that we may not be offended by the unworthiness of ministers.⁹

Again, in the same document [XXVIII] there's an apt word about the importance of tradition:

"He who hears you hears me" cannot be applied to traditions. For Christ requires them to teach in such a way that he might be heard, because he says "hears me." Therefore he wants his voice, his Word to be heard, not human traditions.¹⁰

Similarly, and perhaps more strongly, in the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope:

...the ministry of the New Testament is not bound to places and persons, as the Levitical priesthood is, but is spread abroad through the whole world and exists wherever God gives his gifts, apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers. Nor is this ministry valid because of any individual's authority but because of the Word given by Christ. [The German text adds: ...No matter who it is who preaches and teaches the Word, if there are hearts that hear and adhere to it, something will happen to them according as they hear and believe because Christ commanded such preaching and demanded that his promises be believed.]¹¹

These texts show a common theme – that the person of the minister, whether vicious or virtuous, celibate or married, pope or pastor, and we might add male or female, is not relevant to the efficacy of the grace that is administered through the ministry of word and sacrament. So, confessional Lutherans are free to choose either to ordain women or not; the practice is not precluded by our understanding of the office of the ministry.

The Twentieth Century

I have skipped over a few centuries of women's service in ministry in various denominations between the sixteenth century and our own, simply because the range is too great to do it justice in such a brief paper.¹² Rather, in this final section, I want to touch on the ways in which our tradition has continued to grow in this century.

First, it might be worthwhile to remind you that something like 80% of Lutherans now living belong to churches in which both women and men are called and ordained as ministers of the gospel (LWF information). Only a few small synods, including the LCA in Australia, the LC-MS (Missouri Synod) in the USA, and the LCC in Canada still do not permit the ordination of women. Of course, this does not in itself prove anything about whether it's the 80% or the 20% (or both, in their own contexts) who have "got it right". However, here in Australia we face a problem that our North American sisters and brothers don't have – they have the option of following an informed conscience into either a synod which does or a synod which does not ordain women, while remaining within confessional Lutheranism. Our only Lutheran alternatives are more conservative than the LCA.

In many of the traditionally Lutheran European countries, the situation is affected by the existence of state churches, and this involvement of civil government has undoubtedly expedited the initiation of equal opportunity in ordained ministry as in the rest of the public service sector. However, all clergy face the challenge of ministering to communities where church affiliation can be an apathetic tax contribution rather than a question of active involvement in the life of a congregation.

In the USA, on the other hand, the ordination of Lutheran women was not precipitated by government policy. Nevertheless, both the ALC (American Lutheran Church) and the LCA (Lutheran Church in America) voted in their 1970 conventions to approve the ordination of women. These churches (which have since merged to form the ELCA) now have a quarter of a century's worth of experience of preaching, teaching, and pastoral care by female pastors. A generation of American Lutherans has grown up thinking of "pastor" as a non-gender-specific word, like "teacher" or "doctor", so that the term "female pastor" is as superfluous as "female librarian" – the gender of the person is relevant in only a very limited set of circumstances.

So, what has it been like? Well, first, there is no sign that God has withdrawn support from the congregations to which these women have been called. Generally speaking, they seem to have had both successes and challenges with their new pastors, as we all do¹³. In 1995, a woman was "runner-up" in the ELCA's election of a new general president (both general and regional presidents are called bishops). Some





parishes now have husband and wife clergy teams, while others have pastors whose husbands bake for street stalls. There are also ordained and academically qualified women on the teaching faculties of leading Lutheran seminaries, undertaking theological research and working with their male colleagues to reinterpret the tradition for the next generation.

However, there have been difficulties along the way. The ordination of women seems to have functioned as a catalyst for calls to revive connection with the historic episcopacy¹⁴, a move which seems to contradict the traditional Lutheran concepts and structures of ordained ministry. Ten years after the decision, women were more likely to be placed in “difficult” parishes, inner-city or rural congregations already in demise¹⁵; and even after the “first wave” of ordained women had settled into their calling, there were people and parishes for whom neither reason nor experience would shake their “deep emotional discomfort” at the idea of female pastors¹⁶.

Conclusion

What can this meander through the tradition teach us? The route we have discovered has been more like a hiking trail than a superhighway, but I think we can discern a persistent, if sometimes muffled, call of the Spirit to the church and to the women of the church to allow the gospel to be proclaimed in a different voice.

We might have hoped for a clearer, more decisive path, but as Lutherans we are accustomed to moving forward boldly, with absolute confidence in our gracious God who promises to go with us through the fog. The tradition is our heritage, but it is not a static monolith, not a burden that we carry but a dynamic guide along our way. At its best, it is a living growing organism capable of adapting to the realities of each successive era without losing its essential character. In short, as Pope John XXIII is reputed to have said:

We are here not to guard a museum, but to tend a garden.

Dig deep.

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¹ There is an extensive literature on issues relating to hermeneutics, only a small portion of which is represented in the bibliography of this paper.

² 1983:166

³ according to Schulz, 1990:125

⁴ Ide, 1984:45ff

⁵ Tucker & Liefeld, 1987:132

⁶ Ide, 1984:50

⁷ Wainwright, 1992:63

⁸ Tucker & Liefeld, 1987:144

⁹ Tappert, 1959:173

¹⁰ *ibid* p:284

¹¹ *ibid* p 324

¹² See Tucker & Liefeld, 1987 for a fairly comprehensive outline.

¹³ Barbara Jurgensen, in Schaller, 1982

¹⁴ Gracia Grindal in Preus, 1988

¹⁵ Barbara Jurgensen in Schaller, 1982

¹⁶ Janet Landwehr in Preus, 1988



together proclaiming the word

DO THE CONFESSIONS PROHIBIT THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN?

Shirley Wurst

1. *The gospel - Word and Sacrament - are the focus for the church*

The writers of the *Augsburg Confession* and *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*¹ strongly articulated the view that all church practice should be normed, measured 'in harmony with the Gospel of Christ' (Apology vii,viii:5). If any tradition, ritual or practice was inconsistent with the gospel message, it could not be demanded as essential for Christians as church, the body of Christ; instead, Christians were urged to disobey human rules and demands 'contrary to God' (AC xxviii:34) rather than diminish the gospel by continuing the practice (Apology xxviii:23).

Melanchthon strongly makes the point that there are only two criteria for true church: proclaiming the gospel of the crucified and risen Christ and administration of the sacraments according to the gospel.

If human traditions are not acts of worship necessary for righteousness before God, it follows that people can be righteous and children of God even if they do not observe traditions that have been maintained elsewhere (Apology vii,viii:34).

2. *Church leaders have no right to make rules for the church that contradict the gospel*

In the *Augsburg Confession*, Melanchthon also commented on leaders in the church who were attempting, at the time of the Reformation, to make practices and rules inconsistent with the gospel essential for membership in the church. In a section dealing with ecclesiastical power, he makes the following observations.

According to the Gospel...no jurisdiction belongs to the bishops as bishops...except to forgive sins, to reject doctrine which is contrary to the Gospel, and to exclude from the fellowship of the church ungodly persons whose wickedness is known, doing all this without human power, simply by the Word (AC xxviii:21).

He speaks very strongly against any practice that is inconsistent with the gospel and the Christian liberty asserted in the gospel message.

If bishops have the right to burden consciences with such traditions, why does Scripture so often prohibit the making of traditions? ...Inasmuch as ordinances which have been instituted as necessary or instituted with the intention of meriting justification are in conflict with the Gospel, it follows that it is not lawful for bishops to institute such services or require them as necessary. It is necessary to preserve the doctrine of Christian liberty in the churches, namely, that bondage to the law is not necessary for justification (AC xxviii:49,50,51).

He makes the following assertion, focusing on the chief article of the gospel and the Christian obligation to preserve this gospel core and all that follows from it.

It is necessary to preserve the chief article of the Gospel, namely, that we obtain grace through faith in Christ and not through certain observances or acts of





worship instituted by humans (AC xxviii:52).

3. Sometimes there is need to make allowances because of human weakness, but these are always subordinate to the gospel.

Melanchthon makes the point that some things may be done in the interests of good order -but this human need for order is always secondary to the demands of the gospel focus and its life-and-death implications for all Christians.

It is lawful for bishops or pastors to make regulations so that things in the church may be done in good order, but not that by means of these we make satisfaction for sins, nor that consciences are bound so as to regard these as necessary services. So Paul ordained that women should cover their heads in the assembly and that interpreters in the church should be heard one after the other...Consciences should not be burdened by suggesting that they are necessary for salvation or by judging that those who omit them without offense to others commit a sin (AC xxviii:53,54,56).

4. Customs and regulations of the church change

Faced with the constantly changing nature of human history and human customs and attitudes, Melanchthon also makes the following observations.

Many [canons] become obsolete from day to day even among those who favour traditions...Perhaps there were acceptable reasons for these ordinances when they were introduced, but they are not adapted to later times (AC xxviii:67,73).

Although Melanchthon is not focusing on women's ministry in this section of the confessions, he is talking about rules and practices, instituted by church leaders, that are contrary to the gospel.

5. Conclusion

In earlier periods of church history, it may have been necessary 'for good order' to restrict women's participation in the public ministry of word and sacraments. In contemporary Australia where gender equity is demanded by the law of the land, where

diverse segments of our community are recognising and affirming the equality of women in every sphere of life, and valuing the gifts, skills and abilities of women, it causes offence to many people, both inside and outside the church, to restrict women's service in the church.

Discrimination on the basis of sex does not enhance the gospel or commend it as good news for our community today. Therefore it does not honour the head of the church, Jesus Christ. It is rather a stumbling block, a scandal made by human hands, not God's.

18/3/94

¹ referred to as AC, Apology in this text

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together proclaiming the word

VOICES FROM ANOTHER TIME AND PLACE

*An Interview with Gloria Weber and Ralph W. Klein
from Currents in Theology & Mission, June 77 Vol.4/3
Reprinted with permission.*

Announcer: Is the ordination of women contrary to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions?

Weber: It is certainly my opinion that it is not contrary to Scripture or the Confessions. I feel Scripture and the Confessions really leave it an open question. God made people to serve, and their sexual identity is not the essential point, if we examine the texts closely. I, of course, do not feel the ordination of women is contrary to God's will because I have been serving as an ordained pastor of the American Lutheran Church for two years now and find that I am able to minister very effectively. My ministry has been well received.

Klein: I agree completely with Pastor Weber. I think one thing you have to remember is that while there are a number of passages in Scripture that are usually cited, none of them dealt with the question of women's ordination in its original context. 1 Corinthians 14:34-36 (the women should keep silent) would seem on the surface to rule out a role for women in the public ministry, but there are other passages in Paul's letters, particularly 1 Corinthians 11 and Galatians 3, which would seem to legitimate it in every way.

You've got to remember with these New Testament passages that they don't speak to the ordination of women directly, that one can line up passages on both sides of the argument, and that it is seriously questioned by scholars whether they deal with the role of women in general or whether they deal with the role of wives over against their husbands. If it's not women in general but women within a family structure, it puts the whole thing in a different context.

One other point, and we'll come back I'm sure to some of these things, it's often talked about as if these passages have reference to the so-called orders of creation, that is, God structured the world in a particular way so that men would be in a rulership position and women would be in subordination. I think that it's important to say that the term "orders of creation" is probably a misnomer, a bad name for something. They are really orders of the fall. Genesis 3 says that as a result of our sin we have crabgrass and we perspire a lot when we plow the soil or mow our grass; *as a result of sin* men rule women. Now, in almost every place in God's world today men and women are considered equal, with equal authority. It strikes me as very strange that the church should be the last place in all creation to maintain the orders of the fall. The church is to be the place where the new age of God is celebrated.

To insist that men are to rule women in the church is to maintain the fallen order and just doesn't make any sense to me.

Announcer: I'd like to get back to those passages that you were talking about just briefly here. 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 are the ones that are usually cited against the ordination of women, and the traditional Missouri Synod position on this would say that these passages are pretty substantial proof that women should not be ordained.

Klein: I think it's important that we let the Scriptures speak for themselves here. If there is such a thing as a traditional Missouri Synod interpretation of these passages, which I somewhat doubt, I think it would be that these passages prohibit almost any role for women in the church. The United States passed the amendment giving women suffrage in 1919. It was 50 years later that the right of suffrage was granted within the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and all during that time the reason for opposing women's suffrage was drawn from these passages.

1 Corinthians 14 says that women should not usurp authority, etc., but 1 Corinthians 11 says when women prophesy, which is the closest thing I can think of to preaching, they should wear a hat. Now I doubt whether we want to insist on our women preachers wearing a hat today, but Paul seems to imply that women can exercise a role in the church. And I think it is important to remember this built-in tension or contradiction between these two passages. The other interpretive questions I'd like to repeat it's a real question whether these passages deal with women in general or with the role of wives over against husbands; the "orders of creation or fall", I think, argue as much for ordination of women as against it. And then you have to ask the question what about then and now? Paul was living in a particular society where women had a very low role, but he says at one point in Galatians there's no longer any difference between Jew and Greek, between slave and free, between male and female because in Christ Jesus all are one. Krister Stendahl once wrote that, in respect to the difference between Jew and Greek, Paul really worked out the implications of his principle in some detail; in fact, that's really what the whole corpus of Pauline letters is about, how Jews and Greeks, that is Jewish and non-Jewish people, are equal in the sight of the Lord. Paul did not work



Interview



out the implication of his own principle when it came to slavery, not did he work out his own principle in detail when it came to women. Paul in essence gave a legitimation for equality of women and for their full participation in the church, but because of the constraints of his age his principles were not fully implemented.

There are a lot of passages, of course, where we have to ask what did Paul mean in the original context and what might that mean today. Paul lays it down very strictly that all women should wear hats in church, and yet if you'd go to any of our churches on a Sunday morning, you would see the women bare headed. We say, "He was obviously speaking to his culture". Genesis 1 says, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth". It's rather easy to say what that meant in its original context. I don't think that means everybody should have twenty children today, and I don't know of anybody who argues that way. That is, the Bible has one meaning in its original context, and it may have a variety of applications today.

Announcer: Pastor Weber, is the ordination of women an ecclesiastical extension of the entire question of women's liberation in our society today?

Weber: It's probably because our society has moved forward in women's liberation that the question of women's ordination has arisen today. I would like to take a moment to tell you how I first saw the Scripture many years ago, some ten years ago now, which led me to study in the seminary and want to be ordained. It seems to me that when we look at Scripture we have to ask three questions. What is the writer saying, what did it mean to the people who heard it or read it at that time, and what does it mean to us? Now if we miss that middle question and say only what did he say and what does it mean today, we've passed by something very important that we must consider.

When Paul wrote, women should keep silent, we know what he said. We have to ask, however, what did he mean at that time. It probably meant keeping good order in the church, being acceptable to society and following society's rules, so the gospel

of Jesus Christ could be preached without hindering it by obstructing society or having people think that the Christians were anarchists. Paul today would say, "Fit in with the society so that your witness to Christ can be clear". Use society's rules, in other words, to speak to the world. One does not want to speak in a context where people will not listen, where words are not understood. Paul is probably saying something different to us today than he was in the first century. He's saying, "Use society to speak the Gospel in as clear, as forceful and meaningful a way as possible". And that probably means today: use women to speak. Use women, use anyone who is qualified, trained, called or who has the desire to serve God. We've never said organists must be male or female. We've said a person who was trained, has the ability and talent and the desire to do so, and who feels the call of God, may serve as a musician in the church. I think we are just now getting to the point where we are saying that a person who is trained, who has the call and who wants to do so may also speak God's word within the congregation.

Announcer: Somebody could say, "O.K., I can see the legitimate points that women's liberation brings up about equal pay for equal work, but when it comes to my Lutheran Church, I don't think the church is ready for the ordination of women yet".

Klein: That may or may not be true. I don't think very careful studies have been made about whether the church is ready for it. What has to be said is that almost all Lutherans in the world ordain women: the church in Sweden, the church in Norway, the church of East and West Germany, and 2/3 of the Lutheran churches in the United States, not to mention the church in Czechoslovakia. All of these Lutheran churches ordain women. In 1970, a sociological study was made of Lutheran lay people, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod lay people, in Detroit. Forty-seven per cent of those lay people favored the ordination of women. Only eight per cent of the clergy in that same area favored it. But I think one really has to ask the further question, "What do you mean, is the church ready?" I'm not sure that the church has had the opportunity to look at this in a free and impartial way. There are some people in the church who are not even willing to discuss openly what the Scriptures say. We started out this discussion today a little defensively, the assumption of the announcer being that the Scriptures speak against the ordination of women and that Pastor





Weber and I are trying to get around that. I think what Pastor Weber and I have been pointing out is that the Scriptural evidence is by no means clear. And, in fact, one can find exhortations in Scripture that imply that we should, given our context, ordain women.

I'd like to add some positive reasons, before I yield here, on why I favor the ordination of women. First of all, I favor it because of the variety of gifts God is trying to give us through women. These women are going to be especially good with women and their problems. And I suspect they may help us men to be freer and wholer and fuller as well. Secondly, I think it is important to ordain women because it is a sign of God's in-breaking new age. The church should be a signal in the world that the curse is ending. We sing in the Christmas carol, "He comes to make his blessings flow, far as the curse is found", and the church should be the place where those barriers, those curses, are breaking down. And a third reason I favor the ordination of women is because it would give tremendous affirmation to all women in the church about their role and the church's need for them.

Announcer: The same question to you, Pastor Weber, the argument "I don't think the church is ready for it yet".

Weber: I have found that this is not so. I have served in two congregations and have been well accepted in both of them. Two years ago when I was ordained I was only the second woman to

be ordained in the American Lutheran Church. There are now ten ordained women in our denomination, and eight more have just graduated and received assignments. So within just a few months there will be 18 in the American Lutheran Church, and there are 30 in the Lutheran Church in America. Many of these, probably more than half, have their own congregations, while many others serve as assistants as I do. Either way, they seem to be doing a fine job and they are well received. So, practical experience tells us the church is ready when given the opportunity. I guess that's why I do as much guest preaching as I can. I think it is important for women to be seen in pastoral roles. And once seen, the great majority, the overwhelming majority of Lutheran people do accept them.

Announcer: I'd like to take a quote out of the civil law, or actually a quote from the Declaration of Independence, that says all men are created equal. Now, it's very obvious from the way that this particular passage has been interpreted in the civil law that we are talking about women and all people when we talk about "all men" in this context. Does this passage from the Declaration of Independence express a theological truth, too? Are all people equal in every regard?

Klein: The expression, "all men are created equal", was not really meant literally, as you are well aware. It did not originally include black people, for example, and one of the things that came up in the Dred Scott Decision was that the Supreme Court ruled that it clearly could not mean black people were equal since people like Jefferson owned slaves. I think that *now* everyone would say, "Well, of course it includes everybody who is black, red, white or whatever". But that is a good example, I think, of the difference between what something meant in its original context and what it has come to mean today. "All men" clearly did not mean women because women were not granted the right to vote until 1919.

As to the substance of your question, there are obviously a variety of gifts that are given to people: there are people who are intelligent or there are people who are athletic in a greater degree than other people are, so that one should not become so fuzzy minded that he or she acts as if there are no differences at all. But the access to rights, privileges, and opportunities should be open to all men and women. And given a variety of gifts, God will use men and women in ways that he sees fit. I think that often women





may be more apt for ministry than men.

Weber: Well, it's obvious when you talk about equality in persons that there are differences in the sexes. Women bear and nurse children; because of their socialisation, they may have more desire to care for children. However, God gives each person abilities and a personality, characteristics, which are individually his or hers. None of us should be limited to certain roles. We should be allowed to develop whatever God-given abilities and talents we have to their fullest. Equality means the opportunity to use what God has given you and to develop it to the fullest point possible. And as we all enjoy equal opportunity in our civil context, we would certainly want to have it within the church also, so that we will use all the gifts and abilities of all of God's people. It seems at this point that the ordination of women is one way we could do that. It is certainly not the only way, but it is a beginning.

Announcer: One of the most central terms in the term "ordination of women" is the word "ordination". Does ordination change the ministry of a Christian's life or should ordination be any kind of a change at all?

Klein: You have a whole talk show right there. One question that's involved in all of this is what kind of authority the pastor exercises. Some cite passages in Scripture which say women should not usurp authority over men or rule over them. I view the minister much more as a playing coach, as a person, man or woman, who gets in there with the brothers and sisters in Christ, who has particular training, who has particular spiritual gifts, who has particular leadership ability, and who has had the church lay hands on that person as a sign of their support, their prayers, etc. The ordained minister is not the "professional Christian" to whom the lay people hand over the tasks of ministry. Ephesians 4 says that we are to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. Sure, there's a difference between an ordained and an unordained person. Ordination presupposes a person's training, spirituality, public profession of the faith, and commitment to the church. In turn the church offers fidelity and support to the one ordained. We usually have connected ordination with the right to administer the sacraments and preach publicly. All these things make an ordained person different, and yet, at the same time, he or she ministers much the same as everybody else.

Weber: Some American Lutheran Church documents speak of ordination as ordination to a function. We know that the word ordination is not used in Scripture, so that the church itself has given meaning to the word. Our denomination has said we ministers are set aside for a function, working with the congregations, equipping the saints for their ministry. In other words, helping others to do ministry rather than doing it all ourselves. Our authority is only that of service, of giving ourselves

in a way that enables others to receive the faith, to pray, to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, and to pass the faith on. I am ordained to a function of service which puts me right in the fight with the people in their fight against evil, sin and death, with Christ working on our side. So it's not an authority type of thing, a hierarchy, where one stands as a minister above others, but right with them.

Announcer: My final question is more a summary question than anything else, what finally is the role of the woman in the church?

Klein: Paul says that if anyone is in Christ, he or she is a new creation. I think that's important to keep in mind. When we are talking about women in the church, or men in the church, we're not really talking about power. I think that's probably where in a sense the renewal of women's roles in the church differs from the secular struggle for women's rights. We're talking about the struggle, strange as that may seem, for the right to serve. One is our master, even Christ, and all the rest of us are brothers and sisters. I think that's the role for women and men in the church.

Weber: I think it's important to note also that in our Lord's life on earth, as recorded in the Gospels, he always gave women, every woman he spoke with, full recognition as a person who could hear the faith and who could pass it on. It was not in the mores of his time to speak to women. A rabbi did not speak to a woman in public ever, not even his wife, but Jesus did on many occasions. In fact, his longest known discourse is with the woman at the well, and it's known that after his resurrection he first appeared to a woman and told her to pass on the good news. So we see in the Scripture that women were certainly given every right, right from the start.

This interview was conducted on KFUO/Lutheran Radio, Saint Louis, Missouri, July 23, 1976. Pastor Weber was serving Holy Cross Lutheran Church (LCA) in Creve Coeur, Missouri; she was a member of the ALC ministerium; after union she served on the clergy roster of the ELCA and has now retired from active ministry. Dr Klein is Professor of Old Testament at the Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago.





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A NEW ROAD TO TRAVEL: MY WALK ONTO, AND ALONG, THE WOMEN'S ORDINATION HIGHWAY

Alicia Simpfendorfer

When asked to write down why I favour women's ordination, it became clear that it was one of my most difficult assignments. Along the way, my reading has come from both sides of the argument, and there are many good arguments on the negative side. Against this, it was also necessary to weigh up where I was 'coming from'. What 'baggage' in my past life was influencing me, one way or the other? Why, even changing to a female doctor took me quite a few years. Well served by males, there seemed no reason to change. But I did, and haven't regretted it – and probably wouldn't change back.

Why should a woman of sixty embark on a new road, after being content with the 'status quo' for fifty-three years? What signposts along the way have been worthy of consideration and investigation?

Childhood and teens. There was nothing from my early life that ever made me think that women could not enter into areas where men work, all things being equal. My family always believed that women should be educated, and my mother particularly felt that women should be able to live independently of men's income, if necessary. In retrospect, their thinking was ahead of its time. My sisters and I were among a minority who moved from the country to study teaching in the city.

Church life. Teaching areas within the church were always open to me, including Bible study. In recent years, our church appears to be one of those in the lead, with men on the flower, cleaning and 'cuppa' roster, and women serving on church council (including chairperson), reading lessons and assisting with communion distribution. Our congregation is used to seeing women up front in the sanctuary area of the church.

There is often a wide difference between female and male thinking and experience. That's marvellous. God is the complete example of the very best that

could possibly be found in man and woman. He very cleverly divided this into two parts for the whole of creation. Human, animal and plant life depend on the co-operation of these two parts. Long before thinking seriously on the ordination issue, it seemed a pity that we had separate women's and men's organisations. Wouldn't the two, working together, get a better balance?

Back in 1992, the LCA printed the first study booklet, *Women in the Ministry*. We studied it in our parish immediately. Years later I discovered, to my amazement, that many congregations had not looked at it, or didn't know it existed. How can people make a choice if two sides of an argument are not considered? Not that the booklet seemed to help anyone. Those who favoured female ordination came out with the same views, and vice versa. But at least they had arguments to back their views!

Then in 1997, a notice appeared in *The Lutheran* advertising the first Women's Ministry National Conference. A friend and I decided to go. Perhaps





there we would find some answers about the women's ordination issue. What a conference! A very well organised, creative conference, with a program so original in thought and practice. It included biblical highlights from women's points of view – ideas we'd never met before. We came away with much food for thought. A vibrant woman pastor spoke, whose call from God had never been questioned by anyone, having German background and living and training in South Africa. Biblically based articles from male clergy added to the impact. We realized that men and women must start talking and LISTENING to each other on the subject.

In our home city of Sydney we soon began such discussions, with our first speaker a woman ordained by the Anglican Church, but not from the Sydney Diocese. They still don't ordain women. Their fiery debate was reported widely in the local paper, and it was followed with great interest. At around the same time, the Presbyterian Church discontinued its women's ordination program. Conflicting views abounded. Our speaker told of the gruelling time that women experienced. Incidentally, she has a husband who supports her and helps in the care of their home. They have worked out a satisfactory arrangement.

Choice for women. As a society, we have made many advances which God has allowed, and which have given women freedom never known before. The most obvious is the Pill. That has its good and bad aspects, as does everything. But think about the difference that has made for women, at least in western countries. With modern household appliances and changing attitudes to work practices as well, women have been freed to pursue their gifts. Here is time that God has made available. Do we want to pursue it to be home-makers, career women, or both? Where has God called us?

Key Bible passages –

1 Corinthians 14:33-38 and 1 Timothy 2:11-14. Despite all the material on these two passages, they remain a central stumbling block for some people. So little is actually explained here, and as Lutherans we are not given to literalistic and fundamentalist views. How on earth can anyone from this century, given the best of historical data, really put themselves

into the culture of that day, and know what sort of a situation Paul was talking into? Having been blessed with the experience of overseas travel, it is evident how difficult it is to try to transpose our thinking and understanding of life to any given area of the world, let alone go back some centuries. At that time, Paul was speaking to house churches, and wives were misusing their new-found freedom in Christ. No light is thrown on these passages from anywhere else. Luther acknowledges the difficulty of interpretation where insufficient passages are available to clear things easily.

These are two such passages. The best light is the Light himself, Jesus Christ. This is the Light we must use too.

Jesus made some radical changes in the thought patterns of his day. The world is still trying to catch up. His attitude to women was exemplary. No man could match it today. If we worship in spirit and truth as he expects of us, we will find great benefits in having women join the ordained team. Whom did God send to take the amazing message of the resurrection to the apostles? Women. Can't we still do that today? Of course.

It's not as though there will be a take-over of women, or that congregations won't have a choice. Society appears to have 'levelled out'. Women are balancing their priorities better. The female doctors in our local surgery all balance their hours with family commitments. There are complaints that they are not available enough. If they were more available, people would complain that they are not caring for their families properly. Either way, they couldn't win.

Only time will tell if women's ordination is truly from God. I believe it is. If it is not of God, it will be stopped. He can do that. He will finally resolve it, in his way. In the meantime we do need to talk, read, study, debate, listen and try to come to a consensus. That's hard. We're much better at trying to get others to see our point of view and wanting them to take it on. It's easier. But that's not consensus. In the time still available to us, let's travel the road without fear, knowing that Jesus, who is the Light, continues to give light on this road that we all walk together.



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A NEW WAY OF SEEING

Margaret Hunt

I was baptised at five weeks of age, and in forty years of growing up in the Lutheran church, I accepted unquestioningly the restricted role of women in the Church. Even when I became interested in theology in the 1970s, and took some subjects at Lutheran Teachers' College, it simply did not occur to me to question the status quo of the male-only pastorate. Although there had been some debate about women's ordination at that time, I was not interested. I remember seeing a woman presiding at a worship service on television, and actually feeling repelled by the idea of a woman 'usurping' a position which had always been exclusively male.

In 1990, I decided that the time was right for me to do some part-time study. I remembered how much I had loved my six months' exposure to theology in 1977, so enrolled in two subjects at Luther Seminary (Luther Campus, at that time) in February 1991. Four weeks or so before I began to study, I thought seriously for the first time about the status of women in the Church.

The catalyst for this change was a radio program about the World Council of Churches Congress in Canberra, Australia. It was broadcasting some of the women participants' reflections on the story of Martha and Mary in Luke 10.

They were saying that Jesus and Mary could have both responded to Martha's request for Mary's help, and all three could have prepared the meal together.

At the time I thought, 'But Jesus did not choose to do that. Why?' Then came a rare flash of insight. Jesus wanted Mary to continue doing what Jesus stated was her good choice. That choice was to do what only men did traditionally, namely, to sit at the feet of a rabbi, and to receive theological guidance. I felt stunned. Until that moment, I had been doubtful about my decision to study theology.

I was unsure of my motives, and wondered if I could justify myself by 'indulging' in the study of theology.

After all, I wouldn't be using my knowledge as would a pastor of the Church. I had prayed that God would give me guidance, but had not received an answer.

But now I felt such a burst of joy and energy. Not only was it alright to study at Luther Seminary, but it was most important that I did so. Jesus wants women as well as men to be theologians!

The next affirmation of my new path in life came at a Justice Seminar at Luther Campus in April of that year. The three areas addressed were the rural crisis, justice for Australian Aboriginal people, and justice for women in the LCA. In attending the latter, I was listening, for the first time, to speakers advocating the ordination of women. Among them was Pastor Joyce Scheitel, from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The grace of Jesus shone in her and through her words. It was a very special experience.

During the seminar, the participants also had the opportunity of examining some scriptural texts from a new perspective. The text that my small group studied was the story of the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15. The question was asked, 'Why did Jesus not tell the woman that she also came under the umbrella of God's grace? Why did she, and not Jesus, tell the disciples and others, that even the 'dogs' are allowed to eat the crumbs from the children's table?' It struck me then that by goading her, Jesus was encouraging her to speak out the gospel message, instead of Jesus himself delivering it.

This outcast woman was actually 'preaching' to the chosen ones, the disciples, men of Israel! In the end, Jesus acknowledged her great faith, and granted her request. In the face of tradition and Jewish beliefs, Jesus ushered in the new era of the kingdom of God, in which 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3:28).





The untold story

Since that time I have heard and read many more arguments both for and against the ordination of women. But for me there is nothing more powerful than the words and actions of Christ himself, who, full of grace and truth, has freed us from the dead hand of the law. What is it that prevents called and gifted women from becoming servants (because that is what pastors are – we don't have Lutheran 'priests') who preach God's Word and administer the Sacraments to their congregations? It is the legalistic interpretation of two verses in two letters written to two ancient congregations which is causing so many people so much pain. We need to ask the question, 'What would Jesus say about our persistence in allowing such legalism to crush his people thousands of years later?'

Some argue that it is only today's culture which is influencing Christian women to want to serve in a way which always has been exclusively male. I disagree with that. A number of elderly women (including one pastor's wife) have confided to me that they had always felt called to be pastors, but had no way of telling even their husbands about their experiences because that might cause pain and confusion to the other person. How many women throughout our two thousand years of Christianity have suffered in similar prisons of silence? How many times in history has the failure to acknowledge the call of women to serve in the public ministry resulted in human resistance to the gracious work of the Holy Spirit? Only God knows the answer.

Let us now turn the page of history, shake off its shackles, and joyfully welcome women to the pastorate as we repeat Peter's Pentecost message,

*And in the last days it shall be, God declares,
That I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
And your young men shall see visions,
And your old men shall dream dreams;
Yes, and on my menservants
and my maidservants in those days
I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.*

Joel 2:28,29

Acts 2:17,18





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A WOMAN WHO MADE A DIFFERENCE

Norm Habel

The scene is South India. The situation is an international school and an ecumenical parish. The time has come to appoint a new chaplain and pastor. The decision is made to appoint a senior pastor and a youth pastor. The senior pastor chosen is a man working in Hawaii; the youth pastor is a young woman from New York.

Many felt uneasy about appointing a woman, but felt relieved that a man would be in charge. The Spirit, it seems, had a different idea. The man finally decided not to come, but the young woman did. She was tall, dignified and American.

The first Sunday she stood in the pulpit to preach, you could have heard a pin drop. Many people were anxious. This was the first time a woman had spoken the Word from that pulpit. She was preaching on the text about Jesus healing Mary Magdelene. And her first words still ring in my ears. "I am Mary Magdelene"! She went on to talk about what it is like being a woman rejected by men, rejected by other women and rejected by society. She then told us how she felt when Jesus came, when Jesus touched her, when Jesus healed her.

That day I heard the Gospel afresh, with my heart, my mind and my spirit. That day I realised that women preachers can bring us all a fresh understanding of the Gospel. That day, I experienced in my soul what I knew to be true in my head. The Gospel is in the Word, and women preachers can bring it alive in a fresh and vital way. During the course of that year, more and more students and staff came to accept the significance of a woman preacher. She made a real Gospel difference to our community.

My experience of this difference is not confined to India. A few Sundays ago at my local church in Adelaide, a young woman told a children's story using a puppet. Her story was one of the best Gospel sermons I have ever heard. What this woman preached from behind her puppet was equal to any

sermon I have heard from behind a pulpit! She was my pastor that day! In my experience, women preachers do make a difference, and, by the grace of God, will continue to do so!





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MY STORY

(Lutheran woman, 24)

When I was growing up I never questioned the fact that there were only male pastors and not female pastors because 'that was the way it was'. I did not ever consider challenging the notion that there could be anything wrong with this. Perhaps it was age. Perhaps it was because I, like so many others, did not like the thought of change. Like all people, I am still growing and learning. One thing I seem to have realised in this time is that change is not always a bad thing. Now we have a chance for more positive, progressive change in the church, in the form of women's ordination.

I guess that my argument for women's ordination is a fairly logical one, although academics may consider it to be lacking in theology. However, I truly believe that when God told us to share His love with all, he meant both men and women. Confining the role of publicly preaching the Word of God and administering his sacraments to men only, means

that the skills God gave to women to nurture, care and teach are not being utilised to the full potential of God's plan for us. It is agreed that the current role of women in the Church has been an important one, but if given the opportunity, there is so much more that women could still achieve.

Some of the most inspirational, spiritually-guiding ministers I have met and worked with have been women, albeit of another denomination! Realising that women can be pastors and leaders of the Church, and could have been for the past two thousand years, should be something we embrace whole-heartedly. We could rejoice in the fact that we will have more people to spread the Word and the love of Christ to others who are turning away from God, or who have never known such grace and love.

The untold story





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ANCIENT, DECREPIT AND GREY

Ivan Wittwer

I am neither a theologian nor the son of a theologian, but I treasure the Holy Scripture. So much so, that before I became ancient, decrepit and grey, I learned the New Testament in the Authorised Version by heart, with the exception of the magnificent Revelation to John. I also learned the gospels in Greek by heart, but my problem is that I do not meet any ancient Greeks, so that exercise had little point.

I treasure also a united church, free from endless argument and the history of hot debate which often became hatred in years gone by. It is my hope that the debate on the ordination of women will be free from rancour and that the decision of the majority will not prove to be divisive.

I well remember the debate about women wearing hats in church, or having their heads otherwise covered. Did not Paul clearly say a great deal about this (1 Corinthians 11:3-16)? Today this is not an issue. We are agreed that Paul speaks in the context of society in his day.

The same men who took seriously Paul's words as a dictum for all time, nevertheless ignored our Lord's direction in Luke 10:4, "Carry neither purse, nor scrip", when taking the gospel to the community. I know that wallet and sometimes a packed lunch was taken as they went. Of course, this was local direction, intended for the seventy evangelists, or for the twelve, in Matthew 10. But can this interpretation be disputed? Were we being selective in what we believed was a direction for the first

century of the church, and what we believed was intended for all time?

Again, Paul directs, "I suffer women to keep silent in church" (1 Corinthians 14:34), or in TEV, "The women should keep silent in meetings. They are not allowed to speak". Then comes a most unfortunate translation, "The Jewish law says they must not be in charge". The correct translation is simply "law" and a study of other passages where "Jewish" is inserted demonstrates a distortion of Scripture.

During early years of my ministry I was asked to explain how I could permit a female president of our church youth group to read a lesson during the annual youth service. The fathers of the church were quite sincere when raising their objection. How times have changed! [Yes, Paul was speaking in a particular social setting, so I am advised.]

Further, church custom did not permit me to pray with members of other churches. In our sincerity in observing Scripture as we understood it then, what blessings we denied ourselves.

The last bastion, as I see it, which is preventing the ordination of women is a theology developed around





The untold story

something we call 'The Order of Creation', again from I Corinthians (11:7-9). My library with only a little Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and certainly not the Erlangen edition of Luther's Works, has not revealed that such a theology existed until more recent times. However, I stand ready to be corrected by theologians.



Thus I began to question what I believe evolved from local customs where, almost throughout civilisation, women were in some way subservient to men. I suggest again that we have been selective in our teaching. Let it be said that Paul wrote some of the finest words concerning women. What could be more gracious than, "Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it" (Ephesians 5:25)? He used his gifts in developing congregations. He wrote the finest words of all in this respect, "In Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female..." (Galatians 3:28).

About two years before that joyous day when the ELCA and UELCA became the LCA, a joint Pastors' Conference was held at Gawler, S.A. I listened patiently to the learned debate on the ordination of women. Finally I sought an opportunity to speak. I said something like this, "I have listened with respect to the arguments against such ordination, which I believe have been sincerely presented. However, I state without any fear of being proved wrong, that during the lifetime of some of you here today, the Lutheran Church of Australia will be ordaining women". And immediately there was a majority cry of "NO!" from the gathering.

Please do not take time to write in censure of the above. Let us wait to debate it in glory.





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PASTORAL MINISTRY AMONG GOD'S FORGOTTEN PEOPLE

Ingeborg Hickey

(Inge is a Lutheran lay-chaplain at Adelaide's Strathmont Centre for intellectually disabled people. She has long sensed a call to public ministry in the church).

She looked at me through the glass door, perplexed, frustrated, lost, questioning. Why was the door locked, why couldn't she come out? It was a beautiful hot summer day with the temperature around 35 degrees. Ivy is close to eighty years old, but she can shuffle and move around. Yes, she can express her displeasure, but who will listen? It's for her own good that she is locked in. Hot weather can kill, and it's hard to get the residents to drink. But can Ivy know that? All she knows is that she is locked in. She is alone, away from her family and friends, in a strange place of strange routines.

Peter is not yet 21 years old. Sometimes he loses his temper and throws things at people. He doesn't like being called names. He has nightmares and is on medication to help him cope with living. He has a job, but he gets bored. There is nothing for him to do, no other young people for him to hang out with. Peter has been coming to the chapel for quite a while. He likes to talk about Jesus, and prays for others or asks for prayer. There is nothing wrong with the way he looks, and he can talk. But he can't read or write. What does the future hold for him?

There is a chap from Oodnadatta, Charlie, who loves to play the piano or get hold of the guitar for a twang. He used to scare me because he got angry when others made a noise during worship. But now he hasn't been to the chapel for more than a year, because he's been moved into the community house, and no-one can, or will, take him to services. But when Charlie sees me at the garden centre, he comes over and gives me a hug and a kiss, and touches my arm – so gentle, like a breeze. He tells me his latest news and troubles at which I have to guess. It is so hard to understand what he says.

But I try to stay and listen for a while; then he goes back to his job.

The infirmary is another place to visit. Alan lies there, silent without a murmur, a twisted frame of a body. But his eyes speak a million words, and follow my every move. There is so much noise and hardly time for him to rest. Except for a frown and a closing of his lids, there is nothing left that he can do. So I croon a song of Jesus in his ear and say the Lord's Prayer loud enough for him to hear.

At worship last month, a crowd of eighteen came, and some come and go. But we play the songs and pray. We talk about Jesus, and how he healed a man with sores. How Jesus was not afraid to touch the sick man. The music is fine and we sing as loud as we can. We give each person a tambourine or whatever we have for people to join in our worship of God. Faces are lit and lives are touched by the presence of God. We call them disabled, but who can stop the Spirit touching them? Their spirits are alive and willing to join Jesus our Lord.

Sometimes I've been invited to join a Christmas dinner dance. The music plays and the disco begins, but some are shy and won't join in. I'm no champion dancer by any means, but to see the pleasure on their faces for simply being part of the scene makes up for the aching limbs.

There are other stories I could tell, but you understand my pain as well. So much could be done, but so few are able to come and receive what should not be denied to any child of God. There is not much money made available to spend on people hidden behind doors for their own good, and there is fear of that which is little understood. But there they are, hundreds of them, lonely, bewildered, cut off from all. Where is a complete ministry for them?

Note: Names have been changed to maintain confidentiality.



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THE CHALLENGE

Wendy Begg

I first became aware of 'women's ordination' about twelve years ago. Since then I have been confronted, challenged and stirred by this issue which has not gone away. It needed to be addressed and answered, even though this was not a personal matter in that I have not felt called to serve as a pastor. I could see glimpses of the struggle and the pain of those who felt so called. Out of respect for them and their sense of call, it meant that I needed to be open to listening and learning.

In most, if not all, cases I perceived their acceptance of all other Lutheran doctrine as well as their sense of call. What personal crises this created, and continues to do so! In being true to themselves, they have no place to be. Their only choice is compromise. Does God call only women to compromise their spirituality? In the meantime, I have witnessed the media's portrayal of such struggles within other denominations.

At this point I am wondering about the appropriateness of what seems to me to be an equal ranking of the *what* of the pastor and the *who* of the pastor (i.e. the *function* and the *gender*). For me, the Word and Sacrament are the means whereby the Holy Spirit works; it is the Spirit who makes them efficacious. I find it interesting that in an emergency, anyone can baptize. The human agent is just the vessel through whom God works. Just how small and limited do we make God? Would He only work through a female vessel in an emergency and at no other time?

If I look at some events spread further across my life, I think the focus has been on worship, not on the gender of the person who leads it. I find it interesting now to remember that when I was a child and we played 'churches', I was the pastor, reading the liturgy and the Bible, and 'administering' the 'sacraments'. It never crossed my mind that this was not what the Church was modelling or teaching. Gender never entered our consciousness. Then about twenty years ago I became aware that a rural Uniting Church parish was inducting a female minister.

It passed as an event of no consequence to me, other than that this was new, and that they had a need which was filled.

I have spent the last six years as a part-time student at our seminary. Here I was privileged to hear a reasonable amount of dialogue on this topic, and to be challenged about my attitude. I would have to say that one subject, *Ways of Interpreting Scripture*, challenged me the most. I began looking at the Word from different perspectives. How refreshingly revealing that became!

Currently I attend Women's Ministry Network meetings and events as often as possible as part of my intention to continue learning, and to understand more about the issues for women in a range of ministries.

I feel that the *what* in worship is more important than the *who* of the pastorate, and that the latter can be well served by men or women. I believe that we have been created as complementary creatures, so let the Church show that in practice.





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TIME FOR A NEW SONG

Ruth Fehlberg



'Sing a new song unto the Lord'...Psalm 96. Not only do we accept new songs to worship the Lord, we are encouraged to use new and enriching ways of praising Him and spreading the good news of our great God.

Over the years, we have seen women of great faith and abilities using their God-given talents in His worship and service. And we have seen them unstinting in their faithfulness and devotion in caring for all types of humans in need!

It was while Lutheran clergy were re-evaluating attitudes in connection with God's will for health and healing, in body as well as soul, that, in connection with my New Testament studies, I became fully convinced about the role of women in the Church, including ordination for those who experience the deep call for Ministry.

It was then that Peter's quotation from the prophet Joel on Pentecost Day really 'grabbed' me.

I will pour out my Spirit on everyone. Your sons and daughters will proclaim my message... Yes, even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days and they will proclaim my message (Joel 2:28,29).

If that doesn't put women on an equal par with men in this field, what does? My question now is: why should the infusion of the Holy Spirit be so much more superior in men than in women?

I have often pondered the fact that all the seminarists were and are entirely under male influence and masculine points of view during their five to six years of training and preparation for ordination. This despite the fact that the Church has more female members than male!

When we came to Blackwood in the early seventies, an occasion arose when I was moved to ask our then-current pastor, 'Have you ever considered that on judgement day the Lord may accuse you of having kept the good news of His salvation and His many blessings from countless people through your hard attitudes in relation to the ordination of women?' 'Wouldn't happen! Never!' he replied very forcefully.

Soon afterwards, on our overseas tour in 1973, I was impressed by the number of ordained



Lutheran women in Scandinavia and Germany. We were guests of Pastor Werner Fehlberg, who was in charge of the beleaguered Lutheran parish in Leipzig City, in communist East Germany.

He had as his assistants a young ordained man and the ordained Frau Pastor Gerlich. I was most impressed by her manner as she went about her duties, always gracious and helpful, never officious, completely dedicated. And no-one so much as turned a hair, let alone made any remarks! She instructed the young, preached the sermon, visited the sick and presided at the Lord's Supper.





The acceptance and gratitude of all she served, parishioners and outsiders alike, was palpable. And I could feel for my mother-in-law, coping with her traditional, rather chauvinist pastor-husband, when she exclaimed, 'Den Apostle Paul, den hasse ich!' (I hate that Apostle Paul!)

Watching Frau Pastor Gerlich fixed my attitude to the rightness and need of ordination of women, reinforced many times by further studies and by the backing from Lutheran pastors and Lutheran laypeople in Australia.

The newly-risen Lord had been deserted by his male disciples and followers. It was the women who were witness to His astonishing resurrection and hurried to spread the news to one and all. Jesus did not say to them, 'Stop! Wait for the men! You aren't allowed to be apostles. So, silence – all of you!'

I feel deeply for those gifted, fully qualified Lutheran women who feel the earnest call to open and accepted ministry, but the doors remain closed. Can this be God's perfect will? Sex discrimination is an affront to positive community thinking, and we now have general laws against such implementation. So, isn't there a weighty argument against our Church's established attitudes and age-old practices?





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A POSITIVE APPROACH TO THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN

Herman Pech

This is the story of the journey that led me to a positive stance regarding the movement for the ordination of women in the Lutheran Church of Australia.

During the early years after the formation of the LCA, I was on leave of absence from the pastoral ministry, for family reasons. For just on ten years I taught German and some English in three State High Schools in Box Hill and in nearby Donvale. After three years in a school for boys only, I taught in co-educational schools staffed by men and women teachers. During this time, I gained great admiration for many female colleagues whose skills in teaching and class management surpassed by far anything my



utmost commitment and efforts could produce. Eventually I had to retire because of ill health – a rather traumatic event.

It was during a prolonged recuperation, that I had opportunities to attend pastors' conferences and synodical conventions, and so catch up on what was going on in the church.

After due process over a decade or so, two of the three major Lutheran churches in the USA had begun to ordain women pastors in the 1970s, as Lutheran churches in Europe had already been doing. Influences from overseas now began to affect the thinking and attitudes of some Australian pastors. A university chaplain in South Australia had presented to fellow clergy some positive directions based mainly, I believe, on publications by Krister Stendahl of the USA. So discussion and debate began in pastoral circles; this in due course reached interstate pastors' conferences.

In 1975 at a pastors' conference held in Nunawading, where our family was worshipping, an older pastor gave a very confident traditional presentation on the role of women in the church. Only a restricted supportive role, like that of deaconess, was deemed appropriate for women, women's groups and organisations – valued though such ministry was by the church's male clergy.

I wasn't well at the time, but that certainly wasn't the only reason why I was unhappy with what I heard.

1975 had been declared 'International Women's Year', and there was much discussion and many events that brought women's issues on to centre stage throughout society. Worldwide, under the aegis of the United Nations, many calls went out to espouse 'equality, development and peace' in gender relationships.

The final issue of the Lutheran Theological Journal (LTJ) for 1975 was devoted to a response by way of a 'consideration of the part women have played and could play in the church'. It contained two scholarly articles by seminary lecturers, Drs E Renner and H Hamann, based on OT and NT perspectives. There was also an article by a woman, the first ever in the LTJ, on 'Some concerns of Christian Women' penned by Margarete Freund, and an informative report on the International Women's Year by Pastor Daniel Overduin. Margarete Freund's article evoked in me a good deal of sympathy, and Dr Hamann's thesis on 'The NT and the Ordination of Women', spurred me on to further study and reflection.

At this time a fellow pastor encouraged me to subscribe to a bi-monthly theological magazine from the USA called *Currents in Theology and Mission*. The June 1977 issue contained an interview by a Lutheran Radio announcer on 'The Ordination of Women in the Lutheran Church', the contents of which were very apposite to the current discussion and debate in our Australian church. The people interviewed were Ralph Klein (editor of *Currents*), and Gloria Weber, the second woman pastor ordained in the American Lutheran Church.*

In August 1978, I made a presentation to the Melbourne Lutheran Ministers' Fraternal on 'The Role of Women in the Church', in which I posed a number of questions and possible options for consideration. In the open fellowship of the fraternal, I felt free to suggest some ways to move forward from current 'repressive attitudes, stance and synodical legislation'. So by that time I had definitely progressed to a positive approach to the ordination of women.

In 1979, I was happy to accept an invitation from Dr Grope, President of the LCA, to be one of a number of respondents to Pastor Noel Schultz who was undertaking a doctoral thesis, completed in April 1981. Its title was, 'Neither male nor female: towards a theology and practice of sexual equality in the Lutheran Church of Australia'. My study and interaction with the exegetical and hermeneutical material presented by Pastor Noel reinforced the positive attitudes I had come to accept. These attitudes were also espoused and propounded in two articles that I wrote in 1980 for *The Way: an Evangelical*



Lutheran Voice. This unofficial periodical was published for six or seven years, and had a readership of about five hundred.

*This interview has been reproduced with permission as part of this package. It is entitled "Voices from another time and place."



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WILL WOMEN GET THE BLAME?

(layperson, female, 53, SA)

'Adam was the first, but not the last, man to blame woman when things went wrong', quipped my pastor about thirty five years ago.

Unfortunately, I have the same feeling that the women's ordination issue, no matter the outcome, will be blamed for any split that may become more pronounced after the vote is taken in July.

In fact, I feel that there are already large cracks present in our church. We have different groups who have their own 'pastors' at Murray Bridge, in the Barossa, the Riverland and in Queensland. Friends from Queensland who visited recently, said that there are many 'obvious splits' in the church up there. Somehow these break-away groups are not being mentioned in our church. Are we hoping they will go away if we sweep them under the mat, instead of informing our members of the differences?

There are also the 'splits' with regard to worship. Some pastors and congregations are using the worship resources produced by the Commission on Worship. These alternatives within the liturgy are appreciated for the richness they bring to worship. Others bemoan the changes, saying that the alternative forms mean that they have to concentrate during worship. Other services are a mixture of mostly songs, with the occasional hymn, and some liturgy. Yet other services seem to have little liturgy and minimal congregational participation, because a band does most of the singing.

Some people will only attend worship the former way, and others are just as definite that they will only worship at informal services. There are also differences between pastors regarding worship style. Some say that the informal worship services are not worship at all.

I have also been saddened to hear of some hostility and non-acceptance by some members of our signing of the Joint Declaration on Justification

with the Roman Catholic Church. They even condemn our continuing dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church.

Human nature seems to want to blame something, or someone, when things don't go the way they want them to go. I fear that the 'vote on women's ordination' issue will be the catalyst for a split in the church and be blamed for it. No matter the outcome, people will leave, as some already have. As already mentioned, the cracks are already there because of a variety of other issues.

It will probably be the extremists of both sides who will provide the catalyst for any split, as seen in a letter to the Editor, *The Advertiser*, 31.1.00. On the other hand, in the article in *The Advertiser* on 19.1.00, I was thankful to read that pastoral care for those affected by the decision will be implemented.

If we allow our church to divide over this issue, or any of the others mentioned, aren't we playing into the devil's hands? A church with quarrelling members, a church divided, is what the devil wants.

What a challenge for us to pray for God's mercy, patience, understanding and guidance for our church. Readers, please bring this whole issue to the Lord in daily prayer. Let us be faithful in praying as we put our trust in Him.





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The untold story

WOMEN PASTORS IN THE LCA?

Linda Allen

Women pastors? The first time I remember even being aware that some people were considering the option of ordaining women was about ten years ago, maybe less. It was when the Anglicans were facing the issue. There was a group of loud and militant women fighting to be ordained, and their struggle and eventual ordination was publicised widely in the press.

My initial feelings when I saw and heard these women on TV were shock and distaste. How could these women be genuine? It seemed as if they were only concerned about themselves and their own personal rights. That seemed very selfish to me. Apart from that, I didn't find the idea of women pastors very tasteful. It just didn't seem right. After all, I was used to pastors being men. I had only ever seen and heard a male in the pulpit. I distinctly remember thinking at the time: 'I'm glad we in the Lutheran Church don't have to bother with all that'. I remember hoping that our church would be able to avoid such issues and controversy for at least my lifetime (I'm still quite young).

Well, I was to be disappointed. A few years later I became aware that it was an issue our church had begun to face. This made me feel anxious. I really didn't want the status quo to be disrupted. Being forced to make a decision about something like this could easily go wrong. What if we did get it wrong? What would God think? What would it do to our church? Would we still be God's church?

After a period of ignoring the issue, I began to realise that this was a very important issue for our church, and one that deserved my own careful consideration and investigation. But where should I start? I wanted to find out what the Bible said about authority and order, and where women fitted into God's creation. Aren't men supposed to be the head of the house?

It was about this time that a series of four Sunday afternoon sessions was held at our church. It was organised by Dr Grope. He spoke about the scripture

passages which were at the heart of the debate, and provided opportunity for questions and answers. I went along, but I was not convinced. Instead, I began to be a little confused. This was good, because it was at this point that I prayed to God for real understanding. I really was concerned to do the right thing. If God didn't have any objections to women being ordained, then he would have to show me why and I would have to listen. And that is exactly what he did and exactly what I did.

The following year I found myself at Luther Seminary. I had an opportunity to take a year off from work to study at the Seminary. I jumped at the chance to study God's Word. It was all very exciting. The issue of women's ordination had been pushed to the back of my mind. It was a touchy subject. I didn't really want to discuss it with the women there. They sometimes seemed a bit angry.

I ended up staying at the seminary for five years. At the end of that time I came to realise that it is





women, and began to feel liberated myself. There I began to understand Jesus' teaching about his new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17-19; Isaiah 65:17-25) and a little of what that really means for us, his church.

At the seminary, I learnt that being a pastor is not about what gender one is and not about having authority over others. It is about serving others. Really. We hear these words so much that we have forgotten what that really means. If our church is to practice what it preaches and believes, then it will realise that we already have women in pastoral roles and will give them the same protection and provision that we are so proud to offer to our men.

As you can see, not only did God show me that he didn't have any objections to women being ordained, but also, that it was something that we need to do. God showed me that so long as we continue to refuse to ordain women, we will be a church which is continually living in contradiction to its own faith. In a church which preaches the reconciliation of Jesus Christ, we would then continue in a state where women and men are not reconciled.

absolutely essential for the health of our church and for the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, that we begin to ordain women.

It was as a woman at the seminary that I came face to face with the injustice and discrimination that is practiced in our church against women because they are women. Women face discrimination at the seminary in many ways, because of the way our church views and treats women. Yet it was at the seminary that I learnt about God's Word for women and men together, one people (1 Peter 2:9). It was there that I learnt about authority and that it is God alone who has authority. At the seminary, I learnt that power and authority reside only in his Word (Mark 1:22). Certainly, he gives power and authority to the Church, but it is his power and authority. These gifts are not inherent in any individual whether male or female (2 Corinthians 13:4). There I was reminded of Jesus' instructions to his disciples, that they are not to lord it over each other (Matthew 20:25-27). There I learned of Jesus' radical, liberating attitude toward

