



# Lutheran Theological Journal

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Six papers specially prepared by the Lutheran Church of Australia's Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations presenting the arguments for retaining the ordination of men only and the arguments for introducing the ordination of women



# Lutheran Theological Journal

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The next issue of Lutheran Theological Journal will be a festschrift in honour of Dr Vic Pfitzner, who retired at the end of 2004 after thirty-eight years of service as a New Testament lecturer at Luther Seminary (now Australian Lutheran College).

# Editorial

This first edition of *Lutheran Theological Journal* for 2005 is devoted to the debate on the ordination of women within the Lutheran Church of Australia, ongoing since the late 1980s. On the basis of 1 Corinthians 14:34,35 and 1 Timothy 2:11–14, the LCA's *Theses of Agreement* say that the Bible prohibits women from being ordained as pastors (TA VI.11). In late 1987 the Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations (CTICR) appointed a special committee to study the matter at length. After meeting twenty times, the special committee submitted its 63-page report in April 1991. The report did not settle the matter one way or the other, but its authors were united in their conviction that they had isolated the main issues, that the debate was more complicated than some had thought, and that most churches that had decided in favour of the ordination of women had done so after an extensive period of theological reflection rather than out of a desire to keep up with trends in society (CTICR 1991: 54).

During the decade that followed, countless papers were written that treated the specific topics that were identified in the report: biblical hermeneutics, gospel and culture, God's ordering of creation, the order of redemption, the pastoral office, the priesthood of all believers, pastoral authority, women in the gospels, headship in the church and the family, church tradition and ecumenical practice, and, time and time again, papers on different aspects of the two key texts from Paul's letters. The arguments presented on both sides of the debate were summarised in an initial report on women's ordination in November 1998 and again in a final report in September 1999. Leading into the 2000 General Synod the CTICR concluded that 'on balance scripture and theology permit the ordination of women'. The voting that followed a day's debate at the pastors conference and another day's debate at synod showed that the pastors and then the synod delegates were evenly divided on the subject.

The issue was not tabled for discussion at the next synod, in 2003. A wide-ranging brainstorming within the CTICR in January last year gave the debate a fresh kick-start. Commission members identified the issues that they believed remained in dispute. The issues were gathered together in a paper titled 'Controverted matters in the LCA debate on the ordination of women', tabled at the May 2004 meeting of the commission. From the numerous issues listed in that paper, the commission decided to provide, published in this issue of *LTJ*, a paper on biblical hermeneutics, two summary papers presenting the arguments mounted by each side in the debate as clearly and as fully as possible, and exegetical papers on the three texts that have featured most prominently in the debate: 1 Corinthians 14:33b–38, 1 Timothy 2:11–14 and Galatians 3:26–29. The names of those who provided the original drafts of the six papers have not been given. This is partly due to the temptation we all face to dismiss a paper out of hand because

we know the author, or to regard it as infallible for the same reason. But, more importantly, each paper has undergone so many drafts within the CTICR that few authors would recognise the final product as their own work. Each is a paper of the CTICR and represents the best case that the commission is able to make for the topic in question at this stage. The CTICR does not claim to have covered the vast array of views on the issue within the LCA. Furthermore, the case on each side has undergone a process of constant refinement and expansion, as is to be expected. Readers are asked to note that the articles on hermeneutics and Galatians 3 may be described as 'balanced' papers, representing the arguments advanced by both sides in the debate; not so the other four papers, which arise from the two positions. The list of references (pages 94–100) is drawn from all six papers.

In view of the sensitivity surrounding the topic, CTICR members have stayed committed to the pursuit of truth, unity and love. Christians are called to hold fast to the truth, confess the truth and reject error. They also acknowledge that believers are called to grow in Christian knowledge as the Spirit leads Christ's followers in all the truth. The church knows that new insights can become new teachings, as long as those teachings are consistent with the whole of the Bible and the teaching of the gospel. Secondly, in view of the Spirit's gift of unity and Paul's admonition to 'maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace' (Eph 4:3), the commission has been alert to the threat of church division, whichever way the issue is finally resolved. The CTICR is committed to the view that the LCA cannot avoid the issue out of fear of division, nor should it paper over decisive differences. Unity at the expense of truth and Christian consciences cannot be countenanced. The third factor that has governed the debate within the CTICR has been the Spirit's gift of love. Members acknowledge that it is hard to love those with whom one disagrees on a matter as important as the ordination of women. They have confronted the temptation to let disagreements lead to the rejection of others or to divide into opposing camps. How well the CTICR has succeeded in avoiding these pitfalls is known only to God. But it has been conscious of the dangers, it has sought forgiveness when it has failed, it has practised mutual admonition and it has prayed that the Spirit would continue to endow its members — in fact the whole church — with the gifts of truth, unity and love.

### **CTICR Executive**

# From the president

'The Church accepts without reservation the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as a whole and in all their parts, as the divinely inspired, written and inerrant Word of God, and as the only infallible source and norm for all matters of faith, doctrine and life.'

So runs the first paragraph of Article II, CONFESSION, in the constitution of the church, its districts and our congregations.

Without reservation one turns to Scripture alone, through exegesis and through the eyes of our Confessions, to address the question of the ordination of women.

For this discussion to retain integrity, all who participate will need to clearly understand the current position of the Lutheran Church of Australia. If a new position on the question is to be taken, it must be done over against the teaching we uphold at this time.

There are three legitimate responses to the presupposition that Scripture permits the ordination of women: agree, disagree, undecided.

This discussion is an opportunity for the church to engage in a profitable study of God's word. The way in which we engage on this issue has the potential to place us on a solid foundation upon which to face future issues of significant consequence to our church.

The members of the CTICR have addressed the papers now presented to the church with intensity, passion, scholarship and an honouring of each other, regardless of viewpoint.

Let the church commit itself to prayer as we call on the Holy Spirit to guide us in our struggle to follow our Lord's will.

The Lord be with you.

**(Rev'd) MICHAEL P SEMMLER**

President, Lutheran Church of Australia

7 April 2005

# Hermeneutics and the ordination of women

## Introduction

This paper is not intended to be a general discussion of hermeneutics, although we will begin with some general remarks about the nature and problem of hermeneutics. The main purpose of the paper is to investigate the specific hermeneutical issues connected with the debate on the ordination of women. After a general introduction, we will examine the hermeneutical assumptions and rules for exegesis and then concentrate particularly on the hermeneutical issues involved in the question of male headship and female subordination and how this relates to the order of ministry in the church.

The paper will discuss the topic from the angle of the two positions that are currently being debated in the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA) on the question of the ordination of women. It will highlight areas of agreement as well as disagreement and at the same time clarify the hermeneutical issues involved on both sides of the debate. The arguments reflect the opinions and positions of the members of the LCA's Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations (CTICR) rather than those of the church more broadly. Both sides have changed and developed their arguments in the light of the ongoing discussion. Therefore, there may well be differences in argumentation between the members of the commission and other members of the church on the same side of the debate. It would be a fallacy to think that positions over the last five years have simply been maintained and entrenched. While the bottom line may not have changed, several of the arguments used by members of the CTICR on both sides have been abandoned, changed or refined.

Although the paper's major focus is hermeneutics, this can never be separated from questions of exegesis. Therefore, we will need to look at the various assumptions and rules of exegesis. But first we will briefly discuss the nature and problem of modern hermeneutics and contrast this with biblical hermeneutics. The discussion is meant to form a bridge from the general hermeneutics used in academic circles to the biblical hermeneutics used in the church.

## What is hermeneutics?

The word 'hermeneutics' is derived from the Greek verb *hermeneuein* which means 'to interpret'.<sup>1</sup> Biblical hermeneutics, therefore, is the study of the interpretation of the Bible. Traditionally, biblical hermeneutics (or theological hermeneutics) has involved the task of formulating rules for the interpretation of the Scriptures. These rules have guided the church in its understanding of what an author or speaker intended to communicate.

Hermeneutics today, however, has been broadened to include not only the rules, methods and techniques used to interpret written texts but also the conditions that make understanding possible. Either way, it is very much bound up with the theory of knowledge (epistemology).<sup>2</sup> In sum, it is the theory of interpretation and deals with the question of understanding and the process by which understanding takes place.<sup>3</sup>

Modern hermeneutics, which is a child of the Enlightenment, often makes a distinction between 1) what a text says and what is intended with it; 2) what various writers and books say; and 3) what a text said then and what it means now.<sup>4</sup> To this end it uses various critical tools or approaches.<sup>5</sup> These tools operate with various methodologies that contain certain philosophical assumptions. Consequently, they are a mixed bag. If used judiciously, they can yield helpful results for exegesis (though not all are of equal value). However, since these tools may contain underlying assumptions that are in conflict with the inspiration and authority of Scripture, they themselves need to be used critically if they are to serve the confessional scholarship of the church. For confessional or ecclesial hermeneutics should be seen as the handmaid of Scripture and therefore be subjected to Scripture's scrutiny and critique.<sup>6</sup>

Hermeneutics deals with the interaction between the text (for our purposes we take the text and the author as one) and the reader. In the pre-modern period, the emphasis was almost exclusively on the text, as an objective, stable entity. In the extremes of the post-

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<sup>1</sup> Hermeneutics is also related to the ancient Greek god Hermes, the messenger of the gods. It was his task to communicate or translate the message of the gods to humans. This illustrates the point that 'translation' is a vital aspect of hermeneutics: the translation of God's word, given to us through the medium of ancient tongues and cultures, into the language of our day. Here we can all learn from Luther.

<sup>2</sup> For six modern definitions of hermeneutics, see Palmer, 33–45.

<sup>3</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey are regarded as the founders of modern hermeneutics. Ringma observes that 'with Schleiermacher (1768–1834) traditional hermeneutics moved from its primary philological methodology to become a general hermeneutic involving the science and art of understanding and with Dilthey (1833–1911) it becomes the methodological foundations for the *Geisteswissenschaften*' [human sciences], (9,10). In academic circles hermeneutics seeks the truth of everything without 'resorting to metaphysical realism and objectivism with its idea that there is, as Bernstein says, "some permanent, ahistorical matrix or framework to which we can ultimately appeal"' (quoted in Ringma: 3). Hermeneutics thus acknowledges that understanding is situationally conditioned. Put in Gadamerian terms, understanding involves a recognition that *Wirkungsgeschichte* [the effect of past history] is operative in all understanding and that we can only arrive at an adequate understanding through achieving a *Horizontverschmelzung* [fusion of horizons] (Ringma: 10,11).

<sup>4</sup> The new sense of human autonomy and of historical consciousness produced by the Enlightenment led to the eclipse of the normative and critical function of Scripture. The historical nature of the Bible was understood in a thoroughly historicist way, so that the Scriptures became no more than a collection of time-bound, culturally specific documents, subject to the canons of historical inquiry. The historicist approach to the Bible also destroyed Luther's understanding of the unity of the Scriptures, since the books of the Bible were simply seen as a collection of discordant voices rather than as variations on the one central theme of God's grace and mercy in the face of human sin. The Bible was seen purely as a human book belonging to a past age rather than as the living voice of God in the church and authoritative for the church in all ages.



modern (or hypermodern) period of our own day, the emphasis has switched the other way round and is now almost exclusively on the reader and the reading (or interpretative) community. We take our position somewhere in the centre, for two reasons. First, we recognise the independence of the text and do not hold that the meaning of a text is constructed by the reader. This constructivist approach is largely adopted by those who accept the major tenets of the reader-response theories together with their implied philosophy of language.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, we take a middle position because we also hold that the reader contributes to the interpretative process. The reader belongs to a community that is characterised by a particular use of language and specific traditions. This context conditions the reader to read or hear the message of the text in a particular way. Applied to the church, this means that the community of faith (in our case, the Lutheran confessional community) forms us to be responsible readers and hearers of God's word so that, illuminated by the Spirit, we can discern its intended meaning.

When authors refer to a person's hermeneutic,<sup>8</sup> they are usually referring to the lens or grid through which that person reads the biblical texts. Luther's hermeneutic, for instance, is his law–gospel approach to Scripture, which is based on the conviction that God speaks to the church in judgment and grace through his word. This is linked with his belief that Christ is the centre of Scripture and that all Scripture must be understood in the light of Christ.<sup>9</sup>

In modern liberation theologies (eg Latin American, Asian, Hispanic, black, womanist, and feminist), Christ is seen primarily as a liberator from political and cultural oppression

<sup>5</sup> In the interpretation of written documents, hermeneutics makes use of various approaches, most of which are called 'criticisms'. Criticism here is a technical term which refers to a form of literary analysis. In terms of New Testament hermeneutics, for instance, variant readings in Greek manuscripts are compared (*textual criticism*); the literal sense is detected (*historical criticism*); the antecedents from which the New Testament writers drew their information are studied (*source criticism*); the literary genre is diagnosed (*form criticism*); the theological emphases of New Testament writers are analysed (*redaction criticism*); passages are examined in the context of the entire New Testament or Bible (*canonical criticism*); the structure of New Testament works is analysed (*structural criticism*); the real author is distinguished from the implied author and the real audience is distinguished from the implied audience (*narrative criticism*); the strategies used by the New Testament authors to make what was recounted effective are analysed (*rhetorical criticism*); and the text is studied as a reflection on the social and cultural settings in which it was produced (*social criticism*). If any one approach is used exclusively, the intended meaning of the biblical authors will be obscured (see Brown: 21–7).

<sup>6</sup> For a good critical discussion of modern hermeneutical theory, see Thiselton (1992).

<sup>7</sup> This typically postmodern approach to hermeneutics holds that the text itself has no single given meaning. Rather, the meaning is indeterminate. Hence, readers do not discover meaning in the text but they give meaning to the text by their interpretative practices. In a word, readers create the text and make their own meaning. This reader-response approach is exemplified by literary theorist Stanley Fish in his book *Is There a Text in This Class?* (1982). Fish maintains that the meaning of a text is the reading *experience*. There is no objective meaning. This radically deconstructive approach has been carefully analysed and refuted by Vanhoozer. He argues, in the vale of the shadow of Derrida (the master of deconstruction), that 'there *is* meaning in the text, that it can be known, and that readers should strive to do so' (26). Thus, he rejects the nonrealist position that the world (or the meaning of a text) is a construct of the mind.

rather than from the oppression of sin and death. Ecological theology works to liberate the oppressed earth. It therefore tends to privilege texts that speak from the perspective of the earth. This approach is sometimes called an eco-justice hermeneutic, implying that we should identify as far as possible with the earth or the earth community in our analysis of the text.<sup>10</sup> Simplified, it means treating the earth as a subject rather than as an object in the text.

At the other end of the spectrum, Christian fundamentalism, common in some evangelical circles, bypasses Christ altogether; here a literalist and futurist hermeneutic is employed, to interpret certain unfulfilled prophecies relating to the Jewish people, that supports both Dispensationalism and Christian Zionism. Fundamentalism does not see Christ as the centre of the Scriptures but rather makes a doctrine of every word of the Bible and sees all Scripture as equally authoritative. According to this view, the dimensions of Noah's ark (Gen 6:14–22) or Ezekiel's prophecy against Gog (Ezek 38) are just as important as Jesus' Sermon on the Mount or the doctrine of baptism. Furthermore, its belief that a text must be understood literalistically unless clear indication of a figurative intent is to be found is predicated on a view of inerrancy that is not shared by the Lutheran reformers.<sup>11</sup>

It is agreed that while the Lutheran reformers took it as axiomatic that God's intended meaning is the literal or intended sense (*sensus literalis* or *sensus litterarum*) of a passage, they did not hold that the literal meaning of a text excludes a figurative understanding. It is only modern hermeneutics that forces readers to choose between a literal and a figurative interpretation. However, this is a false antithesis. The Reformers knew that the figurative meaning of a text can be its literal or intended sense. Bohlmann rightly points out that many contemporary Lutherans fail to discern the traditional distinction between the literal meaning and the literalistic meaning of a text (1979: 195).

One of the approaches to reading employed by modern hermeneutics, the so-called hermeneutical circle, has benefits for theology. According to Schleiermacher,<sup>12</sup> the meaning of a particular passage can only be understood in the context of the whole, and the meaning of the whole can only be understood in light of the particular passage.

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<sup>8</sup> The term 'hermeneutics' refers to the theory behind the different methods of interpreting literary texts, while 'hermeneutic' refers to the application of a particular method.

<sup>9</sup> We will say more on this when we discuss the christocentricity of Scripture as one of the rules for exegesis. Suffice to say here that Luke makes it clear that Jesus interprets the Old Testament for the church in the light of his death and resurrection. Therefore, the centre of Scripture is Christ. This, by extension, includes the New Testament, for Christ speaks to the church in the Spirit through the inspired writers. Luther argues that he does not impose the christocentric lens on Scripture but rather finds it in Scripture and that this is the only lens that enables us to properly understand its message.

<sup>10</sup> Scholars working on the Earth Bible series, under the direction of Norman Habel, have formulated a new approach to reading the Bible: 'Rather than reflecting about the Earth as we analyze a text, we are seeking to reflect with Earth and see things from the perspective of Earth' (Habel: 33,34).

<sup>11</sup> For a Lutheran critique of fundamentalism, see Hamann.

<sup>12</sup> Schleiermacher, a theologian of the Reformed church, is often called the father of modern Protestant theology. He is the single most influential person between Martin Luther and Karl Barth.

Applied to exegesis, it means that individual words and parts of a sentence cannot be understood fully without reference to the sentence as a whole, the paragraph as a whole, the chapter as a whole, and the work as a whole. The opposite also applies, in that the work as a whole cannot be understood without due attention to the meaning of individual words and sentences.

The hermeneutical circle also has implications for the relationship between the reader and the text. We come to the text with all kinds of presuppositions and biases which must be corrected by the text. Our reading is necessarily coloured by our assumptions. However, as these assumptions are modified by the text, our interpretation also changes accordingly. Our new understanding of the text in turn modifies our presuppositions, so that we arrive at yet another new understanding of the text, and so the process continues; each new approach to the text brings us a step closer to the mind of the author than the previous one. The hermeneutical *circle* reminds us that the interpretative process involves a continual interchange, an ongoing dialogue between the reader and the text in which the whole can only be interpreted in the light of the part and the part can only be understood properly in the light of the whole.<sup>13</sup> Some prefer to talk about the hermeneutical *spiral*, because it emphasises the dynamic of progress rather than the idea of circularity.<sup>14</sup> Others talk about the world of the reader and the world of the text, or the horizon of the reader and the horizon of the text — the goal of interpretation being the bridging of the gulf between these two worlds, or what Gadamer calls the *fusion of horizons*.

## Hermeneutics and interpretation

There is a close engagement between the reader of a text and the text itself (again, for the sake of simplicity, we are identifying the author with the text). If the text in question is from the Bible, then the triune God is also somehow involved in the human process of reading, understanding and assimilation. One of the goals of reading is that the biblical text, and the Spirit through the text, in some way transforms the reader, for the Spirit of God is given through the word of God (Smalcald Articles, III/8:3).

Under the influence of post-Enlightenment rationalism, the human subject as reader has always been in the centre. Modern readers in their subjectivity either interrogate the text to extract information from it, or they go beyond the text in their search for God (Hegel and Barth) or else they go behind the text to explain what produced it (Schleiermacher and Bultmann). Here the human subject or agent is active and the text passive. Reason

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<sup>13</sup> In a similar way, Franzmann says that 'the process by which a genuine understanding of a text is gained is therefore "circular"; from *verba* to *res* to *verba*, in continual and lively interaction'. He quotes Luther's dictum on *res* (subject matter) and *verba* (words): 'Unless one understands the things under discussion, one cannot make sense of the words'. In this circular process 'the *res* is of crucial importance, since the question addressed to the text helps determine the answer to be gotten from the text' (2).

<sup>14</sup> Osborne contends that hermeneutics is fundamentally a spiral from text to context, from the original meaning of texts to their significance for the church today.

is the main tool the reader uses in trying to appropriate the text. With this approach, God has no role in the transaction between reader and text other than illuminating the reader's understanding.

More recently this hermeneutical model has come under increasing attack by those who wish to retrieve a pre-Enlightenment, evangelical catholic approach to biblical interpretation.<sup>15</sup> This approach takes the emphasis off the human interpreter. It is rather the triune God who is the active subject in communicating and interpreting his Spirit-filled word, while humans are primarily receptive in appropriating the word. Furthermore, this approach correctly sees the word as a speech act in which God the creator does what he says and says what he does, for his speech acts and his acts speak.<sup>16</sup> Oswald Bayer holds that Christian theology is essentially hermeneutical theology, because God through his word interprets his own self-communication with humans in Christ (Bayer: 131,147). On the basis of Luther's approach to meditation, which he sees as an intimate engagement between the reader and the text, where humans are receptive rather than active, Bayer says that 'the crucial question is therefore not: "How do I understand the given biblical text?" but "How does the given biblical text give itself to me to understand it — so that I am understood?"' (Bayer: 131)<sup>17</sup>

While this approach stresses very much the role of language and divine utterance in God's communicative action, it has nothing to do with the New Hermeneutic, identified with Fuchs and Ebeling, which understands revelation as a language event or word event.<sup>18</sup> This is still very much a product of the Enlightenment. Apart from anything else, the New Hermeneutic still sees the human subject firmly in control of the interpretative process. The goal of interpretation here is not the interpretation *of* the text by means of grammatical and historical exegesis, but rather the existentialist self-understanding of the interpreter *through* the text. The text is merely the means to an end. However, Lutheran theology makes the word central, so that the text is not just a pretext but the message through which the triune God works on me and in me.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Bayer, who is representative of the frontal attack against modernity, draws on Luther's understanding of 'meditation' in constructing a hermeneutical theology. For him the chief hallmark of modernity is the anthropocentric self-reference of the active human subject (the 'modern Narcissus'). In place of this, he advocates the receptivity of the human reader who receives the transformation that God works in us through the Spirit by the word (2003). For a fuller discussion, see his *Theologie* (1994: 55–105).

<sup>16</sup> See Bayer, 1994: 438–53; Hütter 1997: 82–6; Vanhoozer 1998: 209–14, 226–7.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Ricoeur's ultimate concern also is not that we interpret the text but that the text interprets us. The eschatological dimension to this is brought out by the apostle Paul in Corinthians 13:12: 'For now we see in a mirror dimly...Now I know in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.'

<sup>18</sup> See Robinson and Cobb Jr. For a trenchant critique of the New Hermeneutic, see the articles by Krabbendam, James I Packer and Royce G Gruenler, in Radmacher and Preus. These responses are too one-sidedly critical. They show no understanding of the performative nature of God's word as law and gospel, or the significance of that word as a speech act, although they do recognise its instrumentality. They fail to appreciate what is true and useful about the hermeneutical circle, and they consistently reject Bultmann's claim that presuppositionless exegesis is impossible.

Analytical methods of interpretation (textual criticism, form analysis, historical analysis, literary analysis, discourse analysis, sociological analysis, and rhetorical analysis) have their place in exegesis as we try to uncover as accurately as possible the intended meaning of the author. We are free to use these instruments as long as human reason is not allowed to be the judge of what is true and false in Scripture.

### Hermeneutical presuppositions

Both parties to the debate in the LCA agree on the following hermeneutical rules, even if there are differences in the way in which they are understood or applied. However, as we know, general agreement at the level of presuppositions does not guarantee agreement in exegesis or application.

Before discussing the rules for exegesis, we begin with three assumptions to which we are all bound by the Lutheran confessions.

First, we confess that all our interpretation is guided and controlled by the rule of faith (*regula fidei*), which is summarised by the two ecumenical creeds, the Nicene and the Apostles', in which the church confesses its faith in the triune God. The rule, like the creeds, sums up the one true teaching of the church (*traditio*). The rule of faith also exposes heresies and determines true and false doctrine.<sup>20</sup>

Secondly, we confess the full inspiration and authority of Scripture as the word of God. However, we come to different conclusions in regard to the ordination of women. This not only indicates differences in exegesis but also points to the fact that there may be differences in theology. At issue is not the authority of God's word but how it is to be interpreted and applied today. Here we need to remember that it is the Scriptures that are inspired and authoritative, not the interpreter. The Reformation has taught us that neither the church nor any individual within the church can claim the role of infallible interpreter.

Thirdly, we confess that Scripture is the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged (Formula of Concord, Epitome, Rule and Norm 1). The LCA holds that the normative authority of Scripture has a twofold basis. On the one hand, Scripture is authoritative because God is its author. On the other hand, Scripture is authoritative because it bears witness to Christ. To use the language of Aristotelian scholasticism, the former states the formal authority of Scripture, while the latter states its material authority. These two sides to the authority

<sup>19</sup> For a range of interpretative methods from a Lutheran perspective, see Reumann.

<sup>20</sup> See Bengt Häggglund, 'Die Bedeutung der "*regula fidei*" als Grundlage theologischer Aussagen', *Studia theologica*, Lund 12 (1958), page 39. Häggglund further points out (40,41) that the rule of faith (as church doctrine), together with theological doctrine (dogmatics), is oriented back to God's revealed economy of salvation: 'The prepositioning of a *regula fidei* before the statements of our dogmatics means that both derive their unity and their context from the concrete order of the salvific event, in the *oikonomia*. Ultimately, every true statement about this order must be grounded in the concrete event itself...for the fathers of the early church this *regula fidei* refers to the fact of revelation' (cited in Hütter: 179).

of Scripture must not be played off against each other but held together in tension.<sup>21</sup> Scripture is the norm of doctrine because it is God's inspired word and because it points to Christ.<sup>22</sup> The Lutheran confessions teach that Scripture *is* God's word. We therefore reject the Barthian view that Scripture as written word is not yet God's word but only becomes that when the Spirit breathes life into the dead letters and applies the words of the Bible to me existentially, so that I know, through the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit, that this is word of God *for me*. This is wrong, because it separates the Spirit from the word or letter of the Bible.

Under hermeneutical presuppositions we also need to add four theological axioms which were developed by Luther in his struggles with the Roman church over the doctrine of justification. They are commonly referred to as the Reformation *solas* because of their Latin tags: by grace alone (*sola gratia*), by Scripture alone (*sola scriptura*), and by faith alone (*sola fide*). These three are all summed up in the axiom 'Christ alone' (*solus Christus*).<sup>23</sup> Any interpretation of Scripture that is in conflict with these fundamental axioms cannot be scriptural, for they safeguard the fundamental article, the article on justification, which is the sum and essence of Scripture.

### **Hermeneutical rules for exegesis**

The first rule is that the Scriptures can only be properly understood christocentrically: Christ is the centre of the Scriptures, and therefore all Scripture, including the Old Testament, must be understood in the light of Christ (Luke 24:27,44; John 5:39; 20:31). Another way of stating this is to say that because Christ is the centre of Scripture, the explication of the gospel, and the law in the light of the gospel, is the goal of a Lutheran interpretation of the Bible.<sup>24</sup> This is summed up in Luther's maxim that the true criterion by which we judge the canonical authority of all books of sacred Scripture is whether or not they promote Christ (LW 35: 395). All Scripture is ultimately seen in the light of Christ, who preaches both law (his alien work) and gospel (his proper work). While as a preacher of the law he outdoes Moses, his proper task is to preach the gospel of the forgiveness of sins. This is consistent with the Lutheran emphasis on the centrality of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. It reminds us that the christocentric focus of Scripture must never be separated from its soteriological purpose.

Luther asserted, over against the Roman church of his day, who held that 'the church was the master of the Scriptures and in contrast to the Enthusiasts' assertion that the

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<sup>21</sup> See 'Consensus statement on holy Scripture', *Doctrinal statements and theological opinions of the Lutheran Church of Australia*, vol 1, 1989, B 9–14.

<sup>22</sup> For a formal treatment of the topic, in particular the matter of Scripture and confession, see Schlink, pages 1–36.

<sup>23</sup> For a discussion of these axioms within the context of Reformation theology, see Bornkamm, pages 15–44.

<sup>24</sup> For the view that the kingdom of God and biblical eschatology is the key to understanding the christocentricity of the Scriptures, see James Voelz, pages 244–62.

internal Spirit was the Lord of all the Scriptures' (Schroeder: 87), that Christ is the Lord of the Scriptures.

When the article of justification by faith came under attack, Luther made some daring statements. If his opponents, in their denial of the gospel, pitted the Scriptures against Christ, Luther in turn pitted Christ against the Scriptures — such was his supreme confidence that Christ is the king of Scripture and that Scripture is the servant. However, it would be a misuse of this axiom to turn it into a general principle and to play off Christ against the Scriptures in an arbitrary fashion. Christ can only be used against the Scriptures when they are used against Christ, contrary to the analogy of faith, or in an attempt to rob the troubled conscience of the certainty that we have through faith in Christ alone.<sup>25</sup>

The christocentricity of Scripture is first of all a homiletical and pedagogical rule and must not be turned into a critical principle in order to determine which parts of the Bible are authoritative and which are not. Luther's use of this rule to relegate the epistle of James to the edge of the canon cannot be used to relativise the key texts in the debate on the grounds that they do not proclaim Christ but instead introduce the demands of the law. This rule has often been called Luther's canon within the canon; it is a variation on the common dictum that the doctrine of justification is the Lutheran canon within the canon. While we cannot discuss this further, we need to remember that for Luther all books in the canon are still holy Scripture, even if he ranked them according to the criterion of how clearly they proclaimed Christ.

The second hermeneutical rule is that Scripture is its own interpreter (*scriptura sui ipsius interpres*). This rule comes out of Luther's controversy with the Roman church, which held that Scripture is a closed book until it is authoritatively interpreted by the church (ultimately by the Roman pontiff). Rome argued that because the Bible is unclear it needs an interpreter. Luther's counterargument was that Scripture is clear, simple and transparent. In a word, Scripture interprets itself.

Luther, of course, did not mean that there are no difficult passages in the Bible.<sup>26</sup> He meant that the Scriptures are clear in their central message: the message of salvation, the gospel of God's forgiving mercy in Christ (the doctrine of justification by faith). That is what is meant by the clarity or perspicuity of Scripture (*claritas scripturae*). To put it another way, the overall message of Scripture as law and gospel is clear, and it clearly speaks the will

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<sup>25</sup> See also the theses (on faith and the law) that Luther wrote for defence at the doctoral examination of Hieronymus Weller and Nikolaus Medler on 11 September 1535, where he takes up the same theme (LW 34: 112). On this topic generally, see Thomas, pages 141–50.

<sup>26</sup> He says in his treatise on the enslaved will (*de servo arbitrio*) that there are many passages in Scripture that are 'obscure and abstruse', not because of the exalted nature of the subject, 'but because of our ignorance of their vocabulary and grammar' (LW 33:25, *The Bondage of the Will*, 1525). Luther refers to the subject matter of Scripture in the plural and includes the incarnation of Christ, his atoning death, his resurrection and heavenly reign. He also says that the christological and trinitarian doctrines are clear from Scripture; 'but *how* these things can be, Scripture does not say' (LW 33:28). The matters essential to faith are clear, if not in one place then in another.

of God to us, while at the same time it illuminates our understanding. However, this rule does not mean to imply that there are no dark passages in Scripture that are either obscure or hard to understand.<sup>27</sup> Luther holds that when it comes to passages dealing with the main doctrines of Scripture, any passage that is dark or unclear should be interpreted in the light of a clear passage dealing with the same subject matter.<sup>28</sup>

In the current debate, it would be a misuse of this rule to declare the two key passages unclear and then interpret them in the light of the gospel, concluding that women may be ordained because the gospel trumps the dominical and apostolic prohibitions. This would be wrong, because the rule presupposes that the passages in question deal with the same or similar topic (*res*).<sup>29</sup>

For Luther, the rule that Scripture interprets Scripture means the reversal of the normal subject–object order of life: it means that Scripture poses the question rather than we. The Scriptures become the subject and we become the object. But Luther also held that, although the Bible is the word of God, it does not mean that everything in the Bible is addressed to me, is God’s word for me.<sup>30</sup> Some words of God are specifically addressed to certain people (eg Old Testament prophets and kings) and not to us. However, it is equally true that there are many words of God that, while they are addressed to specific people, are also addressed generally to the church (eg Jesus’ call to follow him, and the words of institution at the Last Supper, to name but two). For Luther, the entire Bible is God’s word, including those words that are not directly addressed to him (eg God’s command to Jeremiah to wear a yoke), but he also knows that not every passage has the same authority.

The third rule has to do with the proper distinction between law and gospel. However, this is not so much a rule for the interpretation of Scripture as for its application in preaching and teaching. It teaches that when the doctrine of justification is at stake, the law, in its second use, should be clearly distinguished from the gospel and should finally serve the gospel (Gal 3:24: the law was our guardian to lead us to Christ). It also teaches that when justification is not at stake, the law, in its third use, is to be proclaimed on the basis of the gospel, as Paul does in the paraenetic chapters of Romans (Rom 12–15).

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<sup>27</sup> Luther speaks of external clarity (the text itself) as well as of internal clarity (the illumination of the Holy Spirit). The words of a passage may be clear, but its spiritual meaning will be hidden without the illumination of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:12–16). See LW 33:24–28, 89–99.

<sup>28</sup> This rule, incidentally, should not be taken to mean that Luther supports the private interpretation of Scripture in isolation from the church. While he always upholds the primacy of Scripture, he never played Scripture off against the church unless he was convinced by Scripture and plain reason, as he confessed at the Diet of Worms, that the church was wrong. And the church was wrong in its teaching on justification, as we know from the controversy over indulgences.

<sup>29</sup> For more, see Bayer, 2003: 46 n 43; see also notes 44 and 45.

<sup>30</sup> In ‘How Christians should regard Moses’ (1525) Luther says: ‘The word in Scripture is of two kinds: the first does not concern or apply to me, the other kind does. And I can boldly trust and rely on that word which does concern me, just as I can rely on a strong rock. But if it does not concern me, then I should stand still. The false prophets pitch in and say: “Dear people, this is the word of God”. That is true; we cannot deny it. But we are not the people to whom it speaks’ (LW 35:170, translation slightly altered).



The distinction between law and gospel ensures that the gospel functions as gospel in preaching and teaching and that all commands are understood and taught in the light of the gospel without discounting or absolutising them. The claim is made that some of those who support the ordination of women use an inference drawn from the gospel (the equality of all in Christ) to override an apostolic command. They are said to lump the apostolic commands in the two key texts under the category of law and then trump them with the gospel. However, argumentation by means of general 'gospel principles' may be a strategy used by some in the church, but it is renounced by members of the CTICR on both sides of the debate. Such a method of interpretation is not supported by either Luther or the Lutheran confessions, for it amounts to using the distinction between law and gospel as a critical hermeneutical principle rather than as a rule for exegesis and an aid to application. Those who argue for the ordination of both men and women claim to be able to demonstrate on exegetical grounds that the prohibitions in 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:12 are purely local restrictions limited to the churches of Paul's day. Hence, they argue that it is not a matter of trumping the command of the apostle with the gospel but of understanding the true intent of that command.

The fourth rule is closely related to the third and addresses the relationship between the Scriptures and the doctrine of justification. For Luther, Christ is the essential content of the Scriptures: 'Take Christ out of the Scriptures and what do you have left?' (LW 33:26; *The Bondage of the Will*, 1525). Because Christ is the incarnate Word, the Scriptures of both testaments bear witness to him. While the Bible also contains the law and Christ himself also preaches the law, the heart of the Scriptures is the message of the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake, and the proper work of Christ is to proclaim the gospel. For this reason, the doctrine of justification is the key to the whole Bible, because only the person who understands the gospel as the message of the sinner's justification for Christ's sake can comprehend the central message of the Scriptures (Sasse: 115–17). However, for reasons already given, we cannot use the doctrine of justification in the current debate to set aside the dominical and apostolic commands. Those who claim that the prohibitions are only temporary must argue their case exegetically.

### **Divine institution or adiaphoron?**

The debate over the ordination of women has already raised the question of whether their prohibition from the office is a matter of divine institution or an adiaphoron. Although there is a difference of opinion on this question, theologians on both sides of the debate agree that it is not the issue of divine institution that is in contention but its application. Therefore, we begin with a consensus statement on the doctrine of the ministry and the nature of adiaphora before discussing our differences.<sup>31</sup>

We agree that by his word Christ has instituted the office of the ministry (Matt 16:18f; 28:18–20; John 20:21–23). That word provides the mandate for ministry. It empowers the office and consecrates the pastors who occupy it. If the ministry of the gospel faithfully enacts that mandate, both the pastors and the church can be sure that their work is the work of God and therefore pleasing to God. It therefore provides the basis

for confidence that the ministry is Christ's ministry, and that pastors are Christ's mouth and Christ's hands as they shepherd God's flock.

The Lutheran confessions define adiaphora liturgically. The Formula of Concord (Solid Declaration, Article 10) says that the adiaphora are 'ceremonies and church rites which are neither commanded nor forbidden in the word of God'. Therefore, the office of the ministry is not an adiaphoron, because it is divinely instituted. It is not simply a human ordinance introduced for the wellbeing (*bene esse*) of the church, but it is constitutive of the church. However, that is where the agreement ends.

Those who support the church's traditional practice of ordaining males only hold that the prohibitions in 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:12 apply to the office of the ministry and need to be considered together with the foundational texts in order to enact what Christ has instituted for it. They insist that the same Christ who established the office gave no mandate to ordain women but in fact prohibited it. They further insist that without a clear mandate the church cannot bind consciences to a new practice, because practice must enact Christ's prohibitions as well as his commands.

Those who support the ordination of women as well as men hold that the prohibitions in 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:12 do not exclude women from the office, because they are temporary local restrictions. Supporters of this position do not just distinguish between person and office but also between office and gender. They hold to the dominical institution of the office but do not accept that the prohibitions form part of its institution. In other words, they argue that while the office is not an adiaphoron, the gender of the person who occupies it is an adiaphoron.

## Headship and subordination

A major difference between the two sides of the debate in the exegesis of the key passages lies in the way in which they interpret those passages that deal with the headship of the male and the subordination of the female in marriage and in the church. This also involves the vexed question of the relation of the so-called order(s) of creation to the order of redemption. The term 'order of creation' (and its counterpart 'order of redemption'), which is not a biblical term but a theological construct, has been the subject of considerable debate.<sup>32</sup>

Rather than talk about the concept 'order of creation', it is better to follow the Augsburg Confession and speak of the divinely instituted orders. Article 16 teaches that 'the gospel does not overthrow secular government (*weltlich Regiment*), public order (*Polizei*), and marriage (*Ehestand*), but instead intends that a person keep all this as a true order of God (*Wahrhaftige Gottesordnung*) and demonstrate in these stations (*Stände*) [examples listed earlier] Christian love and true good works according to each person's vocation' (Kolb and Wengert: 48.5). There are three divinely instituted orders,

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<sup>31</sup> For a discussion on adiaphora, see LCA, Commission on Worship statement 35: 'Solidarity in worship: The Lutheran understanding of adiaphora'.

the church, government and the home,<sup>33</sup> but Article 16 does not mention the church, because it is dealing with the topic of civic affairs (marriage and secular government).

There is consensus among the members of the church's CTICR on both sides of the debate that it is not helpful to operate with general principles or concepts. More specifically, those who support the ordination of men and women on the CTICR do not argue from the order of redemption, although it has at times appeared in that side's arguments in the past, and those who uphold male only ordination do not presuppose a universal order of creation. We agree that the Old Testament does not teach a general order of creation, nor does the New Testament teach a general order of redemption. Both sides are committed to working with specific texts. That is especially important in the area of headship and subordination.

Many of those who support the ordination of women no longer use Galatians 3:28 to counterbalance Paul's words in the two key texts and to argue that the order of redemption, marked as it is by equality in Christ and mutual submission, takes priority in the church over the order of creation. On the basis of the fundamental hermeneutical principle that all Scripture must be read in the light of Christ and the gospel, it was argued (and still is in some circles) that Paul's words about unity and equality in Christ trump what he said in the two key texts about women not having authority over men and needing to be subordinate. However, the majority of those who support the ordination of women on the CTICR no longer use that line of argument.

The reason they have pulled back is exegetical. The three contrasting pairs Paul mentions (Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female) cannot simply be lumped together as descriptions of the inequality and division in the order of creation. Rather,

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<sup>32</sup> Schroeder (1972: 165–78) attempts to trace the 'orders of creation' back to Calvin rather than Luther. He argues against the nineteenth-century distortion that tended to see the orders as fixed and static. The headship of the male and the subordination of the female, in marriage and in the church, was seen as divinely given at creation and hence belonging to these orders. He points out that Elert argues against this fixed understanding of the order of creation. He holds that it refers not to what God created at the beginning but to what he continues to create (*creatio continua*) and to his continuing act of ordering human life. Theologians in the LCA, who are sympathetic to the ordination of women, have often used Elert's argument to support their case. However, those who hold to the ordination of males only point out, *contra* Elert (78), that it is not a case of 'either-or' but of 'both-and'. They argue that the order of creation is not only established by God prior to the fall as something fixed and immutable, but it is also a part of God's ongoing regulative activity and open to change and growth. However, Elert also says that 'the order of creation is not a product of the creative but the regulative activity of God...As the product of his governing activity, it is a process in time.'

<sup>33</sup> See Smalcald Articles, Preface 14, Kolb and Wengert: 300.14; and Small Catechism, Kolb and Wengert: 365–67. In addition to these references, perhaps Luther's most representative treatment of the three orders is in his 1528 'Confession concerning Christ's supper' (LW 37:363–5). See also Bayer (1998: 139), and Wannenwetsch (130–33). Wannenwetsch rightly points out, in his discussion of the three estates (orders), that 'sanctification for Luther is not just a matter of faith, but a matter of faith *and* created orders, or more precisely of *faith that is exercised in love within the divinely assigned spheres of social life, politics, economics, and religion*' (132). See Augsburg Confession 16 [Latin]: 'the exercise of love in these orders'.

they must be carefully distinguished. The distinction between Jew and Greek (or gentile) is covenantal and goes back to the Old Testament; the distinction between slave and free is social and goes back to the fall; and the distinction between male and female is creational and therefore ontological. In Christ the distinction between Jew and Greek is set aside, as is the distinction between slave and free.<sup>34</sup> But being in Christ does not remove the distinction between male and female. However, at this point the two sides go in different directions.

Those who reserve ordination to men argue that the equality of the male and the female before God does not abolish the headship of the husband in marriage and of the male in the church. Redemption does not negate creation — or, to use the language of the confessions, the order of the church does not negate the order of marriage — but it sanctifies the relationship between husband and wife in marriage, as well as the interaction between men and women in the church.

The relation between God the Father and his eternal Son has at times been invoked by those who support male only ordination to illustrate the point that subordination does not negate equality. Christ is equal in being with the Father in respect to his divinity, yet subordinate to the Father with respect to his origin and office, for he proceeds from the Father. Those who affirm the ordination of women, however, cannot so easily accept the christological analogy. Generally, they speak only of his subordination in the sense of his obedience to the Father in his earthly ministry, not in his exalted state as Lord of the church.

One of the main sticking points in the debate is the interpretation of Genesis 2:18–25. This has implications for the interpretation of the two keys texts, on both sides of the debate, as well as for Paul's words regarding husbands and wives in Ephesians 5:21–32.

Those who uphold the church's traditional practice argue that the apostle supports his prohibition against women in the public ministry by appealing to a divinely instituted order for the church with its ministry of the word which corresponds to the order of marriage as given by God in his law (1 Cor 14:34). In both these orders God has established male headship and subordination to male headship (1 Tim 2:13,14). Paul stresses that his call for women to be subordinate to their male pastors is not his personal opinion but a command of the Lord (1 Cor 14:37). Therefore, the apostolic command is not temporary or limited to the churches of Paul's day but is applicable to all the congregations of the saints (1 Cor 14:33b).

On the other hand, the exegetical paper written in support of the ordination of men and women<sup>35</sup> argues that the apostle's command is limited and temporary. It points to a parallel situation in the churches at Corinth and Ephesus that explains why Paul issued

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<sup>34</sup> Compare Paul's argument in his letter to Philemon regarding his slave Onesimus, who since leaving his master has become a Christian. Paul appeals to Philemon to take him back, not just as a slave but as a brother in the Lord (Phlm 15,16).

<sup>35</sup> '1 Corinthians 14:33b–38 and 1 Timothy 2:11–14 permit the ordination of women.'

this command. At Corinth the women, whom Paul permitted to pray and prophesy (1 Cor 11:5,13), were disturbing the order in the church through their interjections (1 Cor 14:32,33), while at Ephesus they wanted to teach others before they themselves had been properly instructed in the faith (1 Tim 2:11). In both cases Paul commands the women to be submissive. However, there is nothing in the text to indicate that this is a binding law applicable to the church for all time. Rather, the apostle is issuing a pastoral directive to meet a local crisis.

Those who uphold male only ordination hold that the headship of the male was divinely ordained prior to the fall (Gen 2:18–25). They further hold that this is consistent with Paul's understanding of the creation narrative in 1 Timothy 2:13,14 and his command that women not exercise authority over male pastors. The consistency between Paul's command and the divinely ordained headship of the male given at creation (Gen 2) reflects the unity of the Scriptures grounded in their divine authorship.

Both sides know and confess that the unity of Scripture is a unity in diversity. Those who argue for the ordination of women emphasise the diversity of Scripture in pointing to the difference between Paul's interpretation of Genesis 2:18–25, in light of the specific problem at Ephesus, and the original meaning of the text. They hold that the order of marriage instituted by God before the fall is a partnership and does not imply the headship of the husband and the subordination of the wife. The headship of the husband came about as a result of human sin after the fall. However, the counterargument is that it is not male headship that came after the fall but male dominance. Biblical headship always takes a servant form; it can never be enforced but can only be received. But it is sin that causes men to use their God-given headship in marriage to dominate their wives. Again, those who favour the ordination of women can agree that it is sin that causes male domination, but they cannot find any trace of male headship in the creation narratives before the fall.

Those who argue for the ordination of women hold that Genesis 2 offers an egalitarian teaching on marriage,<sup>36</sup> and this in turn colours their interpretation of Ephesians 5:21–32. In their view this passage does not teach the subordination of wives to husbands but calls both husbands and wives to submit to each other in love (Eph 5:21). They hold that Paul's teaching on headship reflects the patriarchal structure of society in his day rather than the divinely ordained order of marriage and the church. Their understanding of Ephesians 5:21–32 is based on the fact that Genesis 2:18–25 does not teach Eve's subordination to Adam. Rather, the language of the creation narrative is testament to the equality of men and women. In fact, those who advocate the ordination of women argue that anyone who reads Genesis 1–3 on its own terms will be hard-pressed to find the teaching of the headship of Adam and the subordination of Eve, unless they read it back into the text in the light of Paul's interpretation. The divine intent was not male rule but partnership, a co-dominion over the world. If there is any

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<sup>36</sup> They can also, like their colleagues on the other side of the debate, understand Genesis 2 as teaching a complementarian view of marriage. They do not see these two views as being mutually exclusive.

submission at all, it is the submission of both Adam and Eve under God. Therefore, they hold that it is entirely consistent to understand Paul's words in Ephesians 5:21–32 as an appeal for mutual submission between wives and husbands (5:21).<sup>37</sup>

Those who reserve ordination to men argue that the divinely instituted order of marriage, and the headship of the husband and the subordination of the wife within it, has not been set aside by the order of the church. However, they do not hold, as they are sometimes said to, that the order of the family determines eligibility for ordination within the order of the church. Rather, for them the sole criterion for eligibility to the office of the ministry is the command of the Lord and of his apostle. The counterargument to this is that the command of the apostle is a local restriction to meet a specific problem and not a universal rule binding on the church for all time. The same applies to the command of the Lord (1 Cor 14:37): those who promote the ordination of women hold that it does not refer to Paul's call for women to be silent in the church but in fact refers to the whole preceding section of the chapter, in which he has been calling for orderly worship.

Those who advocate the ordination of women claim that ultimately, in the view of those who uphold the church's traditional practice, women are disqualified from holding the pastoral office on the basis of their gender — some would even say because of their supposed inferiority or because of male superiority. Those on the opposite side of the debate, however, reply that it is not on account of any universal principle such as male headship or female subordination that women are disqualified but solely on the basis of the dominical and apostolic command, which, they hold, is consistent with the headship of the male in the church and in marriage. Again, it needs to be made clear that what is at stake for them is no single order in which all women are subordinate to all men, but headship and subordination within two concrete orders: the order of marriage and the order of the church.

We need to sum up where the two sides agree and where they differ. We agree that we will not argue from general principles, such as the order of creation and the order of redemption. We agree that in the church and in marriage men and women are equal. However, those who argue that men only should be ordained hold that in the church women are subordinate to male pastors just as in marriage wives are subordinate to their husbands. Both sides also agree that marriage, as divinely instituted (Gen 2), is a partnership in which husband and wife are equal and each submits in love to the other. Furthermore, both sides lay claim to a complementarian view of marriage, but they explain it in different ways.<sup>38</sup>

Those who uphold the church's traditional practice ask those on the opposite side of the debate to understand their position. They do not hold that the headship of the male

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<sup>37</sup> For more details, see Keener, pages 157–83.

<sup>38</sup> In evangelical circles there is a clearer line of demarcation between the two sides: those who advocate the ordination of women are commonly said to adopt an egalitarian view of the male–female relationship in marriage, whereas those who hold to the traditional position are said to adopt a complementarian view. See Beck and Blomberg, pages 139–48.

implies the inferiority of the female. On the contrary, they argue that headship does not negate equality, but by the same token they also hold that equality does not mean sameness and uniformity but embraces bipolarity in marriage. They hold that men and women in the church and husbands and wives in marriage are equal before God, but this equality does not negate the divinely ordained order of church and marriage, where women are subordinate to male pastors in the church and to their husbands in marriage.

## Church and culture

Closely related to the issues of male headship and female subordination in the church and in marriage is the issue of culture and the role it plays in the interpretation of Scripture. Although we will not discuss this in detail, we need to draw attention to a few key points. While these points highlight some of the problems in the debate, both sides agree that the matter of culture is not the critical issue.

The case for the ordination of women highlights the issue of church and culture. Culture shares in the same ambiguity that stamps all institutions in the fallen world. On the one hand, it is God's good gift, while, on the other, it has been corrupted by sinful human beings. God's revelation, and therefore Scripture, is always tied to a particular culture, its language and traditions. By the same token, it also transcends and critiques culture. At the same time, every interpretation of Scripture is influenced by culture, since we bring to the text our presuppositions and cultural biases, which in turn need to be judged by the text to ensure that they are appropriate, for there is no exegesis without presuppositions. Therefore, the need to scrutinise our own cultural (and ideological) pre-commitments is as critical as the need to identify cultural factors in the Scriptures themselves.

Part of the difficulty in the current debate is determining whether the key texts merely reflect the culture of their day or whether they are also trans-cultural and binding on the church at all times and in all places. One case in point is the word Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 14:35, *aischros*, which is translated either as 'shameful' or 'disgraceful'. Is this to be understood culturally or theologically (see Fee 1987: 708)? That is to say, when Paul says that it is 'disgraceful for a woman to speak in church' (14:35), does he mean that it is culturally inappropriate and brings shame to the church or does he mean more? Those who uphold the ordination of men only understand *aischros* theologically. Therefore, they hold that it is disgraceful in God's eyes for a woman to publicly preach and teach in the church. Those on the other side of the debate, however, argue that the sense of *aischros* is purely cultural and so poses no impediment to the ordination of women. What was 'disgraceful' in Paul's day (women speaking authoritatively in the public worship assembly) is not necessarily so today.

## Conclusion

The case *against* the ordination of women is based principally on the apostolic prohibition against women preaching and teaching in the divine service and publicly exercising authority over men in the church (1 Cor 14:33b–38 and 1 Tim 2:11–14). The case is built on the plain meaning of the words in the two key texts. Even if it could be

shown that the meaning of particular words and phrases is uncertain or unclear, this would in no way alter the argument or weaken the case of those who hold to the church's traditional practice. The church, therefore, has no authority to ordain women. The apostle Paul says that this is a command from the Lord which applies to all churches (1 Cor 14:33b,37; cf 1 Tim 3:15). There is nothing in the text to suggest that this command was limited to the churches of the apostolic era.

The case for the ordination of women is based principally on three convictions. 1) There is no contradiction between the texts that mandate and institute the office and the ordination of women to that office, because the gender of the office-holder is an adiaphoron. 2) It is ultimately the word that institutes the office and that is proclaimed by the office that is paramount, not the gender of the person who occupies the office. Even though the person who holds the office must not be divorced from the office itself, it is ultimately the word that is constitutive for the ministry and not the person, or the gender of the person, who holds the office. 3) Paul's command that the women be silent in the worship service is not a general command binding on the church for all times but a specific local restriction that he imposed on the churches of his day to avoid unnecessary offence.

Despite their many differences, both sides in the debate confess that the public ministry of the church is based on our Lord's mandate and institution (John 20:21–23; Matt 16:19). We agree that the word that institutes the office cannot be separated from the word proclaimed by the office. The difference is that those who support the church's traditional practice hold that the prohibitions in 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 form part of the dominical institution of the office, whereas the opposing side says that these prohibitions are purely local and temporary and do not apply to the office of the ordained ministry today.

Both sides submit to the authority of Scripture. However, in the present debate, the burden of proof rests on those who wish to depart from the church's traditional practice and ordain women. But, by the same token, those who hold to the church's traditional teaching need to show clearly, in the face of arguments to the contrary, why it should continue to be upheld.



# A case for the ordination of men only

## Introduction

This study summarises the reasons that the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA) may call and ordain only suitably qualified men to the office of the public ministry. The occasion to spell out these reasons has arisen within the LCA in the form of a series of searching questions: if God has created man and woman equally in his image, if through baptism all believers are made members of Christ's body and partners in a spiritual priesthood in which sexual divisions, like those of race and social status, are transcended, if what is vital for the church's mission is the pure and unrestricted proclamation of the gospel in the world, why is it not possible for suitably qualified women also to be called to the public ministry — an office of service whose effectiveness derives solely from the word of Christ, not the personal qualities of the minister?

These questions are not new. John Chrysostom (c AD 347–407) called it a worthy question to ask why, given that women often exceed men in Christian devotion, they are excluded from the teacher's seat.<sup>1</sup> Yet, following the church throughout history, John answered this query by turning to the reasons given in Scripture. There the answer is given in the context of liturgical leadership in two commands: 'It is not permitted for women to speak' (1 Cor 14:34) and, 'I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man' (1 Tim 2:12).

This study shows from Scripture the universally binding character of these commands and relates them to the biblical rationale that sheds light on God's purpose in giving them. It unfolds in five parts:

- a brief explanation of interpretative procedures for reading holy Scripture as God's word
- a brief definition and exploration of pastoral ministry
- an overview of biblical data
- the witness of history and tradition, and
- a response to arguments advanced by advocates for the ordination of women

This paper holds that the church has no authority or mandate to ordain women.

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<sup>1</sup> John Chrysostom, *Hom. in Eph. 13* (Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* 62.100). ET in Philip Schaff ed, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol XIII, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1979, page 117.

## 1. Hermeneutics

Holy Scripture is the living voice of God in writing, not only as a whole but also in all its parts (TA VIII.3).<sup>2</sup> We regard as true Christian doctrine what is drawn from clear statements and sentences of Scripture. Scripture's divine authorship and Christological content imply that all of its parts are essentially in harmony with each other and that no interpretation may be accepted that contradicts the central articles of the Christian faith.

This does not mean that all parts of Scripture are equally clear or carry the same weight as far as the teaching of the church is concerned. Attention must be given to variations in language, form, intent and context. So we interpret less clear passages in the light of clearer texts. The church, however, does not use general principles, such as the freedom of the gospel or the equality of men and women before God, to ignore or override clear biblical commands.

The right reading of Scripture includes listening to the interpretative witness of the early church. While this is always subordinate to Scripture, it serves to confirm, or to question, the validity of certain Scriptural interpretations. The Lutheran confessors argued that their doctrine and practice could be equated not only with Scripture but with the consensus of the fathers and the ancient church: 'We know what we have said agrees with the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures, with the holy Fathers...and with the whole church of Christ' (*Ap* IV.389; Tappert: 166).<sup>3</sup>

The church's current teaching, which does not allow for the ordination of women, is consistent with Scripture, the Confessions and the consensus of church history.

## 2. The nature of the ministry

The Lutheran church distinguishes between the special public ministry of word and sacrament and the ministry exercised by every Christian, as a member of the royal priesthood, within his or her respective vocation.<sup>4</sup> The former is not derived from the latter. Its foundation actually lies in Christ's institution of the apostolate, and it is the teaching and commands of Christ and the apostles that constitute both its authority and its limitations (*Tr* 10; Tappert: 321; TA A,12.6).

Scripture knows two ways by which God calls people to proclaim his word publicly. The first kind of call comes without human means, given by the direct inward inspiration of the

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<sup>2</sup> TA VIII.7 maintains that the individual *words* of Scripture are also inspired by the Holy Spirit.

<sup>3</sup> See also Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, vol 1, Fred Kramer tr, Concordia, St Louis, 1971, pages 208–9.

<sup>4</sup> Traditionally the Lutheran church has distinguished between teaching in public and in private. Public teaching involves the proclamation and teaching of God's word by a pastor in the divine service. That kind of teaching involves the public ministry of word and sacrament. When men or women read lessons in worship, offer a children's talk or lead studies in various small groups and congregational contexts, they do so under the oversight of the called and ordained pastor of the church, who has the responsibility for the public teaching of the church in that specific location. Private teaching involves instruction in God's word in the home, school and other similar locations. An example of this is the instruction of Apollos by Priscilla and Aquila.

Holy Spirit. Often this inner call is necessitated by some extraordinary circumstance. Such a call may be issued to men, women, or even children. Biblical examples of women called in this way include Miriam, Deborah and Huldah. People claiming a direct call were tested to scrutinise the genuineness of their calling and their message (Deut 13:1–18; Jer 23:16–40; Ezek 13:1–23; 1 Thess 5:19–22; 1 John 4:1–3). They subordinated the exercise of their gift to the rule of good order in the divine service (1 Cor 14:29–33a,40). The church recognises that there are a variety of gifts used by God in his service, but it does not call and ordain anyone for public ministry unless it has first tested any inner call in light of the scriptural qualifications for public ministry of God's word.

The other way by which God calls people is by human beings through the church. We call this the outer call. Not everyone is called to minister publicly in this way (1 Cor 12:29). In Scripture we find specific directives as to the kind of people who may or may not be called and ordained (1 Cor 14:34; 1 Tim 2:12; 3:2–7; 2 Tim 2:24; Titus 1:7–9; 1 Pet 5:1–3). Only those who receive a call and ordination from the church may exercise the public ministry (AC XIV; Tappert: 36).

It is true that the effectiveness of the ministry does not depend on the personal qualities of the minister. By faithfully exercising the spiritual functions of the apostolate, the rightly called pastor speaks and acts as Christ himself (Luke 10:16; 2 Cor 2:10). Luther says: 'Our faith...must not be based on the person, whether he is godly or evil, consecrated or unconsecrated, called or an imposter, whether he is the devil or his mother...' (LW 38: 200). By this Luther didn't mean that the church is free to ordain anyone at all, least of all the devil or his mother. His point was that the operative power in the ministry does not derive from the ministers of the gospel but from Christ's command that institutes their office and his word that is proclaimed in it. As long as that word and command is preserved, the ministry will be effective, even if misused.<sup>5</sup>

If the power of the ministry doesn't depend on the individual person, some find it hard to see why women cannot be ordained as pastors. It is true that the Confessions say that the person of the pastor does not add anything to the power or effectiveness of the word that is preached or the sacrament that is administered. However, even though the worthiness of the individual does not either validate or invalidate the sacrament, Christ and his apostles set out certain qualifications for ordination as well as for the exercise of the office (Matt 20:20–28; 1 Tim 3:1–7; 2 Tim 2:24; Titus 1:6–9; 1 Pet 5:1–3).

It is true that the 'Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope' claims that the validity of the ministry does not depend on the authority of the minister but on the word given by Christ. Yet the context of this claim shows that it does not thereby distinguish between the office of the ministry and the person in the office but between whether the office is established by Christ's word or by the person who holds the office (Tappert, 324.25–27). The conclusion is that the office is given, established, instituted by Christ's word. This gives it its authority and spiritual power. Yet even though the person of the pastor does

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<sup>5</sup> See Luther's comparison of this with the abuse of marriage as a divinely instituted order, in LW 38.202.

not create or validate the office, a person must still be suitably qualified and trained to be a candidate for that office. The two are not mutually exclusive.

The teaching of the Treatise does not mean that Scripture is silent about who can or cannot preach and administer the sacraments. Peter, Paul and Barnabas took great care to appoint suitably qualified elders in every town and instructed them for their work. The work of those elders, who were also called bishops and shepherds, was to continue to shepherd the church by doing the apostolic work of making disciples through the preaching/teaching ministry and the administration of the sacraments (Acts 14:23; 15:1–35; 20:17,28; 1 Tim 3:1–7; 2 Tim 2:1,2; Titus 1:5–9; 1 Pet 5:1–4).

The LCA holds that ‘the spiritual functions of the Apostolate are continued only in the ministry of the Word and Sacraments’.<sup>6</sup> It has been guided by the teaching in Scripture about the qualifications for pastors as it seeks candidates for the pastoral ministry.

It is one thing to make an exception in an emergency situation, or even to change the ministry unintentionally out of ignorance for a period of time. However, it is another thing to change the ministry by introducing the ordination of women, a practice which is contrary to Christ’s command. We hold that such a change to the teaching and practice of ministry would deprive us of the assurance that our service is acceptable to God and well-pleasing to him. If we received the Lord’s supper from an ordained woman, we would be acting in disobedience to Christ’s command and so be uncertain whether we received Christ’s blessing or not. At best we would have an uncertain conscience, at worst a bad conscience (LW 38: 200–202; 1 John 3:21,22).<sup>7</sup>

### **3. Biblical data**

#### *The biblical mandate*

The case for the ordination of men only is based on the command of Christ given in the two primary texts: 1 Corinthians 14:33b–38 and 1 Timothy 2:11–14. These passages assert that God does not allow women to preach and teach in the divine service. The prohibition against speaking in public worship is not a demand for absolute silence but prevents women from preaching and teaching in public worship. The church therefore has no authority to ordain women. Until modern times the church catholic has always taught that these commands prohibit women from being ordained. It has not considered them as a temporary measure designed merely for the churches in Corinth and in Ephesus.

The apostle Paul’s teaching which forbids women from leadership in public worship

- applies to all churches (1 Cor 14:33b,34; see 1 Tim 3:15)
- accords with God’s law given in the Old Testament (1 Cor 14:34)
- must not be disobeyed, for to do so brings shame on God’s name (1 Cor 14:35)

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<sup>6</sup> *Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions: Lutheran Church of Australia*, Theses VI, A 12.6.

<sup>7</sup> See also *Ap VII.48*; Melancthon, *Loci Communes* (1543), J A O Preus tr, Concordia, St Louis, 1992, page 136; and Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, vol 2, Fred Kramer tr, Concordia, St Louis, 1978, page 142.

- does not originate from a human source but from the word of God (1 Cor 14:36)
- is 'the Lord's command' (1 Cor 14:37)

Paul also adds a warning that those who disregard this teaching will not have God's recognition and approval for their work (1 Cor 14:38).

It is therefore neither right nor pastorally wise to change the institution of Christ by allowing the ordination of women. To do so could sow uncertainty about the validity of the office of the ministry and possibly damage the consciences of those who believe that such change is not sanctioned by Christ but forbidden by him. For as our Lutheran Confessions assert, 'God is pleased only with services instituted by his Word and done in faith' (*Ap* 27.70; see also 15.17).

We will explore the biblical data further by considering each of the two main texts in turn and by making some closing comments about headship and subordination and the precedent of Jesus and the apostles.

### *1 Corinthians 14:33b–38*

In the context of dealing with order in worship, 1 Corinthians 14:33b–38 reads:

As in all the churches of the saints, women should be silent in the churches. For it is not permitted for them to speak, but they should be subordinate, just as the law says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home, for it is shameful for a woman to speak in the church. Did the word of God originate with you? Are you the only people it has reached? Anyone who claims to be a prophet, or to have spiritual powers, must acknowledge that what I am writing is the command of the Lord. Anyone who does not recognise this will not be recognised.

When Paul says women should be silent he is not just forbidding idle chitchat or rowdy interjections. It's also clear that it doesn't involve the total absence of speech. Rather, it is the silence that is appropriate to all who listen to God's word as it is expounded in the divine service by those who are called to preach or teach it (1 Cor 14:28,30; see also Deut 27:9). The word translated 'to speak' (*lalein*) regularly indicates authoritative preaching or teaching of the word of God (John 14:10; 16:13; 17:13; 1 Cor 2:6,7; 2 Cor 4:13; Titus 2:1,15). The church, which is created by the word that is proclaimed in this way, cannot exist without it.

Women, then, are forbidden to preach or teach the word of God in the public worshipping assembly. This conclusion is confirmed by the reasons given for the prohibition:

- a. The practice of all the churches: 'as in all the churches of the saints' (1 Cor 14:33). The ruling applies not only locally but everywhere (the same ecumenical rule occurs in 4:17; 7:17; 11:16).
- b. The teaching of the 'law' or Pentateuch: 'as also the law says' (14:34). This may refer to God's statement to Eve concerning Adam in Genesis 3:16, 'He shall rule over you'. More likely, however, it refers to the pattern of creation in Genesis 2:18–24 (see 1 Tim 2:13).

- c. The dishonour it brings to God: 'it is shameful (*aischros*) for a woman to speak in the church' (1 Cor 14:35). Even though in classical Greek texts *aischros* describe what is shameful before others in society, in the Septuagint and the New Testament it is used for what is shameful before God and unacceptable to him (see Eph 5:12, and Brown: 562–64).
- d. The command of the Lord: 'what I write to you is the command of the Lord' (1 Cor 14:37). Like the doctrine of the Lord's supper, which Paul received 'from the Lord' (11:23), the instruction that women should not be teachers in the divine service carries divine authority. Hence 'anyone who does not recognise this will not be recognised'. God will not recognise the ministry of that person. It is sometimes claimed that 'the command of the Lord' in 1 Corinthians 14:37 does not apply to the instruction concerning women in 1 Corinthians 14:33b–35. But it would be strange for Paul to apply the Lord's command to the wider context and not include the immediate context.
- e. 'Everything should be done decently and in order' (14:40). The Greek word for order is *taxis*.<sup>8</sup> It does not just refer to things being done in an orderly way, but to the right order for doing something, such as the arrangement of a unit in a predetermined battle order or in a work roster for the service of priests at the temple. Here the apostle envisages an order in worship that was not dictated by Hellenistic or Jewish cultural customs but by the reading of Scripture in church, the exposition of it by the pastor/teachers, and communal silence during its exposition.<sup>9</sup>

### 1 Timothy 2:11–14

This passage, in which the same prohibition is repeated in another time and place, confirms the universal and binding character of the command. In the context of addressing the conduct of various groups at worship, 1 Timothy 2:11–14 states:

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not the one deceived, but the woman, being deceived, came into transgression.

The structure of the passage contrasts women as disciples with women as teachers. Here 'teaching' (*didaskhein*) parallels and qualifies the sense of 'speaking' (*lalein*) in 1 Corinthians 14:34 and is further amplified by 'having authority' (*authenthein*). Although some supporters of women's ordination have proposed that *authenthein*, which occurs only here in the New Testament, means 'to dominate', there now seems to be a consensus that this cannot be the sense of the word. We agree that *authenthein* means 'to exercise authority'.<sup>10</sup> Women are not to exercise authority over men by teaching or preaching in the divine service.

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<sup>8</sup> This word is used for the order of the priesthood elsewhere in the New Testament (Luke 1:8; Heb 5:6,10; 6:20; 7:11,17).

<sup>9</sup> For the liturgical use of this term in Judaism, see Dautzenberg (1975: 278-84).

The text then provides two main reasons for this prohibition:

- a. The order in which God originally created Adam and Eve: 'For Adam was formed first, then Eve' (1 Tim 2:13). The appeal to Adam's priority in Genesis 2 locates the basis for the command that women should not teach *before* the fall. It follows Jesus' own appeal in his teaching on marriage to what God originally created and thus intended 'from the beginning' (Matt 19:4,5).
- b. Eve's specific role in the fall: 'and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and has become a transgressor' (2:14). The case of Eve's deception is cited as a negative example of what happened when she abandoned her role as disciple and became the teacher of Adam (Gen 3:1–6; see Kleinig 1995: 123–29).

The conclusion from 1 Corinthians 14:33b–38 and 1 Timothy 2:11–14 is that women are not to teach or preach in the public liturgical assembly. That conclusion is supported by the implication that this practice is not limited to one cultural setting but is true for all times and places.

#### *Headship and subordination*

The issue of subordination and the exercise of authority is raised in 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:11,12. In order to understand what Paul means in both texts by subordination we need to explore his teaching on headship and subordination.<sup>11</sup> It is clear from Ephesians 5:22–24 that for him these are closely connected.

In 1 Corinthians 11:3 Paul says, 'The head [*kephalê*] of every man is Christ, and the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God'. While the word 'head' (*kephalê*) may include the meaning 'source', in this passage it clearly denotes authority.<sup>12</sup> Elsewhere Paul speaks of Christ as 'the head of all things' (Eph 1:22), 'the head of the church' (Eph 5:23; Col 1:18), 'the head of all principality and power' (Col 2:10), all of which indicate Christ's authority and loving lordship over both creation and the church. Without denying the essential difference between God and creation, 1 Corinthians 11:3 articulates an analogous relation between God and Christ on the one hand, and man and woman on the other, two structures internally linked by the subordination of man to Christ.

First Corinthians 11 outlines a sequence of authority and headship that undergirds the pattern of divine–human relationships within church and marriage: God → Christ → man

<sup>10</sup> Köstenberger's exhaustive study (1995), which spans both biblical and extra-biblical sources, has demonstrated that verbs linked by *oude* (nor), as *didaskein* and *authentein* are here, invariably bear a parallel semantic character. Since *didaskein*, unless explicitly qualified as referring to false teaching, always carries a positive value in the New Testament, *authentein* must likewise carry positive value and is of parallel thrust. *Authentein* in 1 Timothy 2:12 does not mean 'domineer' or 'lord it over', but 'to exercise authority', and like the teaching of the word of God possesses a positive value in the worshipping assembly.

<sup>11</sup> See also the accompanying paper, '1 Corinthians 14:33b–38 and 1 Timothy 2:11–14 prohibit the ordination of women'.

→ woman. This does not mean that all women are subordinate to all men. Rather there is a relationship of headship and subordination between a husband and wife in marriage and between the preacher/teacher and the congregation in the church.

Whatever the exact situation in Corinth may have been,<sup>13</sup> it was this order that had been upset in the worshipping assembly. Paul was concerned that certain women were abandoning their modesty and asserting liberties inappropriate to women of faith by the way that they dressed. In our culture, head coverings or braided hair no longer function as a 'sign of authority' for women. Yet Paul's teaching on headship and the structure of relations between women and men in church and family remains intact. Now, as then, the violation of the distinctions ordained by God in his creation of men and women through any form of sexual confusion dishonours their divine author.<sup>14</sup>

Genesis 2:18–25 shows that the teaching about headship and subordination in marriage and the church has its foundation before the fall. While biologically man now receives his humanity 'through woman', at the level of being (ontologically) she receives it 'from' him (1 Cor 11:8,9). 'In the Lord' neither is independent of the other. Between them is a definite mutuality and reciprocity (1 Cor 11:11), which, however, does not entail 'interchangeability or confusion between the distinctions but rather a mutuality and reciprocity which has its own intrinsic order' (Weinrich 1992: 12). In other words, he is to her what she cannot be to him, and she is to him what he cannot be to her.

In this light the New Testament requirement that wives should subordinate themselves to their husbands corresponds to the God-given structure of marriage. The equality of husband and wife as human beings and as redeemed children of God by no means excludes the proper asymmetrical character of their relationship. We find a specific application of this teaching of subordination in Ephesians. A wife is to subordinate herself to her husband 'as to the Lord', whereas he is to love her 'as Christ loved the church' (Eph 5:22–25). By this kind of subordination she does not lose her identity and freedom. Rather she is like Sarah who, obeying Abraham and calling him 'lord' (1 Pet 3:6), has become the exemplary 'free woman' and so a type of the church, 'the Jerusalem that is above' (Gal 4:22–26).

Yet the case for the ordination of men only is not based on the theology of headship. It is based on the Lord's command. However, one of the arguments used by Paul to expand and explain that command is that in the church women should not exercise authority over men by teaching and preaching the word of God. That point is consistent with what Scripture teaches elsewhere about headship and subordination in the church and family.

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<sup>12</sup> See Fitzmyer, and Grudem (2002: 145–202).

<sup>13</sup> For a detailed summary of the scholarship on this subject, see Thiselton: 820–30.

<sup>14</sup> See Schlier (TDNT 3: 679–81), and Schreiner, in Piper and Grudem (1990: 137–38).



### *Jesus and the apostles*

Jesus treated women well. That is not in dispute among us. He talked with women in public, taught women, praised women for their acts of devotion towards him and, with the twelve, depended upon the financial ministrations of a close circle of women who followed him from Galilee (Luke 7:36–50; 8:1–3; 10:38–42; 23:49; John 4:1–42).

However, Jesus' positive regard for the contribution of women does not in itself provide an adequate theological foundation for the ordination of women to the ministry of word and sacrament. It is true that in both testaments women were involved in various aspects of ministry such as prayer and praise and prophecy, but they were not admitted to the priesthood in the Old Testament nor to the ministry of word and sacrament in the New Testament. The precedents that we have in the New Testament all confirm the teaching that only men were chosen to be public teachers of the word in the early church.

Given Jesus' regard for women, and the presence of women priests in other religious sects of the time, it is all the more striking that Jesus appointed only men to the apostolic office. Although women were the first eyewitnesses of the resurrection, they were not commanded to report it to the world but to the apostles (Matt 28:10, John 20:17,18; see Luke 24:9,10; John 20:2). The apostles alone were appointed to be heads of the new Israel and the teachers of God's word (Matt 19:28; Luke 22:30; John 16:13). On those foundational occasions when Christ instituted the ministry of word and sacrament he commissioned them to be the first ministers of the gospel (Matt 26:20–30; 28:16–20; Mark 16:14–18; John 20:21–23). Even Judas's replacement had to be 'one of the men' (*andrôn*) who had accompanied the disciples from Jesus' baptism onwards (Acts 1:21,22). Significantly, neither Mary, the mother of our Lord, nor one of the other Marys was chosen as an apostle to replace him.

Since the spiritual functions of the apostolate are continued in the public ministry, Jesus' limitation of the apostolate to men carries decisive significance for the church at all times and in all places.

## **4. History and tradition**

It is also striking that the teachers and councils of the ancient church were unanimous in their consensus that women should not be admitted to the public teaching office (Hauke: 404–44). It is a simple fact that 'at no point in the first millennium did any mainstream Christian church adopt the ordination of women as normal practice' (Mayer: 59).

The only exceptions to this rule occurred in a small number of heretical sects, a fact that fits well with what we know of the gnostic tendency to deny the significance of created bodily distinctions. One of these sects was the second-century Montanists. They believed that the Holy Spirit had told them to ordain women in honour of Eve. In response, the church denied that this teaching came from the Holy Spirit, Jesus or the apostles.

The exclusion of women from the ministry in the early church cannot be explained by the supposed cultural conservatism of its social environment. Priestesses were common in many Greek cults, and the context of cultural pluralism lent support to spiritual egalitarianism. Thus Hauke claims: 'The ancient society within which the early Church developed cannot at all be categorized indiscriminately under the rubric "patriarchalism". Instead, powerful "emancipatory" currents held sway...' (Hauke: 404).<sup>15</sup>

A very influential church order from about 225 AD, the *Didascalia*, prohibits women from the teaching office. It appeals to the example of Jesus.

'For it is not to teach that you women...are appointed...For he, God the Lord, Jesus Christ our Teacher, sent us, the Twelve, out to teach the [chosen] people and the pagans. But there were female disciples among us: Mary of Magdala, Mary the daughter of Jacob, and the other Mary; he did not, however, send them out with us to teach the people. For, if it had been necessary that women should teach, then our Teacher would have directed them to instruct along with us' (*Didascalia* 3:6:1–2).

The Apostolic Constitution (AD 400) asserts: 'We do not allow women to teach, for we have no such command from the Lord'. Its emphasis on the command of the Lord as the foundation for confidence in the ministry is significant in light of the claim in the Apology that without God's word we can affirm nothing about his will (*Ap* 15.17; Tapert: 217).

Various ecumenical and local church councils opposed the ordination of women throughout the centuries.<sup>16</sup> Many church fathers in the early church also taught that women were not to be pastors.<sup>17</sup> It may be acknowledged that some of them did make misogynous remarks which show that they held that women were inferior to men. Yet a close study of the history of the early church clearly shows that the prohibition of the ordination of women by the councils and the teachers in the early church was clearly determined by the commands of Jesus and the apostles, the example of Jesus and the precedents set by biblical history (Weinrich 1991: 277). They all gave the same reason for their teaching: it was not possible for women to serve as pastors because it was contrary to the command of Christ, his example and the teaching of the apostles. They invariably backed their claim by recalling 1 Corinthians 14:33b–40 and 1 Timothy 2:11–14. They therefore were held captive in conscience by Christ and his word.

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<sup>15</sup> The late second-century apocryphal work, *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, reflects this kind of thinking. It preserves a gnostic reaction to received apostolic norms by depicting the 'ordination' of Thecla by the apostle Paul.

<sup>16</sup> For example, the Council of Nicaea (AD 325, canon 19) and the Council of Laodicea (c AD 365, canon 11). The Councils of Saragossa (AD 380), Nimes (AD 396), Chalcedon (AD 431), Orange (AD 441), Epaon (AD 517), Orleans (AD 533), Paris (AD c 829), all spoke against the ordination of women.

<sup>17</sup> For example, Irenaeus (c 130–200) ministered to women who felt driven by the Holy Spirit to celebrate the eucharist, but he would not ordain them. The Apostolic Tradition 11, AD 215, under the guidance of Hippolytus (c 170–236), simply said that a woman is not to be ordained. Even though Chrysostom (c 347–407) worked with several hundred deaconesses in the church as bishop, he followed the example of Jesus and the teaching of Paul on headship in the church and excluded women from becoming pastors and bishops (*The Priesthood* 2:2, A.D.387).

## 5. Counterarguments

### *Limited or permanent application of texts*

It has been argued that since the two key passages *are* clear, they have only a relative, limited application. Therefore they are to be interpreted in the same way as the food laws in Acts 15:29 or Paul's instructions regarding headdress in 1 Corinthians 11:6.

In answer, we urge that every passage of Scripture should be read on its own terms, in light of parallel passages that treat the same subject. Acts 15:29 prohibited gentile Christians in Antioch and Syria from eating certain kinds of meat and blood for the sake of the Jewish members of the church, even though Jesus had already declared 'all foods clean' (Mark 7:19). In light of this declaration, it is clear that any subsequent command to avoid eating certain foods is, as the Confessions rightly affirm, 'for a time, to avoid offense' (AC XXVIII.65; Tappert: 92). Quite different is the command made by the same council to avoid sexual immorality. Since this prohibition clearly agrees with the teaching of Jesus (Matt 5:27–30; 15:19), the apostles (Rom 1:29; 1 Cor 6:13–18; Gal 5:19; 1 Thess 4:3) and the decalogue (Exod 20:14), it remains permanently and universally applicable. On the other hand, in his instructions on the headdress of women, Paul himself asserts that this practice is not based on a command, let alone a 'command of the Lord'; it is simply a matter of 'custom' (1 Cor 11:16).

As further support to the claim that the two commands in 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:12 are limited in scope to that time and place, it has also been argued that in its other occurrences in the New Testament the verb 'to permit', used in both commands, refers only to the specific context of the prohibition. This argument overlooks the fact that these are the only two passages in the whole New Testament where the verb 'to permit' is preceded by a negative (not). All other uses occur without the negative. This negation changes the sense of the verb altogether. 'I permit' is a concession. 'I do not permit' is a prohibition.<sup>18</sup> Paul's prohibition in 1 Timothy 2:12 is backed by his claim that he is speaking as an apostle (2:7; see 3:1) and his assertion that the instructions in chapters 2 and 3 tell how one 'must' (*dei*) act in the whole church (3:15).<sup>19</sup>

### *Augsburg Confession 28*

It has been argued that Augsburg Confession 28 teaches that most of Paul's instructions for worship were given for the sake of love and peace in the church. This misrepresents the argument in that article. The article distinguishes those practices that are based on God's command (AC 28.1–28) from those practices that are based on human ordinances (AC 28.29–78). Paul's instruction about the covering of heads in the liturgical assembly (1 Cor 11:5) is an example of such a human ordinance (AC 28.54). Some of the human ordinances should be obeyed for the sake of love and peace in the church, provided that their observance is not said to merit salvation.

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<sup>18</sup> We would also argue that the impersonal passive form 'it is not permitted' is to be understood as a divine passive. It indicates that God does not permit women to be speakers in the church.

<sup>19</sup> See also the accompanying paper, '1 Corinthians 14:33b–38 and 1 Timothy 2:11–14 prohibit the ordination of women'.

Others, such as the apostolic direction in Acts 15:20 to abstain from blood and from eating what is strangled, apply only for a time, because they were given to avoid offence in a particular situation, such as the coexistence of Jewish and gentile Christians in the early church (AC 28.65,66).

The Formula of Concord, article ten, expands and clarifies what is taught in the Augsburg Confession. The Formula does indeed teach that churches have freedom to change, reduce or increase ceremonies and church rites, as long as it does so without offence and in an orderly way (FC 10.9). However, it adds one further important qualification. This freedom only applies to what is neither commanded nor forbidden in the word of God (FC 10.1). If something is either commanded or forbidden, then it ceases to be adiaphoron. The key issue is not just whether that practice is a loving thing to do or whether it keeps the peace in the church but whether or not it has been commanded or forbidden by God's word. The church has taught, and we uphold, that in the two key texts, 1 Corinthians 14:33b–38 and 1 Timothy 2:11–15, Christ forbids women to be pastors in the church. Therefore we suggest that the reference in the Augsburg Confession to Paul's instructions on worship cannot be used to set aside those passages in which the Lord himself forbids women to exercise the ministry of word and sacrament.

#### *The cases of Junia and Phoebe*

We agree that women have at times been called by immediate prophetic inspiration to proclaim God's word publicly. However, talk of 'compelling' evidence that women were included in the apostolate simply lacks substance. Even if 'Junian' in Romans 16:7 refers to a woman, which textually is uncertain, the clause 'who are well-known to/among the apostles' (*hoitines eisin episēmoi en tois apostolois*) follows a common Greek construction by using 'well-known' (*episēmos*) with 'in' (*en*) plus the dative, in which the dative designates a group quite distinct from the subject. So, for example, the Greek poet Euripides (about 480–406 BC) says that the goddess Aphrodite is 'well-known to mortals' (*episēmos en brôtois*).<sup>20</sup> It cannot mean 'outstanding among mortals', since Aphrodite was not a mortal human being. If we follow this idiom in Romans 16:7 we have: 'Greet Andronicus and Junia(s)...who are well-known to the apostles'.<sup>21</sup>

Even though it is probably correct that the word 'patroness' (*prostatis*), ascribed in Romans 16:2 to Phoebe, indicates 'an official position in the church', it is most unlikely that this position was similar to the liturgical presidency of local pagan priestesses in the rites performed at their shrines (Schulz 1990: 124–27). The economic and social function of patrons in Greek and Roman society is well documented in many classical studies.<sup>22</sup> Origen's comments on the matter help us to understand what Phoebe did as

<sup>20</sup> Euripides, *Hippolytus* 103. See also Heath R Curtis, 'A female apostle? A note re-examining the work of Burer and Wallace concerning ἐπιστημος with ἐν and the dative', *Concordia Journal* (October 2002), 437–40. Curtis shows that it is legitimate to extrapolate such examples and apply them to Koinê Greek.

<sup>21</sup> The dative *tois apostolois* designates a group distinct from the nominative *hoitines episēmoi*.

<sup>22</sup> See Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth eds, *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Oxford University Press, 1996, pages 1124–1127.

a patroness. His assertion that Romans 16:1,2 'teaches with apostolic authority that women are likewise appointed to the ministry of the church' is followed by his comparison of Phoebe's service to the hospitality shown by Lot and especially by Abraham, who had 'the Lord, together with his angels, turn aside to his tent'. In the same way, says Origen, Phoebe was able 'to assist and to accommodate the Apostle as well'. Origen's comments on Mary (Rom 16:6) confirm his view that the primary public ministry of women in the church consisted in offering hospitality.<sup>23</sup>

### *Galatians 3:28*

We do not dispute that in Galatians 3:28 Paul teaches that men and women have the same status before God the Father by virtue of their baptism into Christ. But we do dispute that this text and its theology can be used to counter the two texts that clearly exclude women from the ministry of word and sacrament. The context of Galatians 3:28 shows that it has nothing to say about how the church should order its ministry. Baptism does not negate the various stations of life in the world, such as being Jew or Greek, master or servant, male or female.<sup>24</sup> We therefore reject the conclusion that equal status of men and women before God necessarily implies equal eligibility for the pastorate or the abolition of sexual distinctions in marriage and the family.

The use of Galatians 3:28 to teach that in Christ all sexual differences are abolished contradicts the clear apostolic teaching on vocation. Luther rightly recognised the error in this approach that resulted in two extreme positions in his own time: the spiritual enthusiasm of the heavenly prophets and the gospel reductionism of the antinomians. So, as he explains in the Large Catechism, while before God parents and children are perfectly equal, in relation to one another they are to preserve a certain inequality and difference proper to their God-ordained station (LC I.108; LW 40: 97). The Confessions assert that the gospel does not overthrow marriage or government but 'requires that all these be kept as true orders of God' (AC XVI.5; Tappert: 38). Luther also claims that while in emergencies women and even children may carry out some of the functions of the ordained ministry, the Holy Spirit chooses 'only competent men to fill this office'. For 'even nature and God's creation makes this distinction...The gospel...does not abrogate this natural law, but confirms it as the ordinance and creation of God' (LW 41: 154,155).

Attempts to equate the issue of slavery with the early church's teaching on the role of women in ministry are unhelpful. First, unlike the distinction between male and female, the division between masters and slaves is only a human construction; for, while God created each human being as either male or female, slavery is a purely human institution. Secondly, far from sanctioning slavery as a divine institution, the New Testament lists slave-trading as a vice in the order of adultery, sodomy and perjury (1

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<sup>23</sup> See Origen, *Commentary on the epistle to the Romans: books 6–10*, Thomas P Scheck (tr), Fathers of the Church, Catholic University of America Press, Washington DC, 2002, pages 290–93.

<sup>24</sup> See Hove, in Grudem (2002), and Johnson, in Piper and Grudem (1990). See also Ed L Miller, 'Is Galatians 3:28 the great egalitarian text?' *The Expository Times* 114 (Oct 2002 – Sept 2003), pages 9–11.

Tim 1:10). Thirdly, the abolition of transatlantic slavery in the eighteenth century was not based on the equality of slaves and masters 'in Christ' (such slaves were commonly pagan) but on the recognition, both philosophical (Rousseau) and religious (Sewall, Wilberforce), of the inherent dignity of every human being.

We therefore hold that the use of these arguments to discount the traditional teaching of the church on the ordination of women do not carry much weight.

## **Conclusion**

God himself has commanded that women should not be admitted to the office of the public ministry. We may not fully understand his reasons for this prohibition, but we can be sure it is for the good of the church, the benefit of its mission, and the glory of Christ. Jesus said, 'If you love me, you will keep what I command' (John 14:15; 1 John 5:2,3). He has commissioned his church to teach and observe all that he has commanded (Matt 28:20). We know that his commands are not burdensome but truly liberating (1 John 5:3; John 8:31,32). Since, as Paul declares, the Lord has expressly commanded women not to exercise the preaching office, we can have a clear conscience if we obey his command. We can be sure that what we do is pleasing to God (1 John 3:22).

# A case for the ordination of women and men

## Introduction

One of the many challenges the church faces today is how to talk to a world that has changed dramatically in the last fifty years. The major changes in western society include the development of modern technology and the incremental inclusion of women in almost every area of public life. Australia has embraced both changes wholeheartedly. Inevitably the question has arisen about the role of women in the church. Therefore, together with the church throughout the world, the Lutheran Church of Australia faces new questions, compelling it to re-examine its teachings in the light of the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions. The re-examination has led a number of members of the LCA–NZ to the conviction that it is right for the church to ordain women.

Some parts of the church began this process of re-examination quite some time ago. The first ordinations of women took place in 1929, in the Netherlands and then in Germany. A Lutheran church in Indonesia was the first outside Europe to ordain women in 1969. In the following year two synods in the USA, the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church in America ordained women for the first time (Bengston:11,72). Even though the churches that belong to the International Lutheran Council do not ordain women, most Lutheran World Federation churches do.<sup>1</sup> The LCA voted to allow women delegates to synod in 1981 and in 1989 approved the distribution of communion by women. Following a decision of the CTICR in 1999 ‘that on balance scripture and theology permit the ordination of women’, the General Pastors Conference and the General Synod of 2000 were evenly divided on the subject.<sup>2</sup> These developments require that the question be given full attention within the LCA–NZ.

## Women in the Bible

As we seek the will of God for the role of women in the church, it is appropriate to consider the witness of scripture as a whole. The Bible tells the stories of many women who actively work for the kingdom of God, stories in which women have authority over men, and stories in which women proclaim the gospel of Jesus. Yet there are other passages which say that a woman must be silent in church and a woman shall not teach or have authority over a man. How then are these passages to be interpreted? In

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<sup>1</sup> It could be argued that eighty per cent of the world's Lutherans belong to synods which include both men and women in ordained ministry.

<sup>2</sup> Minutes of the Thirteenth General Synod of the Lutheran Church of Australia, 23–27 July 2000, pages 25,26.

seeking to find the will of God for the church today, those who support the ordination of women are guided by the Bible, the Confessions and long-standing principles of biblical interpretation (see for example Braaten, 1983).

A church considering the role of women as leaders in the church will bear in mind the full range of biblical accounts that deal with the issue. Therefore the first part of this paper highlights a number of examples of women in scripture who acted confidently and unchallenged in situations and roles which one would expect to have been played by men.

*Exodus 15:19–21 — Miriam, prophet and worship leader*

When the prophet Miriam leads her people in a song of praise after they have crossed the Red Sea, she is leading them in worshipping God. In song she also proclaims to her people the great things that God has done. Her song has been recorded in the Bible so that thousands of generations might use it for worship and hear proclaimed to them the wonders that God has done.

*Judges 4 and 5 — Deborah, prophet and ruler of Israel*

At a crucial, fragile moment in the history of Israel Deborah is appointed as ruler and judge over all Israel. She has authority over women and over men, and God speaks his words to men through her. As a judge, or military leader, Deborah has God-given authority even over the male military commanders. This is so well understood that Barak, the army general, will not go to war unless Deborah goes with him in person. To him she represents the very presence of God. And, just like Miriam before her, Deborah is also a worship leader. Her great song praising God and proclaiming God's mighty acts on behalf of his people has also been recorded for use in worship and proclamation by all God's people.

*2 Kings 22:1–20 — Huldah, prophet and proclaimer to king and priest*

During the reign of King Josiah the book of the law is rediscovered in the temple. After tearing his robes, King Josiah sends Hilkiah the high priest to find out the will of God for his people. He sends him to a woman, Huldah. Through Huldah, God speaks his word to the high priest and to four other men with him. Her first words are the formula that prophets used to introduce God's word to the people: 'Thus says the Lord' (2 Kgs 22:15). She announces both punishment and grace — the destruction of Judah and the sparing of the penitent king. Huldah is taken seriously; her right to speak with divine authority is not questioned. The high priest hears God speaking through her to the whole kingdom, heeds her words and reports them to the king.

*Luke 1:39–56 — Elizabeth and Mary and Christ's incarnation*

The first person to acclaim Jesus as Lord is Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist and Mary's relative (Luke 1:43). Immediately following Mary's visit to Elizabeth, Mary is shown giving voice to the Magnificat. This wonderful song of praise and hope for justice, like the songs of Miriam and Deborah long before, has been set down in the Bible for use in



worship and proclamation. Every time Mary's song is sung or read in church to this day her words lead us in worship as they proclaim to us the great acts of God. Furthermore, Mary holds centre stage, with Jesus, at the precise moment that the Word of God becomes incarnate in the world. As Eve's body was taken from the man Adam, so Jesus' body is taken out of the woman Mary. A woman carries the incarnate Word into the world. Never has a man been charged to take the body and blood of our Lord in such a dramatic manner, and, unlike Mary, never has a man been called upon to serve as the vessel through whom God offers Jesus to the world so uniquely for its life and salvation.

*Mark 14:1–9 — Jesus, anointed by a woman*

Before ascending the throne of ancient Israel, a king was anointed by a prophet with oil applied to the head (1 Sam 10:1; 16:1–13). The word 'messiah' means the anointed one, and Jesus is the anointed one, or Messiah, par excellence. But in preparation for his enthronement as royal Messiah, ironically on a cross, Jesus is anointed with oil applied to the head, not by a prophet or a priest, but by an unnamed woman (Mark 14:3). And just as the disciples in Mark's gospel understand Jesus' ministry only in terms of power and glory, this woman knows him as the one whose path to glory passes by way of suffering and death. Unlike the twelve, she demonstrates extravagant self-giving, indicating her willingness to spend her life totally in service of her Lord (Mark 8:34,35; 14:3,4). So much does Jesus approve of his anointing by her (the role of a prophet) and her spending her life in his service (the role of a true disciple) that he foretells that 'what she has done will be told in memory of her' (Mark 14:9).<sup>3</sup>

*Luke 13:20,21; Luke 15:8–10 — the parables of the woman and the dough and the woman and the lost coin*

In one of many kingdom parables a woman mixes yeast into dough. Jesus uses both men and women as examples of those who mix his word into the world and are thereby employed to create the kingdom of God. Here, the creator of the kingdom is pictured as God the Divine Baker Woman (Capon: 121). Similarly, in Luke 15:8 Jesus' story of the lost coin depicts God as the Divine Housekeeper who seeks unceasingly to recover the lost coin, symbolising the lost sinner, and rejoices when she finds it. By making women the central characters in several parables, Jesus, like the writers of the Old Testament (eg Deut 32:18; Hos 11:3,4), freely employs feminine imagery for God's activity in the world.

*Luke 7:36–50 — Jesus' model of ministry, the woman who washes his feet*

At the beginning of Jesus' last great conversation in John 13 he gives his disciples a model of ministry. The model is that of a servant who washes feet or who waits at tables

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<sup>3</sup> There is a delightful irony in the dismissive comment made by the disciples: 'Why was the ointment wasted in this way?' (v 4). The word for waste is a noun (*apōleia*) from the verb for losing (*apolluein*) one's life in service. They criticise the woman for doing the very thing that Jesus has called on them to do (Mark 8:35; see also 12:44, where a poor widow gives her whole life [*bios*] in service).

(John 13:14,15; Luke 22:27). For this reason a pastor is also called 'minister', or servant (*doulos*). Luke tells the story of a woman who washes Jesus' feet with her tears and dries them with her hair. In this and other instances (eg Mark 1:31; Luke 8:2,3; John 12:2,3) Jesus is happy for a woman to serve him in the same way that he now encourages his disciples to serve one another. If serving is Jesus' model of ministry, culminating in his serving the world by his death on the cross (Mark 10:45), it is significant for the public ministry of the church that the gospels portray so many women as servants of their Lord. In choosing women to exemplify servant-hood, Jesus' clear message is that the leaders in the kingdom of God are to conduct themselves in a way that is different from anything they have previously experienced. It will be the way of the servant, a way that women know and fulfil so well.

*John 4:1–42 — The Samaritan woman, one of the first Christian evangelists*

At the well of Sychar, Jesus is served by a Samaritan woman. His conversation with her is the longest recorded conversation with anyone Jesus meets during his earthly ministry. Jesus discusses theology with her, reveals to her that he is the Messiah, and doesn't seem to mind at all that through her public proclamation her townspeople come to faith in him. The disciples are so astonished that Jesus should be speaking with a woman that they are momentarily speechless (v 27). The townspeople, men and women, young and old alike, 'come to faith' on the basis of the woman's testifying (*martyreô*, v 39). The words are chosen intentionally. She alone in John's gospel does what Jesus, in the high priestly prayer, prays that his disciples will do, namely, lead people to faith in him through preaching the word (John 17:20,21).

*John 20:1–18 — Mary Magdalene, the first person to whom the risen Lord Jesus appears, and the first person sent to proclaim the good news of the resurrection*

On Easter morning Peter and the beloved disciple get to the empty tomb early. But Jesus does not appear to them. Jesus waits until they have gone, until only Mary Magdalene is there. Mary Magdalene is the first person to receive an appearance of the risen Lord Jesus. Jesus acts counter to expectations by revealing himself first to a woman, and only later to his disciples.<sup>4</sup> Then Jesus commands Mary Magdalene to proclaim his resurrection to the disciples. Mary Magdalene accepts this great privilege and responsibility. As a result, she is the first person ever to proclaim the good news of Easter.<sup>5</sup> In the first century, women were not accepted as witnesses in a court of law.<sup>6</sup> Yet Jesus entrusts to Mary Magdalene the greatest kingdom message ever, with the result that she became known in the early church not only as the apostle to the apostles but the apostle of the apostles, the pre-eminent apostle.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The church has long been at pains to harmonise the gospel accounts of the resurrection (Mark 16:1–8; Matt 28:1–10; Luke 24:1–12; John 20:1–18). But for all their differences, one feature of the accounts is strikingly consistent, the central role of the women.

*Joel 2:28,29; Acts 2:16–18 — Pentecost prophets, both men and women*

On the day of Pentecost Peter quotes the prophet Joel, who looked forward to the day when daughters as well as sons, women as well as men would prophesy. In the book of Joel, God places women on a par with men as proclaimers of his word. And Peter applies this to the whole church on the day of Pentecost. It is this pivotal sermon, the first in the history of the church, which highlights the inclusivity of the proclamatory ministry of the church. The Holy Spirit, says Peter, is poured out 'on all flesh', so that both men and women are commissioned to continue Christ's ministry of proclamation.

*Acts 21:8,9 — Philip's four daughters, Christian prophets*

That women proclaimed God's word as prophets in the early church is undisputed. Near the end of Paul's third missionary journey, he and his travelling companions meet Philip the evangelist and his four daughters, each one of whom is a prophet in the first Christian community at Caesarea by the Sea.

*Romans 16:1–16 — women like Phoebe, Junia and Priscilla, co-workers with Paul in the work of the kingdom*

St Paul himself reminds us that working as God's prophets was not the only leading role women played in the first Christian communities. Paul describes women as deacons (Phoebe in Romans 16:1), co-workers (Priscilla in Romans 16:3; see also Acts 18:26),<sup>5</sup> and one specifically as an apostle (Junia in Romans 16:7). Right up to and including Erasmus in the sixteenth century, it was acknowledged that Junia was a woman apostle,

<sup>5</sup> In the 'Commentary on the Song of Songs', traditionally attributed to Hippolytus of Rome in the third century, it is written:

And after this, through these women the synagogue, crying out, may make its confession. Those who were made apostles to the apostles, having been sent by Christ, show to a good witness; to whom first the angels said: 'Go and announce to the disciples: "He has gone before you into Galilee. There you shall see him".' That, therefore, the apostles might not doubt that they (i.e. the women) were sent by the angels, Christ himself met with the apostles, that the women might be recognised as the apostles of Christ and might fulfil through obedience the failure of the old Eve. Hereafter, listening with obedience, she appears as perfected. (J A Cerrato, *Hippolytus between east and west: the commentaries and the provenance of the corpus*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002, page 191)

<sup>6</sup> See also Luke 24:10,11, showing the reluctance of the disciples to take notice of the women.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of these terms, see Thompson. An apostle is an eyewitness to the risen Lord, commissioned by Jesus Christ to spread the good news of his victory over death and the grave. In order to detract from her being placed among the apostles, the church has persisted in identifying Mary Magdalene as a prostitute. It is said that she is the repentant sinner of Luke 7:36–50 whom Jesus forgave, but even this woman is not called a prostitute. Certainly, the notice that she 'had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities' (Luke 8:2; see also Mark 16:9) is no basis for calling her a prostitute or for claiming that following her conversion she transferred to Jesus the 'love' that she had previously shown to her clients, a claim repeated in the musical *Jesus Christ Superstar* by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Timothy Rice, the movie *Jesus of Nazareth* by Franco Zeffirelli, and Martin Scorsese's movie *The Last Temptation of Christ*.

even though the name was modified slightly here and there from the twelfth century onwards to make it appear that the apostle in question must have been a man.<sup>9</sup>

Regarding the work of Priscilla (or Prisca), Paul's respect for her work is evident in his naming her and her husband Aquila as his co-workers and thanking them because they 'risked their necks for my life' (Romans 16:3). The New Testament references to Priscilla and her husband make for interesting reading. In scripture, almost without exception, husbands are named before their wives. But in the six references to Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:2,18,26; Rom 16:3; 1 Cor 16:19; 2 Tim 4:19), Priscilla is named first four times, implying her primary status as Paul's co-worker. More significant, however, is the reference to Priscilla and Aquila instructing the influential church leader Apollos. Luke writes that 'they took him aside and explained the Way of God to him more accurately' (Acts 18:26).

The vast array of biblical women who take a leading role in the life of God's faithful people, both in the community at large and in its life of worship, has rarely been noted in our discussions. It is undisputed that the case for women's ordination cannot be based on biblical or historical precedent alone, just as the case for the male only pastorate cannot be based on the precedent of the disciples being male<sup>10</sup> or the church's history of a predominantly male clergy. Knowing that precedent plays only a supporting role in such debates rather than a decisive role, the LCA has tended to spend most of its debating time and energy on the two texts from Paul that appear to forbid the ordination of women. But apart from the urgency of examining those two brief texts more closely in their historical setting and according to their pastoral and liturgical intention, it is also vital that attention be paid to the many texts that show women playing a no lesser or different role from men. The texts provide an important context for viewing the main texts from Paul.

<sup>8</sup> The great fourth-century preacher Chrysostom describes Priscilla as an evangelist and preacher. Chrysostom says that after the Holy Spirit distributed gifts to the apostles and prophets, he distributed them 'third to evangelists, namely those who didn't travel all over the place, but preached the good news alone, like Priscilla and Aquila' (Mayer and Allen: 64).

<sup>9</sup> Some scholars argue that the person *Junian* (accusative of *Junia*) must be derived from the name *Junias*, a shortened version of the masculine name Junianus. If so, it is a *hapax legomenon*. The only reason given for the assumption that the name is masculine is that the person is an apostle, and all apostles were supposedly male (F W Gingrich in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol 2, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1962). But this is a circular argument. In homily 31 of 'Homilies on the epistle to the Romans', Chrysostom writes of Junia, 'Who are of note among the apostles? But to be even amongst those of note, just consider what a great encomium this is! But they were of note according to their works, to their achievements. Oh, how great is the devotion (*filosofia*) of this woman, that she should be even counted worthy of the appellation of apostle!' (White: 49). For an extensive discussion, see Schulz (2004).

<sup>10</sup> The twelve male disciples reflect the twelve sons of Jacob, forebears of the twelve tribes of Israel. They represent the people of the church, far more than simply the clergy. Furthermore, it is hard to detect in the New Testament the start of a historical succession of male apostles. Matthias serves as the replacement for Judas, not as his successor. The church in embryo has been restored to its full number (Acts 1:23–26).

## Paul's epistles and the Lutheran Confessions

In two places in his correspondence, St Paul directs that women should be silent in the church and not have authority over men (1 Cor 14:34,35 and 1 Tim 2:8–15). Having considered the wide range of kingdom work undertaken by women in both the Old and New Testaments, we now turn to the question of how to interpret Paul's directions.

The Confessions provide a sure guide. Article 28 of the Augsburg Confession shows how to interpret St Paul's instructions for worship.<sup>11</sup>

St. Paul directed in 1 Corinthians 11:5 that women should cover their heads in the assembly. He also directed that in the assembly preachers should not all speak at once, but one after another in order. It is proper for the Christian assembly to keep such ordinances for the sake of love and peace, so that there may be no disorder or unbecoming conduct in the church. However, consciences should not be burdened by contending that such things are necessary for salvation or that it is a sin to omit them when no offence is given to others, just as no-one would say that a woman commits a sin if without offence she goes out with uncovered head. (AC 28:54–56)

The apostles directed that one should abstain from blood and from what is strangled. Who observes this prohibition now? Those who do not observe it commit no sin, for the apostles did not wish to burden consciences with such bondage but forbade such eating for a time to avoid offence. One must pay attention to the chief article of the Christian doctrine. (AC 28:65)

The Confessions state that it is proper to follow St Paul's worship instructions 'for the sake of love and peace', but that if people are not offended by doing things differently, then it is not a sin to do so. 'Consciences should not be burdened by contending that such things are necessary for salvation or that it is a sin to omit them when no offence is given to others' (AC 28:56). The Confessions use the example of Paul's prohibiting women from worshipping without head covering. Already in Luther's time people no longer took offence if women refrained from wearing something on their heads; society no longer frowned on such matters. The Confessions discuss the very letter we are debating. How is the church of a different time and at a different place to interpret St Paul's worship instructions? Are they meant for all times and in all places? The Confessions would say that they are not. They state that if people are not offended, or if congregational harmony is not upset, then we do not have to insist on the letter of the law. In fact, such insistence burdens consciences unnecessarily.

### *1 Corinthians 14:34,35*

In relation to 1 Corinthians 14:34,35, those who argue for the ordination of men only apply the guidance of the Confessions selectively. In keeping with the direction of the Confessions they say, 'Yes, silence doesn't have to mean total silence. It is now permissible for women to pray in church, to read in church, to proclaim God's word

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<sup>11</sup> This paper draws on the Tappert edition of *The Book of Concord*.

through song and choir.' But then the Confessions' pastoral guidance is left to one side when it is insisted that women may still not proclaim the gospel by means of the sermon.

The Confessions are clear. Not all of Paul's worship instructions can be applied literally in situations for which they were not intended. Paul's concern throughout chapter 14, in which he compares the relative merits of prophecy and speaking in tongues, is that the gospel be proclaimed clearly in an orderly setting so that people may be brought to faith and built up in the faith of Christ. His prohibition of women's speaking must be viewed in that light. Clearly he is not telling women always to be silent in worship, because they were allowed to pray and prophesy (1 Cor 11:5). Those who should be silent are those who are behaving in a manner that is disorderly and disruptive. All attempts to discover the nature of that disruptive behaviour that are not drawn from the text itself remain purely speculative.<sup>12</sup> The text proper tells us that while others were leading in worship, the women were asking disruptive questions, thereby acting insubordinately,<sup>13</sup> bringing shame<sup>14</sup> upon their husbands and the church, and bringing the gospel into disrepute (vv 34 and 35).

Luther too advises extreme caution when applying the word of God to today's church. It is vital to know what it meant then before it can be applied accurately now.

It is all God's word. But let God's word be what it may, I must pay attention and know to whom God's word is addressed. You are still a long way from the people with whom God spoke. It is not enough simply to look and see whether this is God's word, whether God has said it; rather we must look and see to whom it has been spoken, whether it fits us. (*LW* 35:170)

### *1 Timothy 2:8–15*

Those who promote ordination for men only appear to apply the direction given in our Confessions selectively. In relation to St Paul's ban on women wearing gold or pearls or braided hair in church (1 Tim 2:9), they follow the direction of the Confessions. In line with the Confessions, they say it is acceptable not to interpret literally what St Paul says about dressing for church. They ask, quite properly, what is Paul's underlying concern? Surely his concern is for a well-ordered society and worship that will be most conducive to people coming to saving faith (2:1–4). Paul is saying that ostentatious clothing and

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<sup>12</sup> One such speculative attempt to explain the prohibition is that women are here told not to teach. But the verb for teaching is not used, and prophecy, in which women were engaged (1 Cor 11:5), involved teaching (14:19). Another 'explanation' is that women are told not to exercise the gifts of the Spirit, because of the rowdy way they were doing so, likewise a proposal that doesn't stand up in the light of 1 Corinthians 11:5. In similar vein, it has been suggested that the ban refers to the gift of weighing prophecies (14:29; see also 12:10, 'the discernment of spirits'). But if that were so, one would think that Paul would have made the connection far more explicit.

<sup>13</sup> Neither at 1 Corinthians 14:34 nor at 1 Timothy 2:11 does Paul speak of women submitting to or being subordinate to men. Rather he calls on them to practise submission, which means conformity to prevailing standards of social conduct, living according to the expectations associated with one's position in the family or in society. Men too were expected to practise submission (Eph 5:21).

<sup>14</sup> Pilch writes that 'women are the most vulnerable point through which a family's honour can be challenged or even taken away' (135).

expensive hairdos threaten to undermine the spread of the gospel. They highlight class distinctions. Or perhaps the fashions Paul describes were unacceptable in the church because they were too closely associated with devotees of pagan cults. Having understood Paul's concerns and applied the pastoral guidance of the Confessions, advocates of ordination for men only then leave the guidance of the Confessions to one side and insist that Paul's direction on who may speak and not speak must stay in place for all time, in all places, as if that were his major concern.

But his words dare not be lifted out of their historical and pastoral context.<sup>15</sup> To put it briefly, verses 13 and 14 provide the key to understanding. Like Eve in the garden of Eden, poorly instructed regarding the prohibition concerning the tree of knowledge, the women of Ephesus were poorly instructed in the Christian faith and were easy prey for the heretical teachers who had infiltrated the church at Ephesus. The point of application to the church at large to this day focuses on Paul's concern that all who would teach and preach in church must first learn attentively and in silence, so that they become properly instructed and therefore apt to teach. The women were singled out on two counts. First, the founding members of the church at Ephesus were mainly Jews (Acts 19:1–10), for whom generally it was not vital that women receive instruction in the scriptures and who would not have permitted them to teach and preach publicly. In that respect, Paul's words permitting women to learn represent a major step forward. Secondly, the letters of Paul to Timothy indicate clearly that those who listened most eagerly to the false teachers at Ephesus were women. Their susceptibility, however, was not a function of their sex but of their lack of prior instruction. Two major hurdles had to be negotiated before they would be ready to teach: attitudes towards women had to undergo radical change, and women themselves needed the kind of instruction that would make them equal to the task.

### *The Confessions and the public ministry*

Article 5 of the Augsburg Confession, on the office of the ministry, states: 'To obtain such faith, God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments' (Tappert, page 31). The Confessions are clear that God has 'instituted the office of the ministry' (AC 5), and that implies people as office holders. But AC 5 immediately goes on to make the point that the article is primarily concerned about what is done rather than who is doing it. The stress falls on what the confessors regarded as the essence of the public ministry, providing the gospel and the sacraments, whereby God 'gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the gospel'. What is the public ministry? At its heart and core it consists of the office through which, and the office bearers through whom, the means of grace are provided.

In response to the question, 'What would happen if somebody who was wicked or didn't believe in God were to consecrate the sacraments — would they still be valid?', the Apology of the Augsburg Confession states categorically that the office of the ministry and

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<sup>15</sup> That context is explained more fully in the accompanying paper, '1 Corinthians 14:33b–38 and 1 Timothy 2:11–14 permit the ordination of women'.

the efficacy of the sacraments do not depend on the character or morality of the human being but on Christ and his call through the church (Ap VII and VIII, 28; Tappert, 173).

In the Large Catechism, Luther claims:

Even though a knave should receive or administer it, it is the true sacrament (that is, Christ's body and blood) just as truly as when one uses it most worthily. For it is not founded on the holiness of men but on the word of God. (LC 16; Tappert, 448)

In his Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, Melancthon writes:

Nor is this ministry valid because of any individual's authority but because of the Word given by Christ. [The German adds:] The person adds nothing to this Word and office commanded by Christ. 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. (*Tr* 26; Tappert 324)

Beyond the scope of the confessional writings, Luther wrote in 1533 that 'our faith and the sacrament must not be based on the person, whether he is godly or evil, consecrated or unconsecrated, called or an impostor, whether he is the devil or his mother, but upon Christ' ('The private mass and the consecration of priests', *LW* 38: 200).

Luther says that the sacraments remain valid and efficacious, no matter whom the church chooses to administer them, so long as the word is present with the elements. The validity and efficacy of the sacraments rest on the power of the word of God, not on the authority, the quality, the gender or even the faith of a person.

### *In persona Christi*

According to the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, pastors 'do not represent their own persons but the person of Christ, because of the church's call, as Christ testifies (Luke 10:16), "Whoever hears you hears me." When they offer the Word of Christ or the sacraments, they do so in Christ's place and stead' (Ap VII and VIII, 28; Tappert, 173).

But how do pastors represent Christ? The sinfulness of human nature (AC II) makes it clear that pastors cannot represent Christ according to his moral character. Nevertheless, throughout its history the church has raised up individuals who have gained supporters around their claim that the validity of the public office and the efficacy of the means of grace depend on the Christian character of the minister. This opinion is repudiated in Augsburg Confession VIII, 'What the church is', which affirms that the validity of the office and the efficacy of the word and the sacraments are guaranteed by nothing other than their source in God.<sup>16</sup> The ministry is not nullified by the immoral or cowardly character of the minister.<sup>17</sup>

For our faith and the sacrament must not be based on the person, whether he is godly or evil, consecrated or unconsecrated, called or an impostor, whether he is the devil or his mother, but upon Christ. ('The private mass and the consecration of priests', *LW* 38: 200)



Nor do pastors represent Christ by virtue of a special quality or character that is conferred with ordination. The LCA's 'Theses of Agreement' says that ministers do not 'possess a peculiar sanctity or an indelible character' (TA VI,5; A12).

Is the representation of Christ connected with his gender as a male? An important consequence follows from the Donatist controversy. If the ministry is not rendered invalid and the means of grace are not rendered non-*efficacious* in the case of immoral clergy, how much more does not the same thing apply in the case of female office holders? The Lutheran understanding of the ministry holds firm; that is, the means of grace depend entirely on the promise of God, the word of God, and the grace God bestows. If the validity and efficacy of the means of grace do not depend on the moral character or the priestly character of the minister, nor do they depend on the gender of the minister.

However, the case for the ordination of women is based on a much firmer foundation than implications drawn from the Donatist controversy. Pastors do not represent Christ according to his maleness but according to his humanity.<sup>16</sup> In treating the incarnation of our Lord, the ecumenical creeds place all the weight on his becoming a human being, not on his becoming a male. Just as the first Adam embraces the whole of sinful humanity, both men and women (Rom 5:12,15), so also through the new Adam, Jesus Christ, God redeems and restores fallen humanity, both men and women (Rom 5:15–19; 1 Cor 15:45–49). Through their baptismal incorporation into Christ, women are just as much a part of the body of Christ as men are and can represent Christ to the members of his body no less than men. The teaching concerning the image of God tells the same story. Both women and men bear the divine image (Gen 1:27). Through baptism they put on Christ (Gal 3:27,28; Eph 4:24; Col 3:8–14) and by the indwelling Spirit 'are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another' (2 Cor 3:18). Having been clothed in Christ, all believers equally, whether male or female, may now represent Jesus to other members of the body. The biblical teaching on the image of God prevents us from saying that only males can represent Jesus as rightly called ministers.<sup>19</sup>

## St Paul and mission

As surely as the church gathers to worship, it scatters Sunday after Sunday to carry out its mission in the world (Matt 28:19). God's mission in Christ drove St Paul to undertake

<sup>16</sup> The question arose most forcefully during the Donatist controversy of the fourth century. Donatus and his followers said the means of grace were ineffective when administered by a priest or bishop who had renounced the faith during the persecution of the Roman Emperor Diocletian.

<sup>17</sup> This never means that the church doesn't take great pains to ensure that candidates are fit for ordination. A ministry is seriously compromised, and the free flow of the gospel is hindered, if the incumbent fails to manifest the qualities called for in various places in the Bible (eg 1 Tim 3:1–7; 1 Pet 5:1–5).

<sup>18</sup> On the basis of 2 Corinthians 11:2, where Paul speaks of promising the Corinthians in marriage to one husband (*anêr*), meaning Jesus Christ, it is argued that even in his state of ascended glory Jesus is to be thought of primarily in male terms. But in the same picture, the bride to be, the believers of Corinth, are portrayed as a female virgin. Clearly the usage is metaphorical.

his journeys and write his letters. Paul's missionary concern led him to a radical insight. In 1 Corinthians he responds to one of the key questions behind our debate: 'Serious about mission and committed to the Bible, what kind of adjustments may the church make as it interacts with a world characterised by cultural and ideological diversity?' Paul gives a radical answer:

For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law, I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings. (1 Cor 9:20–23)

Serious about mission, the LCA–NZ is situated within a society that regards the exclusion of women from positions for which they are qualified and suited as deeply offensive. Therefore the church must take Paul's example to heart by treating our culture with due seriousness. Admittedly, religious bodies are exempt from laws that prohibit employing bodies from refusing to employ people according to their gender. But how well does that sit with Paul when he says that 'to the Jews I became as a Jew, to those under the law I became as one under the law' (1 Cor 9:20)? It is crucial that the church follow Paul's remarkable and surprising example and take care to display cultural awareness,<sup>20</sup> flexibility and adaptability, for the sake of the gospel.

This is not a case of caving in to society's agenda, as some claim. For the sake of the gospel Christians must take a stand when anti-biblical claims are made that reflect the spirit of the age. Christians 'obey God rather than any human authority' (Acts 5:29) when people try to persuade them that 'all religions lead to the same God but by different paths' or 'Christians can work for good in the community so long as they don't try to evangelise non-Christians'. On the other hand, for the sake of the gospel, the church will want to give the world a glimpse of Christ's transformative ministry by calling, training and ordaining suitable men *and* women from all cultures and from all backgrounds.

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<sup>19</sup> Some point out that Jesus did not choose any female disciples. This is certainly the case. However, it is also certainly the case that Jesus did not choose any gentile disciples. Yet the church has never argued that it is wrong for gentiles to become priests or pastors. It has always understood that in the kingdom of the new covenant the old barriers are broken down. As St Paul states in Galatians 3:28, 'in Christ there is no longer Jew or Greek (gentile)'. Thus the church has accepted gentiles as full members of the kingdom. But in the same verse Paul also points out that in Christ there is no longer 'male and female'. For a consistent argument it is important to see that for St Paul the overcoming of the barriers applies to women as well as to gentiles.

<sup>20</sup> The church's Finke River Mission took a positive step in this direction by handing back the Hermannsburg mission station to the Aborigines out of concern for native land rights.

## The biblical mandates for the ordination of women

Advocates of women's ordination are told that in order to introduce such a major change in church teaching and practice they ought to be able to point to unambiguous biblical mandates that institute the ordination of women. In response, attention needs to be drawn once again to the texts that are cited as the foundation for ordination itself. The most important of these (Matt 18:13–20; 26:26–29; 28:16–20; John 20:19–23) are addressed to the apostles, who represent the church as a whole to whom the ministry is given, far more than they represent the first clergy. It is readily admitted that the Bible provides no mandate for ordaining women; but neither does it provide a mandate for ordaining men only. Instead it provides the mandate for ministry. The apostles do not represent the first of a historic succession of male clergy originating during Jesus' earthly ministry and perpetuated by the laying on of hands. In those texts where something like ordination is indicated (1 Tim 4:14; 5:22; Titus 1:5–9), because of references to the laying on of hands and the conferring of the gift of the Spirit, the only office bearers who are described as male are bishops and elders,<sup>21</sup> whereas women are already at that early stage included in the ranks of the ordained — as deacons (1 Tim 3:11) and widows (5:9,10). It is also important to note that where other leadership positions with contemporary parallels are referred to in the New Testament (evangelists, pastors, teachers, overseers and leaders; see for example Eph 4:7–13; Acts 20:28; Heb 13:7,17), the grammar does not indicate that the positions are to be filled only by men,<sup>22</sup> and on no occasion does the writer specifically say that the positions are closed to women. Contemporary sensitivities and local problems may well have kept women out of major liturgical leadership roles in the early church. But the founding texts for the ministry and those texts that describe the ministry in its various manifestations provide no support for the claim that women should be excluded from holding public office.

## Summary

Weighty considerations compel us to reconsider the official position of prohibiting women from being ordained as pastors of the LCA–NZ. Pivotal to a correct interpretation of scripture is the understanding that some texts need to be read in the light of the culture of the times, if they are to be interpreted accurately, while others readily transcend the original time and place of writing. With Luther we will always ask, 'To whom was this word of God or that word of God addressed, and in what way does it apply to us today?' With Paul we will ask, 'Does this interpretation of the scriptural injunction, or this practice, promote Christ in today's cultural milieu? Or does it place an unnecessary stumbling block in the way of the gospel?'

A contextual reading of the texts that appear to prohibit women from the public office shows that they clearly deal with issues peculiar to the churches Paul was addressing. Paul's central concern was always the clear proclamation of the gospel within orderly worship so that people would be brought to faith and built up in the faith. In various ways

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<sup>21</sup> It must be noted that they are described as male; maleness is not prescribed.

<sup>22</sup> The nouns are masculine, the inclusive gender with Greek plurals.

the involvement of women at Corinth and Ephesus was hindering that primary goal, so they had to be counselled to desist.

The Bible and the Lutheran Confessions are insistent that the church's essential task, by the power of the Holy Spirit, is to bring the good news of Christ's salvation to all nations (Matt 28:19,20). The Confessions clearly indicate that the office of the ministry does not depend upon the qualities or gender of the minister for its validity or efficacy but upon the gospel and the sacraments. Furthermore, in offering the word of God and the sacraments in the place of Christ, pastors represent the person of Christ according to his humanity, not according to his maleness.

## **Conclusion**

Women in the LCA today have less opportunity to work within God's kingdom than their sisters in the Old and New Testaments. We have not allowed women to exercise the kind of authority within the Christian community that Deborah exercised in her office as judge in Israel. We have no order of women who prophesy in a liturgical setting. We have no women allowed to proclaim the gospel in a liturgical setting. We don't encourage women gifted like Priscilla to participate in the theological instruction of future pastors. We do not prepare women for ordination and then call and commission those suitably gifted to go and proclaim publicly that Jesus is risen.

Our church has in its midst women who believe that God has called them to the public ministry. They are denied the opportunity to test their sense of calling within the LCA and to fulfil their sense of calling. And the church at large — young and old, male and female — is denied the undoubted blessings of receiving ministry in all its fullness both from men and from women. Our prayer is that God would open our hearts and minds to acknowledge and embrace the ministry of those women servants whom God has anointed and would anoint with his Spirit for a full word and sacrament ministry within our beloved church.

# 1 Corinthians 14:33b–38 and 1 Timothy 2:11–14 prohibit the ordination of women

## Jesus' mandate for mission

The last words of Jesus before his ascension are recorded in 'the Great Commission' of Matthew 28:18–20: 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe *all* that I *commanded* you. And see, I am with you for *all* time until the consummation of the age.' The significance of the word 'all' can hardly be missed. As he ascends to heaven, our Lord gives this all-encompassing missionary mandate to his disciples. This is his authoritative commission to his church for all time until the close of the age. The church fulfils his commission by teaching all that Christ has commanded.

Jesus regards our obedient response as a mark of our love for him and friendship with him: 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments' (John 14:15; see also 14:21,23,24; 15:14).<sup>1</sup> By paying loving attention to the Lord's words and enacting his commands, Christians are used by him to bring the gospel to all nations.

The apostle Paul uses the same word 'command' (*entolê*)<sup>2</sup> in 1 Corinthians 14:37 to round off his argument that only men may serve in the public office of the ministry: 'Anyone who claims to be a prophet or a spiritual person must acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a *command* (*entolê*) of the Lord [Jesus]'. We hold that the male-only teaching office in the church is part of the missionary mandate that remains in effect until the end of time.

## 1. The Lord's command

Paul never uses the word 'command' lightly.<sup>3</sup> In 1 Corinthians he uses it only twice (7:19; 14:37). There can be no doubt that in 7:19 the word has weighty and enduring significance. He says: 'Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but what counts is keeping God's commands'. Its significance can be gauged from both the wider New Testament context and the context of 1 Corinthians itself.

<sup>1</sup> The word 'commandment' (*entolê*) in John 14:15 has the same root as the verb 'I commanded' (*eneteilamên*, from *entellomai*) in the Great Commission (Matt 28:20).

<sup>2</sup> The equivalent word in the Latin Bible (the Vulgate) is '*mandatum*', from which we derive the word 'mandate'.

<sup>3</sup> He uses it only fourteen times in his epistles. This includes seven times in Romans, where it always means the commandments of the decalogue, commandments which are still in effect.

In the wider context we find a close parallel in Galatians 5:6: 'In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith active in love'. If we add John's testimony, we see another remarkable parallel: 'This is his *commandment*, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he has *commanded us*' (1 John 3:23). Even though Paul and John do not explicitly say that God has commanded us to have faith and love until the end of time, we would not conclude from this that these were only temporary responses to the gospel rather than permanent characteristics of all Christians for all ages.

In his extensive discussion on marital issues in 1 Corinthians 7 Paul draws a distinction between his own pastoral advice and commands he has directly from the Lord. Whereas he commends his pastoral opinions to the Corinthians for their careful consideration, he places the Lord's commands on a much higher plane as words that have ongoing validity in the church (see 1 Cor 7:6,10,12,25). This distinction prepares the way for and underlines the significance of Paul's apostolic instruction in 1 Corinthians 14:37 that the Lord has given the command that the women should not speak but remain silent in the churches.

### ***Temporary or permanent commands***

We have already discussed the significance of the great missionary mandate in Matthew 28:18–20 and the echoes of that mandate in the letters of St Paul and St John. Given the importance of these mandates, it is inconceivable that any Christian could think the Lord's command to 'love one another as I have loved you' (John 13:34) was only a temporary injunction, conditioned by the cultural context in the first century. Nor would it enter anyone's mind that we could not know whether John's command was permanent or temporary unless he claimed that it lasted until the end of the world.

Like the mandates in Matthew 28:18–20 and John 13:34, the two commands in 1 Corinthians 14:37 and their parallel in 1 Timothy 2:12 carry no expiry date. But both the broader context and the immediate framework show that St Paul regards them as highly significant matters that should not be set aside. The silence of women applies to 'all the churches of the saints'. He adds the stern warning: 'Anyone who does not recognise this will not be recognised' (1 Cor 14:33b,38). Likewise, in his first letter to Timothy, Paul concludes his instructions for the ordering of the church, including the ruling that no woman is allowed to teach, with the solemn words: 'I am writing these instructions to you so that you may know how one should (*de*) behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth' (3:15).

## **2. The Lord's command and Paul's teaching on headship**

The case for reserving the pastoral ministry for men rests on the Lord's command in 1 Corinthians 14:33b–38. Paul connects this command closely with his teaching on headship and subordination in marriage and the church. The two passages that limit the ministry of the word to men explain their prohibition by reference to subordination which,

we claim, cannot be understood apart from Paul's teaching on headship. That then is where we will begin with our analysis of the prohibitions in 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:12.

On the basis of 1 Corinthians 14:33b–38 and 1 Timothy 2:11–15 we will clarify:

- the *servant* character of headship
- the *range* of texts that teach headship and subordination
- the *meaning* of the terms headship and subordination

After these clarifications, we will proceed to the issue itself:

- the *validity* of headship and subordination for churches at all times and in all places
- the *application* of the command for women's subordination to male pastors in the church

### ***a. The servant character of headship***

The strong pressure on churches to sidestep the prohibitions in 1 Corinthians 14:33b–38 and 1 Timothy 2:11–15 stems largely from powerful cultural and philosophical forces in our society. Some influential philosophers tend to reduce all human relationships to questions of power and rights rather than service and responsibilities. Thus some of those who advocate the ordination of women decry the grip of patriarchy in the family and church with its sinful exercise of male dominance and power under the dictates of the law.<sup>4</sup> In the face of male domination oppressed women need to be empowered. Some of them even find fault with biblical language for God because it is shaped by patriarchal presuppositions about male power which are said to privilege the use of male metaphors for him.

When we view everything the Scriptures teach about the man's headship through this prism, our vision becomes distorted because it fails to distinguish power from authority. By itself the word 'power' does not indicate whether it is obtained legitimately and exercised fairly or whether it is seized illegitimately and exercised tyrannically. The word 'authority', on the other hand, carries no negative overtones unless authority is abused and a person becomes authoritarian. In itself authority always implies authorisation, a commission recognised by others to perform a particular role. Thus, when the Scriptures speak about headship, they refer to responsible authority, its proper use for service of others.

The use of the loaded term 'patriarchy'<sup>5</sup> to summarise the Bible's teaching on subordination and male headship obscures the difference between Christian teaching and other religions. It is often alleged in a general way that Christianity has been responsible for widespread oppression and abuse of women. While we could indeed

<sup>4</sup> For such an attempt to link the teaching on headship in evangelical circles with patriarchalism, see Peter Carnley, *Reflections in glass: trends and tensions in the contemporary Anglican Church*, HarperCollins, 2004, pages 225–41.

<sup>5</sup> This pejorative use of the term 'patriarchy' is listed in *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th edition, 1993: 'broadly: control by men of a disproportionately large share of power'.

compile a lengthy list of abuses,<sup>6</sup> the rule still applies: 'The abuse of something does not abolish its proper use'.

The apostolic exhortation to husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church (Eph 5:25) has had a deep influence on societies where the leaven of Christ has done its work. Recent scholarship has documented how women in the Greco-Roman world received freedom and dignity under the influence of the Christian faith.<sup>7</sup> The point is that the Christian teaching on marriage sets a standard of behaviour for men and women which has always had a salutary effect when it is put into practice. With many pagan religions and philosophies, on the other hand, the standard itself is defective. So while it is true that Christian men have sometimes oppressed their wives and other women, the New Testament and the church has never sanctioned such oppressive behaviour.

In the New Testament we find the opposite of the oppression of women that is commonly sanctioned in all human societies. In fact, Paul's teaching on male headship critiques their oppression of women. For Paul, male headship involves the use of his authority to exercise spiritual leadership at home and in church, rather than to evade his responsibilities, as men are so often prone to do. This kind of headship is not coupled with the exercise of power, but it is exercised solely in service. Nowhere does the New Testament condone a man's lording it over his wife or the congregation, as if his headship implied a chain of command.<sup>8</sup> Christian headship always involves willing self-giving that is modelled on the self-sacrifice of Christ (Eph 5:25).<sup>9</sup> Husbands are exhorted to love their wives and honour them as 'joint heirs of the grace of life' (Col 3:19; 1 Pet 3:7).

When a man exercises leadership by loving service in the home and congregation, a woman's subordination is made easy. Her subordination can never be coerced; it is her willing gift offered, in the last analysis, to her Lord (Eph 5:22).

### ***b. The texts that teach headship and subordination***

Paul's teaching on the subordination of women to male pastors in 1 Corinthians 14:33b–38 and 1 Timothy 2:11–15 must be interpreted in the light of his teaching on subordination and

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<sup>6</sup> So, for example, which Christian man could claim he has loved and honoured his wife just as Christ has loved the church?

<sup>7</sup> See Alvin J Schmidt, *Under the influence: how Christianity transformed civilization*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2001, pages 97–124; and Rodney Stark, *The rise of Christianity*, San Francisco, Harper Collins, 1997, who says that 'within the Christian subculture women enjoyed far higher status than did women in the Greco-Roman world at large', and 'the Christian woman enjoyed far greater marital security and equality than did her pagan neighbour' (95,105).

<sup>8</sup> Lording it over other Christians is condemned in Matthew 20:25, 2 Corinthians 1:24 and 1 Peter 5:3.

<sup>9</sup> Muriel Porter also holds that the concept of male headship in the church and the family is central to the debate on the ordination of women. But she caricatures this teaching as an 'ideology of male domination over women'. She pays no attention to the texts in the New Testament that reject anyone who lords it over others and Paul's call for the exercise of headship in loving service. Instead she regards it as domination which is 'oppressive', 'dangerous', and 'frightening', enshrining 'a form of systemic abuse of women within [the church's] power structures' ('The Anglicans' oppressed majority', *The Age*, October 8, 2004, 17).



headship elsewhere. Thus 1 Corinthians 14:33b–38 cannot be understood apart from the passage on women's head-coverings in 1 Corinthians 11:2–16. Everything that the apostle writes about head-coverings comes under the heading in 11:3: 'I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God'. This verse also introduces Paul's lengthy discussion in chapters 11–14 on worship in Corinth. Thus it provides the framework for everything Paul says in 14:33b–38 about the need for women to be subordinate and to listen in silence to the man who speaks God's word in the divine service as the head of that congregation under Christ its head.

The two key texts under consideration in this paper belong to a group of texts which speak of the man's headship under Christ and the woman's subordination in marriage and the Christian church (besides 1 Cor 11:2–16, 14:33b–38 and 1 Tim 2:11–15, see Eph 5:22–31, Col 3:18,19 and 1 Pet 3:1–7). What these texts have in common is an admonition either to Christian women to be subordinate to their husbands 'as is fitting in the Lord' (Col 3:18) or to the men to exercise their headship in a self-sacrificial manner (Eph 5:25–33). They show that headship and subordination are two sides of the same coin. This comes out clearly in Ephesians 5:22–24: 'Wives, be subordinate to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour. Now as the church is subordinate to Christ, so also wives should be subordinate in everything to their husbands.'<sup>10</sup>

### ***c. The meaning of headship and subordination***

#### *Headship*

In 1 Corinthians 11:3 Paul asserts:

The head of every man is Christ,  
the head of the woman is the man,  
and the head of Christ is God.

The key to understanding this general statement is the meaning of the term 'head'.

Before the modern debate on women's ordination, commentators never questioned that when Paul spoke of headship he meant the authority of that person as a leader in a

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<sup>10</sup> So unpalatable has the teaching on headship and subordination become that many argue the references in Ephesians 5:22–24 are nullified by the preceding verse: 'Be(ing) subordinate to one another in the fear of Christ' (see Bilezikian: 153–59). Ephesians 5:21, in keeping with many Pauline passages, does commend the loving subordination, consideration, and humble service of all Christians to others in the church. But verse 21 may not be played off against the subsequent verses that set forth distinctive roles for wives and husbands. A parallel is 1 Peter 5:5, where Peter urges younger men to subordinate themselves to those who are older, but immediately adds: 'All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another' (see Piper and Grudem, pages 165–78). As paradoxical as it may seem, the New Testament plays both themes together: the subordination of all Christians to one another *and* the subordination of each Christian to some others. Similarly, in 1 Peter 3:6,7 Peter speaks in one verse of Sarah's subordination to Abraham and in the next verse of Abraham's honouring her as a joint heir of the grace of life (see also Gal 3:28).

community. However, recent commentators have advanced the view that 'head' (*kephalê*) means 'source', just as a river has its source in its headwaters.<sup>11</sup> But even when applied to a river, *kephalê* does not necessarily mean 'source'; it can also refer to the river's mouth.

After examining all the known occurrences of *kephalê* in biblical texts and non-biblical literature from the biblical period, Grudem concludes that in each case where someone is said to be the head of another, it refers to authority over that person. So, for example, the leaders of Israel's tribes are called the 'heads' of the tribes [LXX 3 Kings 8:1].<sup>12</sup>

### *Subordination*

The passive voice of the verb 'to subordinate' (*hypotassô*) means 'to be placed under someone's authority'.<sup>13</sup> Such subordination may be involuntary (Rom 8:20) or voluntary (1 Pet 5:5). As in all the other places where he calls for subordination, Paul uses the middle form of the verb in 1 Corinthians 14:34 to appeal for voluntary subordination. The Son's voluntary submission to the Father provides the model for this (1 Cor 15:27,28). Christians, then, are to subordinate themselves willingly to God and to Christ (Eph 5:24; Heb 12:9; Jas 4:7) as well as to God's law (Rom 8:7) and gospel (Rom 10:3,4). From this higher subordination of all Christians to God and God's word spring all other forms of subordination, such as wives to husbands (Eph 5:24; Col 3:18; Titus 2:5; 1 Pet 3:1,5), children to parents (Luke 2:51), servants to masters (Titus 2:9; 1 Pet 2:18), subjects to rulers (Rom 13:1,5; Titus 3:1; 1 Pet 2:13), and all Christians to their teachers in the church (1 Pet 5:5).

In 1 Corinthians 14:34, Paul calls on women to be *subordinate* by voluntarily fitting in with God's *order*<sup>14</sup> for the church and its worship. That includes the male teachers of his word.<sup>15</sup> He refers to this liturgical 'order' (*taxis*) in 14:40. All members of the congregation must fit in with that divinely instituted order by practising subordination to Christ, his word and the teachers of his word, so that the congregation can be built up as his temple (14:26) and enjoy peace rather than *disorder* (14:33).<sup>16</sup>

We need to connect Paul's call for subordination in 1 Corinthians 14:34 with his teaching on the subordination of the Son to the Father in 1 Corinthians 11:3 and 1 Corinthians

<sup>11</sup> Fee notes that 'all commentators up to Barrett [1968] and Conzelmann [1975] understood the headship metaphor in terms of authority (1987: 502, note 41). Now the pendulum has swung so far that, in a recent commentary, Thiselton even skirts around the obvious translation of *kephalê* as 'head', with its implications of authority, by translating 1 Corinthians 11:3 as follows: 'However, I want you to understand that while Christ is preeminent (or *head? source?*) for man, man is foremost (or *head? source?*) in relation to woman, and God is preeminent (or *head? source?*) in relation to Christ' (2000: 800).

<sup>12</sup> Grudem's findings have been challenged by Kroeger (1994); but see Grudem's rebuttal (2002: 145-202).

<sup>13</sup> See Luke 7:8: 'I am a man placed under authority (*hypo exousian tassomenos*), having soldiers under me'.

<sup>14</sup> While this term was commonly used in secular Greek for the arrangement of troops as a unit in a set order under their centurion for battle, it is used elsewhere in the New Testament for the order of priests for the service of God (Luke 1:6; Heb 5:6,10; 6:20; 7:11,17).

15:24–28. This wider context ties the relationship between man and woman to the relationship between God and Christ: ‘I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God’ (1 Cor 11:3). And 1 Corinthians 15:28 completes the portrait, as it speaks of the eternal future: ‘When all things are subordinated to him [the Son], then the Son himself will also be subordinated to him who put all things in subordination under him, that God may be all in all’. As Thiselton states, ‘the proof of the permanence of the principle of order...emerges in 1 Corinthians 15:28’ (Thiselton: 1155).

The flow of headship and authority in 1 Corinthians 11:3 is one-directional.<sup>17</sup> To say that God is the head of Christ is consistent with God’s creation of the world through the Word, his sending of his Son, and Christ’s ongoing involvement in the work of redemption as the exalted Lord. To say that Christ is the head of the man is beyond dispute. The third link in the chain is under dispute: ‘the man is the head of the woman’. We hold that this applies both to the role of the husband in marriage and the ministry of the word in the church.

The differentiation in the roles of men and women, given since creation, in no way negates their equality and unity in Christ (Gal 3:28). The subordination of all members of the church to their male pastors promotes the peace and harmony that result when every part of Christ’s body functions properly and the body grows and builds itself up in love (1 Cor 13:1–13; 14:33,40; Eph 4:16).

To sum up the argument to this point: the modern preoccupation with patriarchy and empowerment obscures a proper understanding of headship as service in marriage and the church. The claim that only one or two texts on the fringe of the New Testament develop the theme of subordination and headship ignores the range of teaching on the topic, while the interpretation of headship as source rather than authority distorts its intended meaning.

<sup>15</sup> While Thiselton rightly acknowledges the semantic and theological connection between subordination and order, he ignores the logical connection between subordination and headship by blunting the force of the prefix ‘sub’ (Greek *hypo*) in subordination (*hypotassō*). He translates 14:34, ‘Let them keep to their ordered place’ (1131; see REB, ‘they should keep their place’) and criticises the translation in the NRSV, ‘they should be subordinate’, and the even worse translation in the NIV, ‘they must be in submission’. He argues that the case for the interpretation of the prefix ‘sub’ as ‘under’ rests ‘partly on lexicography and partly on the exegetical tradition which understands Paul’s mention of the law here as a reference to the subordination of Eve in Genesis 3:16’. Thus, he suggests, the whole argument for submission is based on the punishment of Eve after the fall in Genesis 3:16. But Paul’s parallel argument in 1 Timothy 2:13,14 shows that when he spoke of the law he most likely had in mind the story of Eve’s creation in Genesis 2:7,20–25 as well as the story of her temptation in 3:1–13.

<sup>16</sup> Note the play on words here. Paul connects the ‘order’ of the divine service in 14:40 with the ‘subordination’ of women in 14:34 and contrasts it with the ‘disorder’ that is rejected by God in 14:33.

<sup>17</sup> We may not use Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 11:11,12 about women and men’s interdependence ‘in the Lord’ in order to nullify the heading and thrust given to the whole section in 11:3. Verse 3 cannot be interpreted in terms of mutual submission, as if (in addition to Christ’s headship of the man, the man’s headship of the woman, and God’s headship of Christ) it were equally true that the man was the head of Christ, the woman was the head of the man, and Christ was the head of God.

### *Cultural conditioning*

Before we return to the question of the permanent or temporary nature of the Lord's command, it may be helpful to address the notion that the apostolic teaching no longer applies because it is time-bound and conditioned by a thoroughly different culture. This notion skews a straightforward exegesis in a number of ways.

1. According to this argument, the women's disputatious questions in the Corinth of Paul's day brought shame on their husbands and the church community (1 Cor 14:35). Such behaviour is said to have offended against community standards for discreet behaviour. But today it is equally offensive if the women are not given equal rights to speak in church.

However, when Paul writes that 'it is shameful for a woman to speak in church', this does not mean the whole non-Christian community observes the behaviour of Christian women in Corinth and takes offence at it. They would be quite unaware of what was happening in the divine service, for they did not participate in it. Paul simply means that the behaviour is shameful in God's sight.

2. The case for women's ordination runs with the view that while it was offensive for women to teach God's word in Paul's day it would no longer be offensive today. Sometimes this argument is linked to a claim that the apostle issued his command because he was aware of the sensitivities of his intended audience which, it is alleged, was mainly Jewish. Jewish women were not allowed to be students of the law, let alone teach it. So, it is argued, it would take time before they were ready to assume their God-given right to take their place alongside men as teachers and preachers in the church.

It is difficult to sustain this argument, particularly in the case of 1 Corinthians. Clearly the Corinthian congregation was composed largely of gentiles, and it was baggage from their pagan days that troubled the congregation and weighed most heavily on the apostle rather than the concerns of Jewish converts.<sup>18</sup> Instead of adopting traditional pagan customs in the hope of advancing the gospel, Paul challenges common pagan practices in Corinth such as consorting with prostitutes, engaging in homosexual acts, and sexual cohabitation outside marriage. His approach is counter-cultural. Likewise, his instruction that only men were allowed to serve as pastors challenges the Greco-Roman culture, where women commonly served as priests in particular cults.

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<sup>18</sup> At the heart of 1 Corinthians we find three chapters about the old customs of the people in Corinth who still dined in pagan temples and ate food offered to idols, things that no Jew would ever have done (1 Cor 8:1 – 11:1). Other old habits such as litigiousness, visiting prostitutes and involvement in homosexual activity also stemmed from their pagan background (1 Cor 5:1 – 6:20). The opening chapters (1–4) respond to the Greco-Roman adulation of rhetoric, which was a feature of the second Sophistic movement of Paul's day.

#### ***d. The permanent validity of Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians***

##### *Ecumenical practice (33b-34a)*

Paul claims that the prohibition of women as speakers in the church and the requirement for them to remain silent during the speaking of God's word applied to 'all the churches of the saints'. This therefore was an ecumenical rule, a common practice for all Christian communities in all cultural settings. Previously Paul had repeatedly reminded the Corinthians, a congregation inclined to go its own way, that they were linked to the church 'in every place' of worship by a common confession of faith (1:2) as well as by the same teaching of God's word (4:17; 7:17; 11:16). As Thiselton notes, Paul's emphasis here on ecumenical teaching and practice anticipates the later teaching on 'the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church' in the Nicene Creed (1155). Thus the reservation of the public ministry of the word for men is not just a local custom but an ecumenical requirement.

##### *The law (34d)*

After appealing to the church's worldwide practice, Paul undergirds his ruling by pointing to its agreement with what God has to say in the 'law', the Pentateuch. Thus the subordination of women to male pastors is not a recent innovation of the apostles. It is consistent with the teaching of God in the early chapters of Genesis.

By speaking of the law, Paul has in mind the same passages that he appeals to in 1 Timothy 2:13,14, the creation of Eve in Genesis 2 and the temptation of Eve in Genesis 3. Adam was formed first, and so, according to biblical theology, he has the priority. He was the first born, the teacher, who received God's teaching about the need for obedience (Gen 2:16,17). Eve usurped the spiritual headship of Adam by ceasing to be a student and becoming a teacher of her husband, while Adam dodged his responsibility to teach his wife by weakly following her teaching, with tragic consequences for both. So women were not to assume this role again, and the men were not to renege on it.

Like Jesus before him, Paul recalls the creation of our human parents when he speaks of the relationship between men and women in marriage and the church. In response to questions from the Pharisees, Jesus rejects the practice of easy divorce that was permitted under Mosaic law on the grounds that 'from the beginning it was not so' (Matt 19:8; Mark 10:6). For Paul, too, the original order for marriage that God had established by the creation of Adam and Eve still governed the relationships between men and women in the Christian home and the Christian church. He acknowledged that the gospel does not overthrow these universal structures that were established at creation.

Carl Braaten explains this well:

The point of this doctrine is to affirm that Christians, like all other human beings, exist in a framework of universal structures that are prior to and apart from the fact that Christians believe in Christ and belong to his Church. God has placed all human beings in particular structures of existence — such as nationality, race, sexual identity, family, work, government — that in some form or other are simply givens of creaturely existence. The law and

commandments of God are revealed through these common created morphological structures of human existence and function apart from and in tension with the special revelation of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ. (1992: 120)

### *'The Lord's command' (14:37)*

Paul clinches his argument with an appeal to a command of the Lord. He says: 'If anyone thinks he is a prophet or a spiritual person, let him recognise that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command' (14:37). Here Paul tells the Corinthians that he received this teaching from Jesus as a part of oral tradition that was not recorded in the gospels. Two other examples of this are found in Acts 20:35 and 1 Thessalonians 4:15 (see also John 20:30; 21:25). This is confirmed by his question about the origin of the apostolic tradition in the preceding verse (14:36): 'Did the word of God originate with you [Corinthians], or are you the only ones it has reached?'

### *Present validity*

Paul claims that his teaching on the subordination of women to the men who were the teachers of the word in the divine service is based on ecumenical teaching and practice, the teaching of the Pentateuch and the command of the Lord. If that is so, how can we determine whether this teaching still applies in the church today?

Some divine commands are temporary, designed for a particular time or circumstance. The following examples are found in the New Testament.

- Jesus called the divorce legislation in Deuteronomy a temporary concession to the hard-heartedness of the Israelites (Mark 10:2-9).
- Upon his descent from the mount of transfiguration, he commanded: 'Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead' (Matt 17:9).
- Jesus received commands from his Father relating to his ministry in a specific time and place (John 10:18; 12:49).
- The epistle to the Hebrews sees the ceremonial law in the Old Testament as a temporary arrangement until its fulfilment by Christ (Heb 7:4–19).
- Although it is not called a 'command', the decision taken by the Jerusalem council that gentile Christians who wished to receive communion with Jewish Christians should abstain from eating blood is a divinely inspired but temporary decree that extended God's prohibition to the Jews in Leviticus 17:10–12 to the gentiles in the early church: 'it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us' (Acts 15:28).<sup>19</sup>

Wherever a divine command in the New Testament has only temporary significance there are contextual indicators to that effect, such as 'don't tell anyone...until...' (Matt 17:9). Without clear indications in the context, divine commandments issued or reissued

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<sup>19</sup> This temporary requirement must be seen against the background of Jesus' earlier declaration that all foods are clean (Mark 7:19), a declaration with abiding validity.

in the New Testament are permanently binding.<sup>20</sup> For example, Jesus confirms the ongoing validity of the law (Matt 5:17–19). He does not set a time limit to his ‘new commandment’ that his disciples love one another (John 13:34; see also John 15:12; 1 John 2:7–11). Similarly, there is no time limit to the divine commandment to ‘believe in the name of [God’s] Son Jesus Christ and love one another’ (1 John 3:23) and to walk ‘in truth’ (2 John 4).

Those who advocate the ordination of women often point to Paul’s instructions about head coverings in 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 as an example of an apostolic command that is no longer observed. We must, however, distinguish between a divine command and a human custom that exemplifies how that mandate may be put into effect at a particular time and place. The story of the foot-washing in John 13 serves as a good illustration of this. While Jesus tells the disciples, ‘You ought to wash one another’s feet’, his action is simply an ‘example’ of how the disciples should show their love (13:15). The custom of foot-washing may no longer be a helpful way of demonstrating and enacting Christian love in our culture. But the new command of Jesus to love one another still applies (John 13:34). Similarly, it is no longer customary in western cultures for women to wear head-coverings; other customs have emerged to express a woman’s love and respect for her husband, such as wearing a wedding ring or taking on his surname. But headship of men in marriage and the church still remains in effect (1 Cor 11:3).

To argue that by making much of the law and the command in 1 Corinthians 14:34,37 we fall prey to legalism betrays a failure to grasp the breadth of these terms in the New Testament. God’s commands embrace not only the Ten Commandments but also ‘the whole counsel of God’ (Acts 20:27), everything our Lord has commanded us to teach about faith and love, the sacraments and the ministry (Matt 28:18–20). By keeping his commandments we show our love for him (John 14:15,21,23; 15:10,14).

We have already noted the significance of the word ‘command’ in 1 Corinthians, where it appears only twice, each time in a context that underlines its significance (7:19; 14:37). The context of 14:37 does not indicate that the command for women to be silent was a temporary restriction.<sup>21</sup> Everything points to its authority as a divine command with permanent and universal validity. Paul underlines the seriousness of the command by

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<sup>20</sup> Horrell maintains that in certain contexts Paul believed higher considerations of Christian discipleship could require ‘the setting aside of a specific instruction, or word, of Jesus’. He appeals to 1 Corinthians 9:14,15, where Paul quotes the Lord’s command that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel, but goes on to say that he has not used this right. Horrell holds that this has implications here for our attitude to women’s ordination (1997: 587–603). It should be clear from Paul’s language that he is not setting aside an instruction from Jesus. He writes: ‘The Lord *commanded*...but I have *not used*’. Not all directives are of the same nature. For example, a person who is granted citizenship in a country is not required always to live there and exercise ‘all the rights and privileges of citizenship’. The Lord issued a decree to the apostles that they had the *right* (*exousia*, 1 Cor 9:6,12,18) — not the *duty* — to receive support. Paul exercised his right to support in his ministry among the Philippians (Phil 4:15,16). At Corinth, he chose not to exercise his right. Similarly, a pastor who declines an honorarium or donates it to a worthy cause is by no means violating Christ’s command.

adding a warning (14:38) that God will not recognise the ministry of anyone who ignores the Lord's will in this matter (see 1 Cor 3:11–15). This warning of divine disapproval shows that he does not have in mind such minor matters as the chatter of loquacious women or their disputatious questions. Rather, he is speaking of a clear command that remains valid to the end of the world.<sup>22</sup>

### ***e. The application of the commands for silence and subordination***

#### *1 Corinthians 14:33b–38*

Scholarly opinion about the intended scope of Paul's directive in 1 Corinthians 14:34 varies widely. Carson (129–31) believes the prohibition applies only to the evaluation of prophecies. At the other end of the spectrum, Bruner (300–301) argues that in this directive Paul does not allow women to speak in tongues or to speak a word of prophecy, the two kinds of speaking that are discussed in this chapter.<sup>23</sup> A detailed explanation of how 14:34 relates to Paul's passing reference in 11:5 to the women who pray and prophecy goes beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>24</sup> However, it must be said that the brief reference in 11:5 may not be used to discount the apostle's final and much fuller statement on the issue in 14:33b–38.

According to biblical usage, to prophesy is to speak God's word to his people on the basis of a special revelation by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 14:30; Rev 1:1–3; 22:18,19).<sup>25</sup> Thus prophecy belongs to a different genre of speaking from preaching and teaching. While New Testament prophets received God's word as he revealed it to them, preaching was the proclamation of the apostolic gospel in the light of the Old Testament. The *Good News Bible* is therefore misleading in its translation of the verb 'prophesy' (*propheteuo*) in 1 Corinthians 11:5 as if it meant the ordinary proclamation of God's word: 'Any woman who

<sup>21</sup> Some interpreters suggest 1 Corinthians 14:37 could be a temporary concession to Jewish Christians who had only recently become accustomed to the higher regard in which women were held in Christianity and were by no means ready for the further step of seeing women in teaching roles. More persuasive is D J Nadeau's contention that Paul is 'deeply concerned to avoid any confusion between the emerging Christian churches and marginal Graeco-Roman or oriental cults in which women exercised more prominent roles than in the synagogues which formed the Jewish roots of the churches' (*Le probleme des femmes en 1 Cor 14:33b–35*, 63–65, cited in Thiselton, 1157).

<sup>22</sup> 'He/she is not recognised' is a divine passive: 'is not recognised by God'. It also has eschatological overtones similar to those in 1 Corinthians 3:12–15, which speak of a person's work in the ministry as being either recognised and rewarded by God or forfeited and lost on the Day of Judgment.

<sup>23</sup> Bruner argues that Paul places a prohibition particularly on a woman who speaks in tongues in the congregational meetings.

<sup>24</sup> For a discussion of five different ways of relating 11:2–16 to 14:33b–38, see G Lockwood (2000: 527–34).

<sup>25</sup> Friedrich says that 'all prophecy rests on revelation (1 Cor 14:30). The prophets...speak to the congregation on the basis of revelations.' It is important to distinguish between this narrower sense of the word 'prophecy', which is standard in the scriptures, and the broader sense of the word, which has been common in church history. Luther, for example, referred to himself as the 'prophet of the Germans' (*LW 47:29*) and spoke of the need for more such 'prophets', 'pastors well versed in Hebrew and Greek and thus equipped to 'dig into Scripture' (*LW 45:363*).



prays or proclaims God's message in public worship with nothing on her head disgraces her husband'. This equation of prophecy with preaching confuses the issue under discussion by assuming that in Paul's day women commonly preached in the divine service.<sup>26</sup>

### *1 Timothy 2:11–15*

This close parallel to 1 Corinthians 14:33b–38 is part of Paul's apostolic charge to Timothy and the churches entrusted to Timothy's care. Here Paul presents himself as an appointed 'herald and apostle...a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth' (2:7). His instructions to women in 2:8–15 are part of a broader admonition both to men and women about how they should 'conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth' (3:15).<sup>27</sup> This makes it clear that his teaching does not just apply to the church in Ephesus but to the universal church.

This broader admonition begins with a charge that all Christians should pray for all people (2:1–7). Secondly, Paul teaches that he wants the men everywhere 'to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing' (2:8). Thirdly, even though women should pray together with men, he wants the women to be modest and sensible in their dress (2:9,10). Fourthly, even though they should pray together with all the men and be students of his word like them, they must not become teachers but must remain disciples who listen to the word of God 'in silence' and in 'full submission' (2:11–15).<sup>28</sup>

Christians who believe that these admonitions still apply to the women in the church today differ in their understanding of how widely Paul's words about the silence of women apply to their participation in the divine service.<sup>29</sup> But one boundary line stands out clearly. That boundary is set in 1 Timothy 2:12. It reads: 'I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet'.

Paul insists that a woman should not teach or have authority over a man. Here, as in all his pastoral epistles, Paul does not use the verb 'teach' in a general sense for any kind of instruction but as a technical term for the transmission of doctrine, the apostolic 'teaching' of God's word (1 Tim 1:10,11; 2 Tim 3:16; 4:2,3; Titus 2:1,10).<sup>30</sup> Thus Timothy is to 'teach' what he has received from Paul (1 Tim 4:11; 6:2) and to pass it on to others to 'teach' (2 Tim 2:1). So a woman may train other women (Titus 2:3–5), instruct her children (2 Tim 1:5; 3:14,15; see Acts 16:1) and, like Priscilla, take an active role —

<sup>26</sup> For another misleading translation of 1 Corinthians 11:5, see J B Phillips, 'if she prays or preaches with her head uncovered'.

<sup>27</sup> The introductory words to chapter 3, 'This is a trustworthy saying', could apply backwards, as a conclusion underlining the trustworthiness of what Paul has just been saying in chapter 2 (see the similar function of 1 Cor 14:37,38).

<sup>28</sup> Paul's wish that the woman be a student of God's word stands in contrast with the prevailing attitude of Pharisaic Judaism.

<sup>29</sup> Christians have debated whether a woman may read lessons, vote at church meetings, serve as a chairperson, or help administer holy communion.

<sup>30</sup> Thus the term 'teacher' is used in the New Testament for an apostle (1 Tim 2:7; 2 Tim 1:11) as well as a pastor (Acts 13:1; 1 Cor 12:28,29; Eph 4:11; James 3:1).

possibly even a leading role — in the private instruction of a man like Apollos (Acts 18:25,26). Yet this does not mean that women are permitted to serve as the preachers and teachers in the liturgical assembly where men, women and children are gathered for public worship.

The New Testament distinguishes the office of apostles and prophets, with their special tasks during the church's foundational period,<sup>31</sup> from another office variously designated as 'pastor', 'teacher', 'overseer' and 'elder' (1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11; Acts 20:17,28). This office, this gift of God to his church, continues through the centuries. Paul instructs Timothy and Titus to prepare and install such men in the churches of Ephesus and Crete (2 Tim 2:1,2; Titus 1:5–9). One of the chief qualifications of these pastors is that they be 'apt to teach' (1 Tim 3:2; 2 Tim 2:24; see also 2 Tim 2:2). He also assumes that these pastors would be men (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6).

At a time when confessional Lutheran churches need to emphasise the pastor's sacramental ministry in reaction to the low view of the sacraments in many Protestant churches, we also need to reaffirm the biblical teaching of the pastoral office as a teaching office. Paul emphasises this in Ephesians 4:11, where he speaks of Christ's gift to the church of 'pastors who are teachers'.<sup>32</sup> It is an office of word and sacrament, for the sacraments need proper teaching to provide the right setting for their evangelical administration. That office is necessary for the life of the church at all times and in all places.

To sum up:

- In the church the Lord has forbidden women to be teachers, and he has commanded them to be subordinate to those men who exercise their headship under him.
- Biblical headship is always exercised in self-sacrificial service.
- The woman's subordination to her 'head' is her voluntary, loving gift.
- There are six significant texts in the New Testament that develop the teaching on headship and subordination for the Christian home and the church.
- Headship means authority over another, while the subordination of a woman in marriage and the church involves her voluntary acceptance of the authority of her husband and her pastor.
- This divine arrangement has permanent validity, grounded in the creation of the first man and the first woman.
- Finally, its application to the respective roles of men and women in the church means that only qualified men may fill the pastoral office and teach in the church, while women (and most men!) are to listen and learn.

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<sup>31</sup> In Ephesians 2:20 Paul speaks of the church being 'built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets'.

<sup>32</sup> 'The pastors and teachers' is a hendiadys, which expresses one idea by using two words connected by 'and' such as in 'nice and warm'. This is reinforced by the fact that the article is not repeated.

## **Conclusion**

Opinion about the scope and applicability of the Lord's command in 1 Corinthians 14:33b–38 varies widely. But if we follow the principle that one part of Scripture interprets another part of it that deals with the same topic, then the parallel passage in 1 Timothy 2:12 should remove all doubt that Paul has in mind authoritative speaking and teaching of God's word. A woman may teach other women, she may teach children, she may take part in the private instruction of a man like Apollos, but when a congregation assembles for public worship, women have no authority to serve as the preachers and teachers.

The church has no mandate to ordain women; it is bound by Christ's prohibition of women as teachers of God's word in the divine service. If we accept the Lord's prohibition, we will fulfil one part of his great commission to bring the gospel to all nations.

# 1 Corinthians 14:33b–38 and 1 Timothy 2:11–14 permit the ordination of women

## Introduction

This paper shows that when 1 Corinthians 14:34,35 and 1 Timothy 2:11–14 are read closely in context it becomes clear that they are designed to serve Paul's fundamental pastoral and evangelical concern that worship be conducted with order and decorum, so that nothing prevents the word of God being clearly taught at church and the gospel freely proclaimed in the community. The inappropriate conduct and the ostentatious apparel of certain women in the churches of Corinth and Ephesus were placing a stumbling block in the way of the free course of the gospel. So Paul needed to speak out and put an end to the offensive behaviour. Elsewhere in his letters, however, Paul provides ample evidence that women were at liberty to take their place alongside men in the worship life of the early Christian community. Paul sustains a creative tension between his inspired vision of the church as the place where all barriers are removed through the believer's baptismal union with Christ and his equally inspired pastoral sensitivity to those behaviours that would unnecessarily alienate the church from the society in which it was seeking to gain a foothold — for the sake of the gospel. Paul's words cannot be understood without carefully distinguishing between his fundamental concern for the unhindered progress of the gospel and the local practice that threatened its progress. In 1 Corinthians 11 the counterproductive practice was that women were neglecting to wear the traditional head covering when they led in worship. In 1 Corinthians 14 it was the habit some poorly instructed women had developed of interrupting the worship leaders with a stream of questions. And in 1 Timothy 2 the focus falls on a group of women who had fallen prey to false teachers — most of whom were probably libertarian charlatans — and were seeking to take a leading role in worship without first undergoing the thorough instruction in the faith that led to the ability to instruct worshippers in the health-giving teaching of the gospel.

## 1 Corinthians 14:34,35

### *Worship life at Corinth*

Paul's words about women in worship cannot be understood without an appreciation for the worship practices of the congregations he was writing to. Services in the early church were probably held in the houses of kind patrons such as Philemon (Phlm 2), Chloe (1 Cor 1:11) and Phoebe (Rom 16:1). There was much greater freedom and spontaneity than we are familiar with, as various members of the community contributed to the service at the instigation of the Holy Spirit. The gifts of the Spirit that were manifest

in worship are not those that we are familiar with from a standard Lutheran worship service. A quick read through 1 Corinthians 11–14 makes it quite clear that various members of the congregation offered prayers during the service, or they had the gift of speaking in tongues (*glossolalia*), which included praying in tongues and interpreting tongues. Some would share with the congregation a revelation they had received, a word of wisdom, a word of knowledge, a prophecy or a teaching (12:8–10). Some had the gift of weighing the prophecies that others had shared (12:10; 14:29). It would even appear that members of the congregation chose what hymns would be sung and what lessons from the Old Testament would be read (14:26), as they were moved by the Spirit in the course of the service.

It would be a mistake to think that Paul disapproved of the freedom and spontaneity of worship in early Christian congregations. After all, he told the Corinthian believers, ‘Be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues’ (14:39). It would also be a mistake to think that the style of worship, with the open manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit, was peculiar to Corinth. After all, when Paul addressed the believers at Thessalonica, he said, ‘Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything’ (1 Thess 5:19–22).

Early Christian worship practices in other parts of the Mediterranean world were probably not so different from those of Corinth. The reason that Paul wrote so much about worship at Corinth was that serious abuses had arisen there, which may not have arisen elsewhere, or if they had they may not have been quite as problematical.

It is not hard to infer from Paul’s words what was happening. A boastful and competitive spirit had set in, as members tended to rank gifts and boast about them. The ability to speak or pray in tongues stood at the top of the ladder. *Glossolalia* was widely regarded as a sign of greater spiritual power and maturity. Rather than wait for an interpreter to speak so that the congregation might be built up in the faith, it would seem that the Corinthians preferred to pray, prophesy and speak over the top of one another (14:27–33). They couldn’t wait for their turn to speak. Liturgical order had given way to liturgical chaos.

Worship at Corinth had become a shambles. The spiritually gifted were speaking simultaneously and unintelligibly, with little concern about whether others understood what they were saying. All that mattered was that they were given the chance to demonstrate their remarkable ability to speak ‘in the tongues of mortals and of angels’ (13:1). No trouble was taken to ensure that people with gifts for weighing prophecies and interpreting tongues were present, or, if they were present, that they were given the opportunity to exercise their gifts, so vital for building up the faithful.

While not wanting to quench the Spirit, Paul’s overriding concern was for good order in worship. He wrote, ‘God is a God not of disorder, but of peace’ (14:33) and, ‘all things should be done decently and in order’ (14:39). Worship order was not an end in itself; rather it created the setting in which members could be instructed and built up in the faith. Paul had made it clear that love was the pre-eminent fruit of the Spirit (13:13), and

those who loved their fellow believers would take great pains to ensure that everything that happened in worship served to build up the congregation (14:3,4,5,12,17,26). The breakdown in Christian teaching and proclamation (14:19) meant that the congregation was being denied the learning and encouragement that resulted from consistent and careful catechesis (14:31).

Disorder in the worship at Corinth was also having a detrimental effect on people who were new to the faith<sup>1</sup> and unbelievers (14:23,24). Confronted with an unintelligible babble of voices, neophytes and unbelievers were failing to hear the good news of Christ. The message of the gospel ought to sound out clearly and distinctly, like a bugle calling an army into battle (14:8). The cacophony of worship prevented the gospel from being heard. But enquirers or onlookers were putting two and two together. From what they saw and heard they were concluding that the Christian movement was just one more strange mystery religion to add to the smorgasbord available in the Greco-Roman world of the first century AD. Christians at worship appeared to have been caught up in a state of ecstasy, so that Paul can ask, 'Will they not say that you are out of your mind?' (14:23), like the followers of Dionysius, Isis, Bacchus or Mithras.<sup>2</sup>

### ***Female head covering***

As if the noisy commotion was not bad enough, matters were made worse by the attitude of some of the leading women. Paul had taught that 'there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female' (Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 11:11,12). He allowed women to pray and prophesy in public worship (1 Cor 11:5), something never allowed in the Jewish synagogue. Due to their new freedom in Christ, however, some Christian women believed that some of the constraints of their former life should no longer apply to their new life in Christ.

The majority of the congregation's members were Jewish converts, and Jewish and gentile women were required by tradition to wear some form of head-covering. It appears that some were saying that the traditional head-covering should no longer be required in the church. But Paul feels so strongly about the practice that he devotes fifteen verses and marshals several weighty arguments to bolster his contention that women should maintain the practice (11:2–16).

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<sup>1</sup> The Greek word *idiōtēs* (singular) means a non-specialist or layperson, someone without rank or specialised expertise in a particular profession, for example a private soldier in the army rather than a ranking officer. 'Some who do not understand' (NIV) captures the meaning better than 'outsiders' (NRSV). The English word 'neophyte' comes close to the sense of the word.

<sup>2</sup> The verb *mainesthe* (14:23), which the NRSV and NIV both translate as 'you are out of your mind', is from *mainomai*, which means to be caught up in the ecstatic frenzy of the devotees of cults like those of Dionysius, Bacchus and Isis. It does not mean that the people are mad, but that the spirits of the god or goddess in question are controlling the minds and bodies of the worshippers. The mystery religions were mostly fertility cults that celebrated the annual cycle of decay, death and new life. Elaborate nocturnal fire-side rituals, consisting of singing, dancing, heavy drinking and blood-letting, induced devotees into a trancelike state in which they communicated intimately with the patron deity and participated in the life-force that emanated from him or her.

First, Paul argues from male headship (11:3,8), about which more will be said. His second argument has to do with social honour and shame. Shame was brought on men in general and husbands in particular if the woman failed 'to exercise authority over her head' by removing her head-covering (11:10). She shamed her head — both her literal head and her metaphorical head, that is, her husband (11:5). It was understood that a man's wife brought him honour or shame; she was his crowning glory<sup>3</sup> or the cause of his disgrace in the community, depending on her demeanour (11:7; see 1 Esdras 4:17). So Paul has no qualms about reinforcing his plea with a strong appeal to social propriety (11:14) based on well-worn social custom (11:16). Thirdly, Paul appeals to nature (11:14).<sup>4</sup> Fourthly and finally, to clinch the argument he says that the practice is observed without exception throughout the churches of the Mediterranean world (11:16). Women were to exercise authority over their heads. Their new-found freedom in Christ was not to go to their heads. They were to wear a covering on their heads.<sup>5</sup>

Paul has no qualms about women's participation in worship leadership. They led the congregation in prayer, they led the congregation in prophecy (11:5), and prophets are ranked second only to apostles in Paul's letters (12:28; Eph 4:11). However, Paul is vitally concerned that when women do provide leadership, they are careful to avoid any kind of conduct that would create offence in a society whose sensibilities have been shaped by prevailing social conventions.

It is interesting to ask why the uncovered female head caused such offence. As usual, the telltale clues are found in the text itself.<sup>6</sup> Paul says that the woman who leads in worship with head uncovered might as well go the whole way and have her head shaved (11:5). Together with the Greek and Roman philosophers of his day, and in keeping with Jewish sensitivities (Keener: 42–45), Paul was adamant that a clear distinction should always be maintained between men and women (see especially Rom 1:26,27). Of all people, believers were to stay in the station in which they were called rather than try to transcend any perceived limitations imposed by the human condition in enthusiastic

<sup>3</sup> The Greek is *hê gynê de doxa andros estin* (literally 'but the woman is a man's glory').

<sup>4</sup> The point seems to be that Paul regarded women's thick hair or long hair as a natural endowment, God's intended covering, and therefore artificial head covering served the vital role of accentuating a feature that clearly distinguished women from men.

<sup>5</sup> The only time the word 'authority' (*exousia*) appears in the chapters where Paul issues worship guidelines, that authority is exercised by women. NRSV translates the phrase *exousian echein epi tês kephalês* (11:10) as 'to have a symbol [NIV: sign] of authority on her head'. This suggests that the head-covering is worn as a sign of male authority over the woman. But the word 'sign' or 'symbol' is not in the text; the translation is misleading. Elsewhere in the New Testament the phrase means 'to take charge of something' or 'to keep something under control' (Rev 11:6b; 14:18; 20:6). It is the woman who exercises control, over her head.

<sup>6</sup> As attractive as other proposals may be, they do not find support within the text itself and therefore must remain speculative. One proposal is that the uncovered female head was sexually provocative and hence inappropriate for a worship leader. A related mixed message proposal is that prostitutes let their hair hang loose as a sign of their availability. Or members of the public all too easily mistook a woman with freely flowing hair for a prophetess engaged in the mystery religions of Paul's day.

anticipation of the parousia (1 Cor 7:17–24). Any kind of activity that sought to convey an impression of gender neutrality, such as cross-dressing or unisex hairstyles, was totally off limits.<sup>7</sup> Head covering showed at once that a woman was a woman. Removal of the covering raised serious doubts, but far worse was a shaved head that made a woman look remarkably like a young man. That is why Paul says a woman who uncovers her head may as well turn herself into a virtual boy and complete the job of shaming her husband and bringing the church into total disrepute.

Paul could hardly be more biting. If you are going to damage the spread of the gospel, he says, you may as well do so as thoroughly as possible. The number of verses and the number of arguments devoted to women's head-covering considerably outweighs the verses and arguments devoted to women's silence and submission in church. Yet the insistence that women wear something on their heads has been abandoned in most parts of the church today, because people have been able to attend to the basic concern that gave rise to Paul's ruling, the concern that the gospel be given free course in the society of his day where specific codes of dress were accepted and expected.

### **Male headship**

The first argument Paul draws on in support of his ruling regarding women's head-covering has to do with male headship (11:3). Those who advocate the ordination of men only draw heavily on the concept of headship. In Greek the clause in question is 'a woman's head is the man' (*kephalê de gynaikos ho anêr*). A fascinating debate has arisen between scholars determined to demonstrate that both in the Bible and in the extra-biblical literature of the time 'head' means a leader in the sense of an authority figure, and those scholars who are equally determined to show that 'head' means source, as in the source of a river.<sup>8</sup> Even though the weight of evidence favours the proposal that the word means 'source', it cannot be denied that the word also means 'leader' on some occasions.

The most fruitful approach, as always, is to search for the clues in the text itself. When Paul says that a woman's head is the man (v 3), the reference to Genesis 2:22,23, where God builds Eve from Adam's rib, is clear and unmistakable. Quite literally Adam is the source from which Eve flows. The finding that 'head' means source is reinforced by verse 8, where Paul says that 'man was not made from woman, but woman from man', and by verse 12, where he speaks of all things coming from God.

The consistent emphasis throughout the passage on the derivation of one person from another, Christ from God, and all things ultimately from God, would tilt the balance in

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<sup>7</sup> As Hays puts it: 'Symbolic "gender-bending" actions in which women and men seek to reject their specific sexual identities are a sign not of authentic spirituality but of an adolescent impatience with the world in which God has placed us' (191).

<sup>8</sup> A comprehensive listing of the articles written by disputants appears in Keener, page 56, footnotes 118–120. What emerges from the debate is a fresh appreciation of the truism that data is readily manipulated to support predetermined outcomes.



favour of 'source' as the chief meaning of 'head'. And lest too much weight be placed on men as 'heads' in the sense of leaders, Paul hastens to correct any misapprehension on the part of his readers by adding: 'In the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God' (11:11,12). By making the far more important point about the mutuality and interdependence of the man and the woman through their baptismal incorporation into Christ, Paul wants to correct any misunderstanding that might arise from his point about the woman's derivation from the man,<sup>9</sup> based on the second creation account, a point made only to serve his plea for women not to abandon their traditional head-covering.

For the advocates of male only ordination, headship is closely connected with the subordination of women to male pastors that they say is commanded in 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:11. The theme of headship undergirds their contention that only men are authorised to lead in worship.<sup>10</sup> However, the words 'head' (*kephalê*) and 'authority' (*exousia*) are never used in connection with one another. And Paul does not draw on either of the words in his texts about women in worship (1 Cor 14:34,35 and 1 Tim 2:11–15). In fact, the only time the word 'authority' is used (11:10), it is authority exercised by women, the authority (or control) they are told to exercise over their heads.<sup>11</sup>

Paul does not use male headship as the lens through which to view his instructions regarding women in worship. Rather, he includes male headship in his extended list of arguments against women leading worship bareheaded. And of all the arguments Paul employs, it is the one he qualifies most heavily, by adding that in Christ women and men are interdependent rather than subordinate one to the other. Paul's one and only concern is that congregational behaviour be eliminated that prevents the gospel from taking root in the hearts of worshippers and bearing fruit in transformed lives.

### ***Let the women be silent: a range of interpretations***

One of the chief issues our church has to face in the discussion on the ordination of women is the precise meaning of Paul's instruction at 1 Corinthians 14:34 that 'women should be silent in the churches'.<sup>12</sup> Parts of the early church went so far as to rule out women's participation in congregational hymn singing. Having modified its position in various ways as time has passed,<sup>13</sup> the LCA has decided that Paul's words apply only to authoritative teaching and preaching in public worship. But does the text in question

<sup>9</sup> Other potential misunderstandings are that Christ is the head only of the man, but not the head of the woman, or that Christ is a subordinate member of the trinity (v 3). But Paul is too busy mounting arguments for women to wear head-covering to take the opportunity to cover his tracks on all these matters.

<sup>10</sup> See CTICR Plenum, 'Final report' (1999: 4).

<sup>11</sup> It could be protested that Paul denies women the right to exercise authority over men at 1 Timothy 2:12. But the word used there, *authentein*, is a different word altogether. It is treated in the discussion of 1 Timothy 2:11–15.

<sup>12</sup> In Latin the singular form, 'let the woman be silent', is *mulier taceat*, convenient shorthand for referring to 1 Corinthians 14:34,35.

support such a position? This paper now addresses four interpretations of the *mulier taceat* that are sometimes advanced to moderate the impact of Paul's stern command. In each case the paper assesses whether the interpretations can be sustained on the basis of a close exegetical study.<sup>14</sup>

First, it has been suggested that only wives are told to be quiet in church, not women in general, because single women were free to devote their time to the work of the Lord (1 Cor 7:34).<sup>15</sup> But just as Paul speaks of wives and then women in general at 11:2–16, it is a reasonable assumption that he moves from women in general at 14:34 to wives in particular at verse 35.<sup>16</sup> The reader readily understands that just as wives were to leave their questions till they got home, so also other women were to wait till they left church before raising any concerns they may have had with what was said or done during worship.

Secondly, it is proposed that the *mulier taceat* is an insertion by someone other than Paul, because it appears to contradict what he says at 11:5, where women are anything but silent. Furthermore, the two verses seem to go off on a tangent from Paul's chief concern in chapter 14, to regulate prophecy and speaking in tongues.<sup>17</sup> But digressions are a common literary feature. And maybe it isn't such a bolt from the blue as has been claimed. The themes of silence, subordination and orderly worship link the *mulier taceat* with the rest of the chapter (vv 28–33,40).

A third theory that has gained currency recently is that the *mulier taceat* is not Paul's own opinion but his quotation of the words of a strict opposition party at Corinth which he then goes on to refute in verse 36. But when Paul does quote his Corinthian opponents elsewhere (see 6:12–14; 7:1–5; 8:1–3), he always commences his rebuttal by showing that he partly agrees with what they are saying, before demonstrating how misguided their opinion really is.

<sup>13</sup> At one stage it was unthinkable for women to read the Bible lessons in church because of the way the *mulier taceat* was interpreted. In some congregations they were not permitted to give a children's address in church. They could not be elected as delegates to synod until 1981, and questions are still being raised about the ruling of the 2003 general synod that women may take lay reading services.

<sup>14</sup> Convenient summaries are found in Keener, pages 74–80, and Fee, pages 702–705.

<sup>15</sup> This is the position, for example, of E Schuessler Fiorenza, page 230. It is clear that only wives are meant when their husbands are referred to as well (as in v 35), because the Greek word *gynê* means both woman and wife. The same applies to *anêr*, which means both man and husband.

<sup>16</sup> The part often represents the whole in the Bible (*pars pro toto*), as in 'give us this day our daily bread' (Matt 6:11), where daily bread stands for all that is needed for body and life. In the same way, wives can readily represent women in general.

<sup>17</sup> See the commentaries by C K Barrett, F F Bruce, Brendan Byrne, Hans Conzelmann, Gordon Fee, Richard Hays, Wayne Meeks, Robin Scroggs and Nigel Watson. The argument is that the *mulier taceat* was first penned by a zealous scribe in the margin of the text, and the two verses were inserted into the text itself at a later date by a subsequent copyist. Further support for the proposal comes from the fact that in some manuscripts the *mulier taceat* appears after verse 33, as in English translations, whereas in others it appears after verse 40 at the end of the chapter. Given scribal respect for the sacred text, it is argued, why would a handful of copyists move the two verses from one spot to another unless the verses were first written in the margin?

Fourthly, after visiting Orthodox Jewish synagogues, with their upstairs women's gallery, some have concluded that worship spaces in Corinth must have been designed the same way. Separated from the main auditorium, the women couldn't take part in worship and caused a disturbance with their noisy chattering. But the earliest archaeological evidence for segregated synagogue worship is from the Middle Ages (Keener: 76). And for the most part believers — men, women and children — gathered in private homes to worship in Corinth.

***Is Paul excluding women from the higher office of authoritative teacher?***

Proponents of the ordination of men only have had to find a way of dealing with 1 Corinthians 11:5, where it is clear that women prophesied and offered liturgical prayers in the worship assembly, especially when this verse is read in connection with 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Ephesians 4:11, where it is clear that prophets are ranked only below apostles as those gifted by the Spirit for service in the church. One way of doing so has been to propose that Paul actually hints at another office which is superior to that of the prophet. After delivering their prophecy in the assembly, prophets were counselled to be silent until such time as their prophecy had been weighed or discerned (*diakrinein*, 14:29,30; see also 12:10). This has been taken to mean that there was another office in the church at Corinth, a higher office, of male teachers and preachers who were responsible for evaluating prophecies with the word of God as given in the Old Testament and the apostolic tradition.<sup>18</sup>

According to this theory, prophecy did not involve a public ministry role, because prophecy was nothing more than announcing, under divine inspiration, the prophetic utterance that the Lord had revealed to the prophet. Prophets were little more than channels for divine revelations, so this was an acceptable role for women. Accordingly, when Paul tells women to be silent, he is prohibiting them from getting involved in the critical evaluation and discussion that follows the prophetic utterance. Woman may prophesy, but they may not weigh what has been said. That is an authoritative task given to the appropriately gifted male leaders of the congregation. Weighing prophecies involves careful scriptural interpretation and homiletical application of the Lord's words and deeds. The closest parallel in today's church would be the sermon. It is men's work. It involves the authoritative task of acting 'as a speaker in a liturgical assembly' (Kleinig: 80). Women are to remain silent in acknowledgment that they are subordinate.

This solution is highly problematical. First, it assumes that prophecy in general, and hence the utterances of female prophets in particular, were 'subordinated to the apostolic tradition' (Kleinig: 79). But in regulating the gift of prophecy (14:29–33a), Paul only makes one reference to subordination. He says that 'the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets' (v 32). And women were included among the ranks of the prophets.

Secondly, prophecy is far more than mechanical reporting of the Lord's words or other divine revelations, to be distinguished from the office of scriptural interpretation and

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<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Kleinig (1994), and Grudem (1982: 239–55).

doctrinal and ethical application that is said to outrank the office of prophet. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 14 those with the gift of prophecy are engaged in catechetical instruction (vv 19,31), calling people to account for their sins (v 24), proclaiming the reconciling word of God that leads to faith and worship (v 25), and providing Christian encouragement to fellow believers (v 31), virtually the same activities that would have been engaged in by those holding the hypothetical office of interpretation and proclamation.

Thirdly, there is nothing to suggest that one and the same person could not on one occasion be engaged in giving a prophetic utterance, after which time he or she would be silent for the duration of the evaluation, and then on another occasion be engaged in the joint evaluation of another person's prophecy while that person remained quiet. In fact, Paul's words at verse 29 make it difficult to escape precisely that conclusion: 'Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said'. 'The others' certainly seems to imply the other prophets, among whom are included women, if not the whole congregation.

Fourthly, if Paul had wanted to prevent women from being involved in the weighing of prophecies he would have said so. In verse 29 he has used the verb 'to speak' (*lalein*) and the verb 'to weigh' (*diakrinein*), each in connection with prophecy. The prophets speak, then they are silent while others weigh their words. All members of the congregation have the right and the privilege to speak, that is, prophesy (14:5,24,31; see 1 Cor 11:5), as long as they have received the gift of prophecy. But at verse 34 Paul does not say that women may not weigh prophecies; he says they may not speak. Given that the two activities have been clearly distinguished in verse 29, it is extremely strange that at verse 34 Paul has not used the verb appropriate to the activity he is supposedly prohibiting women from engaging in — weighing prophecies. He prohibits women from speaking, and it remains to be seen what kind of speaking he is referring to.<sup>19</sup>

***Some women were disrupting worship, shaming their husbands and bringing the church into disrepute with their repeated questions***

Throughout his first letter to the Corinthians Paul addresses specific local problems associated with the church's conduct in the community or its conduct when it comes together for worship. Since Paul's other instructions regarding worship have dealt with specific local practices that have proved a problem (see especially 14:26–33), it can be assumed that the *mulier taceat* also addresses a specific problem that has arisen in the Corinthian churches.<sup>20</sup> It was undoubtedly an ongoing problem and therefore well known to Paul and his Corinthian correspondents. As a result, he did not have to spell it out in detail. The reader is in the

<sup>19</sup> The verb 'to speak' (*lalein*) was an ordinary word for speaking at the time of the New Testament (13:11), so close attention to context is necessary in order to determine the kind of speaking that is forbidden at verse 34. Certainly the verb is used in connection with authoritative teaching (1 Cor 2:6,7,13; 3:1; 9:8), but it is also used in connection with prophecy (12:3; 14:3,29), revelations (14:6), tongues (12:30; 13:1; 14:2,4,5,6,9,11,13,18,21,23,27,28,39), and anything except tongues (14:19). In each case, the context has shown what kind of speaking is in mind. The same principle will guide our understanding of the meaning at verse 34, where women are forbidden to speak.

fascinating position of one who is suddenly eavesdropping on a long-running dispute. Despite the reader's late arrival on the scene, however, the text still provides the vital clues, no matter how clipped, as to the precise nature of the problem that has arisen.

The most obvious explanation for the *mulier taceat* is revealed by Paul's words to the women, that 'if there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home' (verse 35). It appears that the women in the churches throughout the region had developed the habit of spending a great deal of time asking questions during worship, especially during the scriptural expositions. Celebrating their newly acquired freedom in Christ and eager to learn as much and as quickly as possible, the women's questions had become increasingly loud and assertive, rude and aggressive. This was regarded as totally unacceptable. When rabbis expounded the scriptures or philosophers gave voice to their wisdom, their disciples were expected to listen reverently and attentively. An occasional question may have been in order, but for the most part students were expected to listen attentively during the speaker's presentation.<sup>21</sup>

As today<sup>22</sup> so then, questions are sometimes designed to expose the speaker's ignorance or demonstrate the interrogator's superior knowledge. Some questions are designed to steer the speaker away from the subject. Others arise from profound ignorance or a desperate desire to learn everything in a hurry. Whatever the motive, too many questions from the audience or congregation have the effect of disrupting the presentation, wasting time and annoying others who are trying to follow the thread of the presentation. In addition, the barrage of questions is a sign of total disrespect for the teacher or leader.

Concealed behind Paul's few words is a major problem, felt also by others in the ancient world.

Those who constantly interrupt with contradictions, neither hearing nor being heard, but talking while others talk, behave in an unseemly manner; whereas those who have the habit of listening with restraint and respect, take in and master a useful discourse, and more readily see through and detect a useless or a false one, showing themselves thus to be lovers of truth and not lovers of disputation, nor forward and contentious.<sup>23</sup>

Far from Paul's words being a put-down of women, they are an encouragement to them to keep learning and growing in knowledge and in faith. At first glance it seems odd that

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<sup>20</sup> By speaking of 'all the churches' in verse 33 Paul is probably referring to all the churches within the eastern Mediterranean region, whereas 'the churches' in verse 34 may be a more specific reference to the several worship assemblies (house churches, preaching places) within Corinth itself. Keener estimates that 'the average house church in Corinth may have held about fifty members' (page 96, note 55).

<sup>21</sup> 'The same advice holds for asking questions of knowledgeable people at dinner parties' (Keener, page 97, note 60).

<sup>22</sup> Who of us hasn't been to a public lecture that has been seriously disrupted by an annoying member of the audience showing off his or her knowledge of the topic, or trying to shame the presenter by asking questions designed to expose the presenter's ignorance, or by raising issues that bear no relationship to the topic under consideration?

women in particular should be addressed in this way. If the problem is aggressive questioning of worship leaders, surely men may well have been equally culpable. But with rare exceptions such as Priscilla, Phoebe, Junia, Lois and Eunice, women would not have been as well versed in the scriptures as men. Normally it was not regarded as necessary that girls and women learn the Torah. Certainly they could not teach it. Some women would have become involved in children's Torah instruction.<sup>24</sup> But most Jewish women received no, or very little, scriptural training. The habits of Judaism were deeply entrenched and continued into the fledgling church, so that the gap between the biblical knowledge of men and women remained quite pronounced.

Many women were eager to make up for lost time. They were fully aware of Paul's teaching that those who were in Christ were a new creation (2 Cor 5:17) and the former divisions of religion, socioeconomic status and gender had been overcome (1 Cor 11:11,12; Gal 3:26–28). Their desire for a crash course in the Christian faith, given the constraints of their former life, however, quickly spilled over into their excited questions.

In the end, their intrusive involvement was just one more ingredient in the chaotic worship life of the churches of first-century Corinth. Like the proud and showy display of spiritual gifts, the women's questions were disrupting the service. This meant that believers were not hearing the pointed preaching of the law and the clear announcement of the gospel, and neophytes were receiving mixed and muddled messages rather than clear and well-developed expositions of the faith. In addition, the women's behaviour was bringing shame on the church. The Greco-Roman world of Paul's day, and Jewish society in particular, was highly patriarchal. Women traditionally stayed in the background and conducted themselves modestly and quietly in public.<sup>25</sup> The gospel would make no headway if the church proved to be out of step with the best values and practices of the day.

While telling the women to maintain a respectful silence, Paul does nothing to dissuade them from preparing for an active ministry in the church. In fact he urges them to undergo the instruction essential to taking the lead in worship. His words are an active encouragement to the women to come to church well prepared and, while there, to listen intently so that they are sure to take everything in and continue learning. After worship they are urged to do additional research, to seek out people such as their husbands, who are better informed than they are, and ask them follow-up questions as they seek clarification of matters they haven't fully understood. The inevitable outcome of such a process is that the women will gradually become as well informed as the men of the

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<sup>23</sup> This 3rd century BC comment, attributed to the Pythagoreans, is quoted in Keener, page 82.

<sup>24</sup> For an extended discussion see Keener, pages 81–85.

<sup>25</sup> In other words, the women are to be subordinate (v 34). Notice once again that Paul does not say subordinate to men. Subordination means adhering to the code of conduct associated with one's calling, in the church, the family and society. In adding, 'as the law also says', Paul could be referring to the overall androcentric thrust of Old Testament law, Jewish oral tradition, or the ecumenical practice or tradition that developed in the early church (see CTICR Plenum, 1991, pages 39,40).

congregation, and one by one they will be able to take their place alongside the other gifted members of the church, both men and women, who are providing various forms of leadership in the worship services of the community.

### ***The command of the Lord***

Advocates of the ordination of males only place great weight on verse 37: ‘Anyone who claims to be a prophet, or to have spiritual powers, must acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command<sup>26</sup> of the Lord’. On the basis of this it is said that the authority of Jesus himself stands behind the ban on the ordination of women. But when the words are read in context, it is by no means apparent that they apply to the *mulier taceat*. From beginning to end chapter 14 is about the priority of prophecy over tongues when it comes to achieving the goals of orderly worship, the proclamation of the word and the edification of the community. Prophets and speakers in tongues are mentioned at the start of the chapter (vv 1–5), throughout the chapter, and then both before and after ‘the command of the Lord’ at the close of the chapter (vv 37–39). Therefore, in its literary context, it is far more likely that the command refers to the regulation of the conduct of the prophets and tongue-speakers that is given in verses 26–33.<sup>27</sup> Even if ‘the command of the Lord’ did apply to the *mulier taceat*, the Augsburg Confession (AC 28) demonstrates that many of Paul’s worship instructions are to be read in the light of their pastoral context, as we have seen. The instructions were intended ‘for the time being’ and ‘to avoid offence’.

## **1 Timothy 2:11–15**

### ***The situation in Ephesus***

In combination with Paul’s words at 1 Corinthians 14:34,35, the two verses from 1 Timothy in which Paul calls women to silence and submission (2:11,12) have proved an almost insurmountable barrier to women’s ordination throughout the history of the church. However, Paul’s words cannot be fully understood or accurately applied in today’s church without close attention to the issues that confronted the early Christian church in Ephesus, where Timothy served as a pastor.

In this church problems had arisen that hindered the purpose of God, that all people on earth be saved (1 Tim 2:3,4). Through the early ministry of Paul and Apollos the church was established in Ephesus, starting with the conversion of about twelve Jewish men (Acts 19:7). An intensive three-year ministry by Paul resulted in the conversion of many Jews, together with some gentiles who gave up their superstitious practices and the worship of the goddess Artemis (Acts 19:8–20).

<sup>26</sup> Some manuscripts omit the word ‘command’, so that the words read, ‘what I am writing to you is from the Lord’.

<sup>27</sup> The point of reference for ‘the command of the Lord’ could be extended to include verses 34 and 35, under the same rubric of Paul’s concern for good order and gospel proclamation. But a further moderating factor is that in some manuscripts the *mulier taceat* appears at the end of the chapter, after verse 40, and ‘the command of the Lord’ refers to what precedes, not what follows.

This rapid expansion was followed by the entry of 'savage wolves' into the church, 'not sparing the flock' (Acts 20:29). A division soon arose between a group influenced by 'teachers of the law' (1 Tim 1:7), legalists who even outdid Jewish law by abstaining from certain foods and forbidding marriage (4:3), and a libertarian group totally opposed to adherence to Jewish law. The promotion of false doctrine (1:3) by teachers on both sides had made the members angry and argumentative (2:8; 6:4). The libertarians held that the resurrection of the dead had 'already taken place' (2 Tim 2:18), and therefore the judgment was past and people could live as they pleased because salvation was assured. This resulted in wicked and godless behaviour (1:8–11; 2 Tim 3:1–5), the wearing of ostentatious clothing and jewellery by certain women (2:9), and the pleasure-seeking and gossip-mongering of some widows (5:6–15).

### ***The place of women at Ephesus***

No New Testament writings focus so heavily on issues associated with women as Paul's letters to Timothy. Women in particular had fallen under the spell of the libertarian faction and possibly formed part of its leadership team (eg 1 Tim 2:9–15; 4:7; 5:13–15; 2 Tim 3:6,7). They wanted to play a major role in the teaching ministry of the church.

On two chief counts this was unthinkable. First of all, the founding members of the church were converts from Judaism (R Strelan: 153–155). For them it was doubtful that women should even be instructed in the scriptures, let alone become teachers. Paul's saying that women could learn (2:11) would have represented a major and troublesome step forward for them. Generally speaking rabbinical instruction in the Torah was out of bounds for women.

Secondly, much of the initial appeal of the new faith lay in the gospel of grace that Paul taught, but the instruction of the women in the faith was not thorough enough to allow them to appreciate that the Christian way involved making a complete break with their wicked past. Many had lived formerly as hedonists, magicians and idol worshippers (Acts 19:18–27). They had gained the mistaken impression that being in Christ brought immunity from the wrath of God. Permission to teach would have been one way of flaunting their newly acquired status. Another would be the freedom to wear whatever high-fashion clothing they liked.

Such ostentation was totally out of step with mainstream society, whether Jewish or Greco-Roman. For these women, as newcomers to the faith and poorly instructed, it was important that they continue to learn but not become involved in teaching. They were neophytes, with a long way to go. For them Paul's words that they may learn quietly but not teach publicly would have represented a serious infringement of Christian liberty.

### ***Universal ban or local restriction?***

How can we tell whether a biblical command, such as 1 Timothy 2:11,12, remains in force in the church today? Clearly, if the text says explicitly that the command remains in force until Christ returns, all doubt is removed. This can be shown in the case of the



command to baptise (28:18–20), to celebrate the Lord's supper (Matt 26:29; 1 Cor 11:26), to preach the gospel (Rom 10:14–17), to pray and give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thess 5:17,18) and to meet regularly for worship (Heb 10:24,25).

Other commands have rarely been interpreted literally but have rightly been regarded as exaggerations for the sake of emphasis or as metaphors to highlight the Christian lifestyle. Some clear examples are Jesus' commands to gouge out an offending eye and cut off an offending right hand (Matt 5:29,30), or his commands that believers wash one another's feet (John 13:14) and let their light shine before others (Matt 5:16). The commands are no less important than those that don't draw on such graphic figures of speech. In fact, the graphic way in which they are told highlights their seriousness. But few would contend that they are to be carried out literally.

There is another category of biblical commands that the church has seen fit not to enforce with the passage of time, even though there is no biblical mandate countermanding the original command. Some that fall into this category are: Sabbath observance (Exod 20:8–11; Deut 5:12–15), the requirement that women wear head-covering when leading in worship (1 Cor 11:2–16), the ban on eating meat sacrificed to idols or meat that has been strangled or still has blood in it (Acts 15:28), and the prohibition concerning women having their hair braided or coming to church wearing gold, pearls or expensive clothes (1 Tim 2:9).

On these matters there is no dispute. But an obvious question arises: by what criteria do we determine whether the commands of our Lord and the apostle Paul apply throughout the church until the return of Christ or are pastoral words intended for a highly specific local congregation? If the latter is true, the further question arises: what theological, pastoral or liturgical concern lies behind the command and how is that concern to be upheld by an appropriate re-application of the command within a different setting at a different time and in a different place? Different answers are given to that question, but those who favour the ordination of women normally work with the following criteria. The command is universally applicable if the following matters can be clearly established.

1. The command is said to be in force till the return of Christ.
2. The command contains no verbal clues that the command is limited to the time and place of writing.
3. The command serves to underpin and enhance the proclamation of the gospel and the creating and sustaining of faith; it does not prove counterproductive to the gospel taking root in hearts and lives.

If it is clear that the command has been issued in order to avoid offending against long-held religious laws and traditions or deeply ingrained cultural practices and customs, however, serious questions regarding appropriate application have to be answered. When such sensitivities lapse, especially if a new set of sensitivities arises, a fresh examination of the original command is urgently required. Nobody knew this better than the Lutheran confessors, who said that certain things were forbidden in the early church 'for a time and to avoid offence' (AC 28,65; Tappert: 92).

What follows is the evidence that 1 Timothy 2:8–15 has special application to the situation Paul confronted in Ephesus and need not be applied literally to the church in every place until the end of time.<sup>28</sup>

1. Given women's poor biblical instruction, whether they were gentiles or brought up within Judaism, it is little wonder that they were the main members of the congregation to fall under the spell of the false teachers, the libertarian charlatans who entered their midst. When this is noted, it makes sense of the puzzling verses 13 and 14, in which Paul gives his main reason for denying the women at Ephesus permission to speak: 'For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor'.

This is certainly not the last word to be spoken about the story of the creation of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2 and the fall into sin in Genesis 3. Paul knew perfectly well that Adam was deceived just as much as Eve (see especially Rom 5:17; 1 Cor 15:21,22), and that the prior creation of Adam in no way made him Eve's superior (Gal 3:26–28; 2 Cor 5:17). But Paul is drawing the reader's attention to one specific aspect of the stories in Genesis 2 and 3. Just like the men of Ephesus who had received thorough instruction in the faith, so Adam was the only one who was present in the garden of Eden when God issued the command not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge (Gen 2:17). Eve had not yet been formed. She heard neither the prohibition, 'you shall not eat', nor the threat, 'for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die' (Gen 2:17). Likewise, just as the inadequately instructed women of Ephesus formed the group that was most susceptible to the wiles of the false teachers, so also the poorly informed Eve was the one who succumbed to the serpent's devious proposal in Eden. It is important that we are clear on this matter. Paul's idiosyncratic treatment of the Genesis texts can be fully appreciated only in light of what has been happening in the church at Ephesus. That Eve is created some considerable time after Adam means that she is less well informed than he is and hence more likely to succumb to the serpent's temptation.<sup>29</sup> Likewise, only one point is being made about the women of Ephesus. Their inadequate education makes them far easier prey than the well-instructed men in the face of the false teachers who have insinuated themselves into their midst.

What does this mean for our discussion? It means, first and foremost, that in speaking of Adam and Eve in the second chapter of Timothy, Paul is speaking about the stories of their creation and fall and not about women in general. If he was

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<sup>28</sup> This does not mean that the text is irrelevant today, only that its true relevance, Paul's underlying concern, needs to be more carefully sought and found, and the necessary steps need to be taken to ensure that his concern is attended to appropriately in a new situation.

<sup>29</sup> It is possible that the women were emboldened to take a public teaching role also as a result of inroads being made by devotees of the cult of the goddess Artemis of Ephesus (Acts 19:23–41). The cult taught that Artemis was created before her male consort, giving women the edge over men. By highlighting the prior creation of Adam, Paul may also be tilting at the cult's teachings in this regard (see Rick Strelan, 1996).

speaking of all women, and not merely of Eve, he would be saying something totally false and libellous, that is, that by their very nature women are more susceptible to temptation than men.<sup>30</sup> And since Paul is not speaking of all women, but only of Eve and her susceptibility to temptation in the garden of Eden, the text needs to be applied accurately today in that light. The most accurate application is that those who are poorly instructed, or those who have come under the influence of false teachers, have no right to become teachers and preachers in the church. The reference to women is time bound and coincidental, not central. It just so happened in the church of that time that it was the women in particular who fell into that category.

2. On every occasion that the verb 'to permit' is used in the New Testament, elsewhere without a preceding 'not', it refers to a highly specific situation, limited to the time and place where the order is given (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). It is not used in any of these texts for commands of our Lord or his apostle that are meant to be binding on the church for all times. Therefore it is highly unlikely that the situation is different when the word is used at 1 Timothy 2:12 in connection with women speaking in church.
3. Throughout our text Paul uses terminology drawn from contemporary 'rules for the household' (*Haustafeln*, see Eph 5:21 – 6:9; Col 3:18 – 4:1; 1 Pet 3:1–7), which likewise spoke of modesty, decency, piety, respect, and an external deportment that reflected moderation in all things. Behaviour that deviated from these ideals undermined the mission of the church. Paul is therefore at pains to advocate a Christian lifestyle that conforms as closely as possible to codes of behaviour current in the society of his day (Phil 4:8). A church that behaves in ways at odds with best current practices will not be heard. Those practices change with time. Today, women's leadership doesn't cause the offence that it once did. On the contrary, offence is caused when women are prohibited from holding positions in society because of their gender, when they are perfectly capable of doing so and have been trained to do so.

Paul's concern in the text under review is thoroughly evangelistic. He is intent on ensuring that best community standards are maintained, that the offence of having women serving in the public role of congregational teacher be avoided, and that people provide leadership in worship only after they have been thoroughly instructed in the scriptures and the teachings of our Lord. Two concepts surround and control our text: quietness (vv 2,11,12) and salvation (vv 3,4,[5,6],15). In a quiet setting, both within society and the church, God's saving mission is most effectively accomplished. The word 'quiet', used twice in the text itself (vv 11,12), is not the Greek word for absolute silence but the word for respectful quiet or tranquility. It speaks of a mood of gentleness and an attitude of humble receptivity (Acts 22:2; 2

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<sup>30</sup> Sadly, the slur that women are more easily led astray than men has been employed from time immemorial, together with its twin, that women are more devious and hence more likely to try to lead people astray.

Thess 3:12; see also 1 Tim 2:2; 1 Pet 3:4). In an environment that frowned on female rowdiness and female leadership it was essential that Christian women hold their tongues and not disrupt the 'quiet and peaceable life' (v 2) in which the gospel has free course.

***What does Paul mean by adding that women are not 'to have authority over a man'?***

It has become popular to argue that it is not teaching by women itself that Paul rules out at 1 Timothy 2:12 but teaching in a domineering way or in a way that violates the truth.<sup>31</sup> It is said that outside the New Testament the verb that is translated 'to have authority' (*authentain*) usually refers to aggressive, assertive and even violent behaviour towards others. Koestenberger has issued a strong plea for retaining the traditional translation, 'to teach and to have authority over a man'. His research (1993) shows that the word 'nor' (*oude*), which connects 'teach' and 'have authority', always connects two verbs that are positive or two verbs that are negative, not a positive verb and a negative verb. Since 'teach' is always positive in the letters to Timothy, 'to have authority' must be positive also, he says. It cannot mean 'to domineer'. But what it does mean cannot be determined unequivocally, either from the New Testament, because this is the only occurrence of the word, nor from the extra-biblical literature of that time. The word's uncertain meaning and its sole appearance in the New Testament would caution the reader against drawing hard and fast conclusions about the precise meaning of the expression 'to teach and have authority over a man'. And even if Paul is ruling out authoritative teaching for women, it has been shown that the mandate applies in a highly specific and problematical setting, and not more widely.

***What does Paul mean by women's submission?***

As for Paul's call for female submission in our text (v 11), it is vital to note that he does not speak of women being subordinate to men. That would contradict what Paul says about the mutual submission of men and women at Ephesians 5:21. The submission, or obedience, of women has more to do with them knowing their proper place in church and society, and taking it. It has to do with conformity to the generally accepted standards associated with a person's station in life. The first converts were mainly Jews, so Paul was eager to avoid offending people raised in the Jewish faith. In Judaism only men were encouraged to learn the Torah; they alone were allowed to teach it. Women took their place in society alongside slaves and children, not as the equals of men. When they converted to Christianity, women were obliged to maintain a respectful silence, let men take the lead, decline to contradict or argue with the male leaders of the congregation, appreciate that the domestic arena was the proper place for women, and adorn themselves in good works that would attract more converts to the Christian faith and do the church a power of good. That is what Paul means by subordination. It does not have to do with conforming to the structure of existence supposedly embedded in creation.

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<sup>31</sup> See for example Barrett, Fairbairn, Guthrie, Dibelius and Conzelmann, Kelly, Simpson, Payne, and CTICR Plenum, 'Final report', 1991, page 43.

## Summary and conclusion

It is inconsistent of the church to enforce the prohibition on women teaching in worship and then ignore other prescriptions and restrictions that are of equal weight in the Timothy text, such as the ban on braided hair, gold, pearls and expensive clothes (v 9). Rather than enforcing these dress prescriptions item by item, the church will try to discover Paul's underlying concern. Conscious of the harm caused when class distinctions were emphasised, maybe Paul was eager that poorer members of the community not feel excluded by the wealthy members in their designer clothing and expensive jewellery. Or maybe the items he lists were those worn by devotees of the mystery religions. Misunderstanding on that score was to be scrupulously avoided. The evangelistic and pastoral concern is what endures; the practical application of that concern is adapted to ever-changing circumstances.

In 1 Timothy 2:11–15 Paul forbids the women of Ephesus from teaching in the church. Instead they are to sit quietly and respectfully at the feet of the teachers and preachers and learn the scriptures. The requirements of Judaism had formed the mind of those embarking on this new faith venture, so that for women to adopt a teaching role would be to cause undue offence. But far more than Jewish law and local tradition stood in the way of women's teaching and preaching. As Eve was led astray because she had not been instructed by God and thereby inoculated against the serpent's scurrilous proposal, so the Ephesian women's inadequate induction into the faith made them easy targets for a highly influential group of false teachers in the church. If the women were permitted to teach, the heretical notions of the libertarian teachers would spread like wildfire.

Paul is not opposed to women teaching and preaching in church. He is opposed to false teaching by anyone at all, and at Ephesus that was far more likely to come from the women, not the men. But the time would come when the women would be sufficiently well instructed for them to assume a teaching role in the community. The force of old restrictions borne of the rigid application of Jewish law would wane with the passing of time. And women would eventually have the time and opportunity to do the very thing that Paul advocates, to learn (2:11) and hence to grow in biblical knowledge, the teachings of our Lord and insight into the human condition, so that they too would become properly equipped for the vital role of public proclamation of the gospel. For the time being the women were not sufficiently versed in the scriptures to detect and avoid the heresy they were hearing from the ravaging wolves of Ephesus. Their teaching, in turn, would only have perpetuated the damage that was being done. Under such circumstances, any premature permission would have done nothing to hasten the day when the women would be able to assume an equal share of responsibility for teaching the saving truths of God within the church.

# Galatians 3:26–29 and the ordination of women

During the course of the debate in the Swedish Lutheran Church on whether to ordain women Krister Stendahl published a booklet called *The Bible and the role of women* (1966). In it he used Galatians 3:28 to argue that the dichotomy between men and women had been overcome by Christ in the church. Because this applies both in relation to God and in relation to each other, women are eligible for the ordained ministry. Since then the interpretation of Galatians 3:26–29 has been part of the Lutheran debate on the ordination of women to the ministry.

After analysing the argument as it is developed in Galatians 3:26–29, this paper summarises how it is understood and used by those who promote the ordination of women and by those who argue for the ordination of men only.

## **The context and structure of Galatians 3:26–29**

This passage is part of Paul's argument against a group of Jewish Christian agitators. They had confused the churches in Galatia by their claims that Paul had not preached the full gospel to the converts from paganism. Their focus was on the need for performance of 'works of the law', with its demand for circumcision in order to receive the blessing that God had promised to Abraham (Gal 1:6,7; 5:2–12; 6:12–16). They seem to have taught that for the Gentiles to share in the inheritance of Abraham, faith in Christ had to be supplemented by circumcision and adherence to the law.

The argument that leads up to this passage runs as follows. After his initial greetings, Paul insists that there is no other gospel than the one that he preached to the Galatians (Gal 1:6–10). He then gives a historical prologue that defends his authority and the authority of the gospel that he proclaimed. He recalls his own calling as an apostle (Gal 1:11–24) and recounts the acceptance of his message and ministry by the apostles in Jerusalem (Gal 2:1–10). Finally, he shows that he used his authority to correct Peter when he withdrew from fellowship with the Gentiles in Antioch (Gal 2:11–14).

At Galatians 2:15–21 Paul begins the main part of his argument with the basic proposition that justification is received by faith in Christ rather than by the observance of the law. Then comes his first argument, in 3:1–18, about the primacy of faith. Here he appeals to three facts: the experience of the Galatians with their reception of the Spirit and the Spirit's ongoing activity among them by the hearing of faith (3:1–5); the example of Abraham as the man of faith and the recipient of the promise of blessing, with the Spirit (3:6–14); and the priority of the covenant of promise to the covenant of the law (3:15–18).

In his second argument (3:19 – 4:7), Paul uses two rhetorical questions (3:19,21) to raise the issue of the purpose of the law and the issue of the apparent contradiction of the promises of God. Paul makes three points about the law. First, it was added to deal with transgressions until the coming of Christ, the promised seed, and the reception of the promised inheritance through faith in him (3:19–22). Second, it prepared the people for their inclusion in Christ as sons' of God (3:23–29). Third, Christ has redeemed those who were under the law so that they might receive adoption as sons and heirs of God (4:1–7).

## Translation

26. For all of you are sons of God<sup>2</sup> through the<sup>3</sup> faith (that is) in Christ Jesus;

27. For as many (of you) as were baptised into Christ<sup>4</sup> have put on Christ,<sup>5</sup>

28. There is<sup>6</sup> neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; there is neither male and<sup>7</sup> female,<sup>8</sup>

For all of you are one<sup>9</sup> in Christ Jesus.

29. And, if you are Christ's, then you are seed of Abraham,<sup>10</sup> heirs<sup>11</sup> in accordance with the promise.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The term 'sons of God' is used, rather than the more inclusive term 'children of God', because Paul argues that through baptism we share in Jesus' status as the only Son of God and heir of God the Father. 'Sons of God' keeps clearer this connection to 'the Son of God'. It also retains the importance of sonship for inheritance in Paul's argument.

<sup>2</sup> See Rom 8:14,19; Gal 4:6,7; Matt 5:9,45; Luke 6:35; Heb 2:10; 12:7; Rev 21:7.

<sup>3</sup> It is not entirely certain why Paul uses the article here. It may be that, as in 3:23 and 25, he refers to the content of the gospel, what is believed, or, as in 3:14, to Christ as the object of faith, the one in whom they believe. This may be used in contrast to the teaching of his opponents on faith in God rather than faith in Christ.

<sup>4</sup> See also Romans 6:3 and 1 Corinthians 12:13. The passive is best understood as a divine passive to refer to God the Father as the primary agent in baptism.

<sup>5</sup> See Romans 13:14, Ephesians 4:24, Colossians 3:10.

<sup>6</sup> The word *eni* is a shortened form of *enesti*, which means 'it is', or 'it exists', or 'it can be', or 'it is possible'. This shortened form is also used to make a strong negation in 1 Corinthians 6:5, Colossians 3:11 and James 1:17.

<sup>7</sup> The use of *kai* rather than *oude* breaks the pattern of the two preceding antitheses. Its occurrence in Colossians 3:11 shows that it does not change the sense. Most scholars say that Paul here quotes Genesis 1:27 from the Septuagint. It may also be an allusion to Leviticus 12:7, or a stylistic variation, or a stock formula, or a subtle attack on his opponents' teaching that the religious status of women in the church and their participation in the blessing of Abraham depended on their attachment, like Sarah in Genesis 17:15–21, to a circumcised male person.

<sup>8</sup> Even though Paul uses similar antithetical pairs of terms for groups of people in 1 Corinthians 12:13 and Colossians 3: 11, the reference to the two sexes is found only here.

<sup>9</sup> The Greek uses the masculine singular form to denote that the unity of all the diverse people mentioned in the previous sentence is given and received only in the person of Christ. Here Paul most likely refers back to 3:16, where he had argued that the 'seed' of Abraham was not all his descendants but only 'one' person, the Messiah.

<sup>10</sup> See Galatians 3:16,19; compare Acts 3:25; Romans 4:16,18; 9:8. Paul uses no article here because he wants to distinguish those who are seed/sons/heirs of God in Christ from Christ himself as 'the Seed', the one who is the true Son and heir of God the Father.

<sup>11</sup> See Galatians 3:18; 4:1,7,30; 5:21.

## Analysis

This passage is a carefully crafted rhetorical unit. It is embedded in its immediate context by the particle 'for' (*gar*) in 3:26. This signals that the unit explains why Christians are 'no longer under the law' (3:25) and how the promised blessing, the Holy Spirit, the inheritance from Abraham, is given to those who have faith in Jesus the Messiah (3:14,18,22). The passage consists of three explicative sentences, each introduced by 'for' (*gar*; 3:26,27,28), that culminate in a concluding conditional sentence that is linked to them by the connective 'and' (*de*) (3:29). The first and third explicative clauses begin with the same word, 'all' (*pantes*), which highlights the connection between sonship and unity in Christ. This chain of explicative clauses does not give three different reasons for release from the custody of the law; rather, they complement and augment each other (see Longenecker: 154). Between the second and third explicative clauses Paul has inserted an appositional clause made up of three antitheses that affirm the result of investiture with Christ in baptism (3:28).

In 3:26 Paul explains why the Galatian Christians are no longer under the tutelage of the law. There is a shift from the third person plural of the previous verses to the second person plural to emphasise that he is addressing both Jewish and Gentile Christians in Galatia. This is reinforced by the emphatic use of 'all' to assert that all those who have faith in Jesus as the Messiah are 'sons of God'. All share in his status and inheritance as the only Son of God the Father.

This is a remarkable claim if it is considered against the backdrop of the Old Testament. In ancient Israel the king, like the coming Messiah, was commonly regarded as God's royal son, his regent and heir (2 Sam 7:14; 1 Chr 17:13; 22:10; 28:16; Ps 2:7; Isa 9:6; cf Ps 89:26). While Israel too was envisaged collectively as God's first-born son (Exod 4:22; Hos 11:1; Jer 31:9), the Israelites were only once called 'sons of the Lord' (Deut 14:1). Their theological status was normally determined by their membership in God's people, his human clan. Hosea prophesies that one day they would be called 'sons of the living God' (1:8–11). That would be their new status when they were reunified under a single head. According to Paul, this promise of sonship was fulfilled by the baptismal union of Jews and Gentiles with Christ regardless of their gender or economic status (3:26; compare Rom 8:13–16; 9:4; 2 Cor 6:18).

Paul holds that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God (Gal 1:15; 2:20; 4:4,6). By itself that claim was not at all controversial for any Jewish Christian. But to that he adds the controversial assertion that all those who have faith in Jesus the Messiah are also 'sons of God'. This includes the Gentiles. By adoption both Jews and Gentiles share in Christ's own 'sonship' (4:5). Since they have his royal filial status, they receive his Spirit as their common inheritance from God the Father, so that they too, like Jesus, may address God as Father (4:6,7). Even though, by adoption, they are the descendants of Abraham (3:29), they are not just the sons of Abraham (3:7) but sons of God as well (3:26). They

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<sup>12</sup> See Galatians 3:14,16,17,18,19,21,22; 4:23,28. Paul uses this term quite specifically in this chapter to refer to the promise that God made to Abraham and his seed in Genesis 22:18 (3:16,17,19,29) as well as what was promised, the Spirit (3:14,22).



do not receive their God-given status as heirs by law through Abraham but by grace 'through' God (3:18; 4:7). Through faith they share in the unique relationship of the Son with God the Father.

After declaring that all believers are 'sons of God', Paul gives the reason for this assertion in 3:27. They are all God's sons by virtue of their baptism. When they were baptised into Christ they assumed his status before God the Father. Here Paul's use of imagery is startling. All those who have been baptised have dressed up as Jesus the Messiah. They have not just dressed up in the same royal regalia; they have dressed up in him and taken on his royal status. The imagery of taking off one set of clothes and dressing up in another is most likely derived from the practice of baptism (see Moule: 52,53). Elsewhere Paul uses this imagery for removal of the old self and its lifestyle by those who have been baptised (Rom 13:12; Eph 4:22,25; Col 2:11; 3:8,9) and their reception of their new self and all God's gifts in Christ (Rom 13:12,14; 1 Cor 15:53,54; 2 Cor 5:3; Eph 4:24; 6:10,14; Col 3:10,12; 1 Thess 5:8). This does not just mean that they have taken on 'Christ's characteristics, virtues, and intentions, and so become like him' (*contra* Longenecker: 156); they have taken on Christ himself and a new self in him (see Rom 13:12; Eph 4:22; Col 3:8). They belong to Christ and derive their being from him. Everything that belongs to Christ, such as his status as God's Son, his inheritance, his Spirit, his access to the Father, belongs to them. He is their be-all and end-all before God (see Col 3:11).

In 3:28 Paul draws out the implications of this foundational fact in a series of startling antitheses. Since they are clothed in Christ, dressed up in him, he, as it were, covers up their former clothing, the dress that had formerly determined their status before God.<sup>13</sup> Their theological status does not depend on whether they are Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, males or females. These attributes do not decide their standing before God the Father. Yet Paul does not base these claims on their common humanity as descendants of Adam but on their union with Jesus the Messiah. They are all 'one' in him. They have their common sonship and their unity in him. All those who are clothed with Christ are one in him.

Paul uses these negations in order to teach the unity that is given by faith in Christ. He argues that the promise of blessing that God gave to the 'seed' of Abraham in Genesis 22:18 applies to Jesus Christ, the one and only 'Seed' (3:16). By virtue of their union with Christ in baptism, those who have faith in Jesus also share in that promise because they are 'one' in him, the one person who is 'the Seed'. That one person is the giver of blessing and unity for all people, no matter what their human status might otherwise be. He unites them in all their diversity.

Many have been surprised at the presence of three antitheses here, as it seems that Paul only needs to mention the first (Jew/Greek) to make his point, 'while the others appear redundant for the argument Paul is making' (Betz: 162).

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<sup>13</sup> The presupposition for this argument is the common use of clothing in the ancient world to show a person's identity and status and to indicate a change of status with all its privileges and responsibilities.

There are several possible explanations for the insertion of the three antitheses. First, it is possible that Paul is quoting from a baptismal liturgy of the early church or from his own stock baptismal teaching (so Betz: 197–200). We find variant versions of this in 1 Corinthians 12:13 and Colossians 3:11. The fact that it is familiar material would explain why he quotes more than is necessary for his argument about the terms for the participation of the Gentiles in the inheritance of Abraham. This theory, however, does not explain the differences in formulation between the three versions of that material.

Second, it could be that Paul here contradicts the regular Jewish morning prayer, in which each adult male thanks God that he is not a Gentile, a slave or a woman (so Longenecker: 157). One problem with this explanation is that, according to the Jewish tradition, this prayer was added to the daily prayers at about 150 AD by Judah ben Ilai. It therefore was not demonstrably in common use in Paul's day, although Judah may have been sanctioning an earlier practice. Similar expressions of gratitude appear in Greek writings as well; for example, 'that I was born a human being and not a beast, next, a man and not a woman, thirdly, a Greek and not a barbarian'.<sup>14</sup> These Greek references predate Paul by several centuries. According to this view, Paul here emphasises that in Christ there is no such superiority.

Third, these antitheses could refer to the law for circumcision. Martin has set out the argument that Paul here refers to the practice of circumcision in his day and its divine legislation in Genesis 17:9–14,23–27 (so Martin 2003: 111–125). Three groups were eligible for circumcision and the privileges that ensued from it: the physical offspring of Abraham rather than the Gentile offspring of Adam; the slaves who belonged to his household rather than free males who were employed to work in it; male members of Abraham's family rather than his female descendants. Thus the law for circumcision provides a rationale for the selection of these three antitheses in which the second part of each antithesis lists those who were excluded from the rite of circumcision. Martin concludes:

In contrast to the distinctions that determine the extent of the obligations of circumcision, Gal 3:28 states that none of these distinctions is relevant for determining candidates for Christian baptism. The covenant of circumcision distinguishes between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female...Christian baptism ignores the distinctions required by the covenant of circumcision and provides a basis for unity in the Christian community. (2003: 121)

A difficulty with this interpretation is that these antitheses may reflect the practice of circumcision but they do not clearly echo the terms of the legislation in Genesis 17:9–14,23–27.

In 3:29 Paul draws his conclusion from his three explanations about why the Christians in Galatia were no longer under the supervision of God's law and imprisoned by it. He

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<sup>14</sup> This thanksgiving is attributed to Thales and Socrates in Diogenes Laertius' *Vitae Philosophorum* 1.33, and to Plato in Plutarch's *Marius* 46.1 and Lactantius' *Divine Institutes* 3.19.17. See Longenecker, page 157.

recalls his earlier statement in 3:18 that the reception of the promised inheritance did not depend on the law but was given by grace through God's promise to Abraham. Since all believers in Christ are sons of God who have been clothed with Christ and so belong to him, they too are Abraham's seed. Yet they are his seed only in a secondary derived sense, for their status as his 'descendants', his 'offspring', depends on their union with Christ, who is the one and only 'Seed' (3:16,19). Both the promise of blessing for all nations and the blessing itself belong to him. That blessing is the gift of the Spirit (3:14), the Spirit of his Son (4:6). The Spirit is his inheritance. The Spirit belongs to Jesus as the Christ. Yet he does not keep the Spirit to himself as God's Son, but he shares it with all the 'sons of God' as their common inheritance from God the Father. They are 'heirs through God' (Gal 4:7). God has sent his Son to redeem all humanity from the curse of the law, so that they might receive the blessing of the Spirit as heirs of God and coheirs with Christ (3:13,14; 4:4–7; see Rom 8:17). All who are in Christ, no matter whether they are Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, males or females, are heirs with Christ of God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 22:18. They all share in his sonship and inheritance.

### **The interpretation of Galatians 3:26–29 by those who argue for the ordination of women**

1. Galatians 3:26–29 speaks of the transformation brought about by redemption in Christ: that by baptism into him all people receive not only incorporation into the people of God but also the divine status of sons and heirs of God the Father, because they receive the very sonship of Christ himself. This establishes not only unity but also equality on the basis that all have exactly the same status before the Father, that of the Son of God himself.
2. Precisely because these verses do not speak directly to order within the church or to the status of women, they are most valuable for our current discussion. Paul is writing here of a new and eternal reality not conditioned by culture or historical situation. Although the text does not say that all distinctions have ceased to exist in every sphere, it is the new reality of being in Christ which limits and redefines the significance of those other distinctions, not the other way round.<sup>15</sup>
3. That Paul embraced the implications of this redefinition in his own ministry can be illustrated by the following.
  - a. Paul expected Jews and Gentiles to embrace and treat the other as equal in honour and standing (see Rom 15:7–9; Eph 2:11–22). In Galatians 2:11–14 Paul says that by drawing away from the Gentiles, Peter was 'not acting consistently with the truth of the gospel'. He does not complain that by living like a Gentile Peter was not maintaining his station as a Jew.
  - b. In Philemon it is clear that the new relationship of brother in the Lord is to have a significant practical effect on the relationship of master and slave. The injunction, 'Be

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<sup>15</sup> Stendahl writes: 'We would hardly expect to hear Paul say, "These statements apply to the question of individual salvation, but in all other respects things are as they used to be"' (32).

subject to one another out of reverence for Christ', applies to all members of the community, including wives and husbands, slaves and masters (Eph 5:21 – 6:9). 1 Corinthians 7:21–24 establishes both the freedom of the slave and the slavery of the free.

- c. Marital relations also are to be characterised by the mutual submission that partners share in the gospel (Eph 5:21–33). When Paul says that in sexual relations each partner's body is ruled by the other (1 Cor 7:4), it is natural to read Paul's words against the background of Genesis 3:16b: 'Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you'. Paul comments in 1 Corinthians 11:11,12 that the Christian husband and wife are not independent of each other but remain interdependent.
4. The fundamental relationship of any Christian is their relationship with God, and their status as children of God through the sonship and heirship of Jesus now gives shape and meaning to all other relationships. This challenges not only the traditional hierarchies of race and social standing which operate in our world (Gal 3:28) but even the primal relationship of male and female (Gen 1:27, Gal 3:28), which is now secondary to their union with Christ in baptism and is transformed by it. This opens the possibility of a changed role for women. If our primary status before God rests in the given of unity in Christ, there can be no argument that limits the possibility of anyone's full participation in the ministry of the church on the basis of inferior status. While equality is never to be grasped or demanded within the church, it is given as part of the inheritance shared by all God's children. They have 'the right to become children of God' (John 1:12).
5. Paul's new order in Christ reflects a restoration of God's original intention in creation, overthrown by the fall into sin. If the husband's rule is a consequence of sin (Gen 3:16), then sin's defeat reinstates the partnership in which male and female both 'rule' (Gen 1:26). In faith the church reflects and models to the world the work of restoration promised for all creation (Isa 65:17). The prophetic vision of Joel 2:28,29 specifically includes an equal partnership of men and women, slaves and free people, young and old, all participating in the Spirit's ministry of proclamation. This is fulfilled for women in Acts 2:14–21 (see 1 Cor 11:5).
6. At times Paul seems to take a position at variance with the interpretation presented here.<sup>16</sup> When we examine these instances more closely, however, the seeming contradictions can be resolved by noting that they represent temporary concessions explained by Paul's desire not to cause offence and thereby damage the mission of the church.<sup>17</sup>
7. It is a Lutheran principle that the gospel does not overthrow the social order (AC 16:5). Laws cannot be made on the basis of the gospel, neither in society nor in the church. However, the freedom of the gospel is active in the lives of those who live in society

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<sup>16</sup> For example, 1 Corinthians 11:3–15; 14:33b–38; 1 Timothy 2:11–15.

<sup>17</sup> See the accompanying paper '1 Corinthians 14:33b–38 and 1 Timothy 2:11–14 permit the ordination of women', which deals with these texts.

and who worship and work as members of the body of Christ. The abolition of distinctions between Jews and Gentiles was effected early in the history of the church, but not without a struggle, as witnessed by Paul's letter to the Galatians. It took many more centuries of growth before Christians were moved to take a leading role in the abolishment of slavery in Western society. Progress towards the establishment of equal opportunities for women within our society has been an even more complicated journey, but — at its best — represents an achievement which can also be seen as a reflection of the renewed and restored creation implicit in, and derived from, Paul's teaching here in Galatians 3:28 (cf 2 Corinthians 5:17). The ordination of women into the church's ministry not only reflects their changed status within society but continues to unfold and implement the full implications of the gospel within the church.

### **The interpretation of Galatians 3:26–29 by those who argue for the ordination of men only**

1. Galatians 3:26–29 does not deal, either implicitly or explicitly, with the ministry of word and sacrament. In it Paul teaches that, despite their diversity, all baptised people are united with Christ and so share in his sonship. By grace they have the same theological status before God the Father and have all received the Holy Spirit as their promised inheritance. While Paul's choice of the three antithetical pairs in Galatians 3:28 is determined by the contrast between circumcision and baptism, their similarity to the lists of pairs in 1 Corinthians 12:13 and Colossians 3:11 shows that they are meant to teach the unity of all people in Christ rather than the abolition of religious, economic and sexual differences.
2. When Paul maintains that all who are baptised are one in Christ Jesus, he does not here teach their equality with each other but their unity in Christ that transcends all diversity.<sup>18</sup> An examination of the idiom 'you/they/we are one' bears this out (Matt 19:6; Mark 10:8; John 17:11,21,22; Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 3:8; 10:17; cf John 10:30).<sup>19</sup> In each case this idiom describes the unity that is established between different persons, with all their various gifts and tasks (eg Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 3:5; 10:17). That God-given unity does not abolish their diversity but employs it for the common good. Thus Paul does not use this idiom in Galatians 3:28 as an argument to assert that all people are created — or recreated — equal but to teach the unity of diverse persons in the body of Christ.
3. The differences that Paul mentions in Galatians 3:28 are not all of the same kind. The religious difference derives from God's covenant with Israel. The economic difference results from the fall. But the sexual difference is given by God in creation. Christ supersedes the first two, for all who are baptised are heirs of Abraham and free sons of God. But the sexual difference from creation remains and is still significant in the order of redemption.

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<sup>18</sup> See below at paragraph 4a.

<sup>19</sup> See Hove, in Grudem, ed (2002: 105–143).

4. In Galatians 3:26–28 Paul claims that both sexes equally share in Christ's sonship and the gift of the Holy Spirit. They are not just part of God's extended family as children of God but are actually included in Christ's unique relationship with God the Father.
  - a. Since by baptism both women and men are sons of God, they are also coheirs with Christ, the only Son and heir of God the Father. Their theological status is therefore granted to them by virtue of their union with Christ. Yet even though they are equal in status as sons and heirs before God the Father, they do not all do the same work or have the same gifts. All participate in the work of the church, but they do not do so in the same way.
  - b. The unity of women and men in Christ does not abolish the order of the family. Instead, it confirms their diverse tasks and gifts in both domains (1 Cor 14:33b–38; Col 3:11–19; 1 Tim 2:2 – 3:13; Titus 2:1–8; cf Rom 12:3–8; 1 Cor 12:12–26). Like Christ, Christian husbands are to be heads of their wives, just as their wives are to subordinate themselves to their husbands, like the church to Christ, its head (Eph 5:21–33).
  - c. Yet headship and subordination do not imply superiority or inferiority, domination or subservience, but the exercise of self-sacrificial love in the Christian family and the church. The unity of men and women in Christ, and their equality before God the Father, presents them with new possibilities for humble service of others in community, each according to their station and vocation. That kind of love, that kind of service, is what is so new for those who are a new creation in Christ (Col 3:9 – 4:1).
5. The ready use of equality as a theological term does not sit well with the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son who did not grasp at equality with his Father, but who, in obedience to his will, sacrificed himself for all those who wanted to be equal in status and power and glory with God (Phil 2:6). Thus the New Testament rarely speaks about equality.<sup>20</sup> This vague legal term was popularised as a political slogan by the French and American revolutions. Its careless use by the church translates the proclamation of the gospel into legal discourse with its concern for personal rights and privileges, social rank and status, political position and power.
6. Theological implications may be drawn from a passage in Scripture to confirm, or to elaborate, a point of teaching. But such deductions may not be used by themselves, without further scriptural foundation, to establish doctrine and to impose it on the church. Moreover, these conclusions must not contradict what is explicitly taught on that matter elsewhere. The use of Galatians 3:28 as the scriptural foundation for the ordination of women does just that. It contradicts Paul's prohibitions in 1 Corinthians 14:33b–38 and 1 Timothy 2:11–15, as well the teaching in Ephesians 5:21–33, Colossians 3:18,19 and 1 Peter 3:1–7 on the relationship between men and women in marriage. It is true that elsewhere Paul quite rightly draws out social implications from the gospel. But the supposed implications of his teaching in Galatians 3:28 should not be used, together with arguments about

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<sup>20</sup> Acts 11:7; 2 Corinthians 8:13,14; Philippians 2:16; Colossians 4:1; 2 Peter 1:1.

social change and women's rights, to discount what he says much more clearly elsewhere about the ordination of women. Such a procedure does not provide a sound scriptural basis for the abolition of an established ecumenical rule that comes from Christ's command and the teaching of the apostles.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper we have set out our agreement on the argument of St Paul in Galatians 3:26–29. We agree that baptism clothes us with Christ, gives us his status as sons and heirs of God the Father, fills us with the Holy Spirit and, despite all our diversity, makes us one in Christ. We have also set out our areas of difference. Those who uphold the existing position of the LCA hold that the equality of men and women before God does not make them equally eligible for ordination. Those who argue for the ordination of women hold that the equality of men and women in baptism supports their case.

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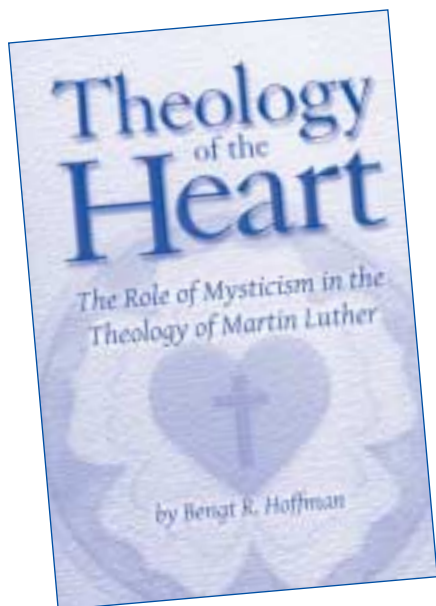
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