

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.¹ 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.

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).² 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

¹ 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.

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

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).³

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.⁴ 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 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 recognizes 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

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

⁴ 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.

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; Tit 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.⁵

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 (Matthew 20:20-28; 1 Tim 3:1-7; 2 Tim 2:24; Tit 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 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 Peter 5:1-4).

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

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

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

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).⁷

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),
- 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).

He also adds a warning that those who disregard it 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.

⁷ 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.

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; Tit 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*.⁸ 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 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.⁹

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' (*didaskein*) 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'.¹⁰ Women are not to exercise authority over men by teaching or preaching in the divine service.

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).

⁸ 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).

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

¹⁰ Köstenberger's exhaustive study (1995), which spans both biblical and extra-biblical sources, has demonstrated that verbs linked by *oude* (nor), as *didaskein* and *authenthein* 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, *authenthein* 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.

- 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.¹¹ 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.¹² 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.

1 Corinthians 11 outlines a sequence of authority and headship that undergirds the pattern of divine- human relationships within church and marriage: God → Christ → man → 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,¹³ 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.¹⁴

¹¹ See also the accompanying paper, '1 Corinthians 14:33b-38 and 1 Timothy 2:11-14 prohibit the ordination of women'.

¹² See Fitzmyer, and Grudem (2002: 145-202).

¹³ For a detailed summary of the scholarship on this subject, see Thiselton: 820-30.

¹⁴ See Schlier (TDNT 3: 679-81), and Schreiner, in Piper and Grudem (1990: 137-38).

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.

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 toward 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' 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 millenium 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).¹⁵

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;

¹⁵ The late second century apocryphal work, the *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.

Tappert: 217).

Various ecumenical and local Church Councils opposed the ordination of women throughout the centuries.¹⁶ Many church fathers in the early church also taught that women were not to be pastors.¹⁷ 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.

5. Counter arguments

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 headship 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 headship 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,

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ 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).

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.¹⁸ 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).¹⁹

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. 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 episêmoi en tois apostolois*) follows a common Greek

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ See also the accompanying paper, ‘1 Corinthians 14:33b-38 and 1 Timothy 2:11-14 prohibit the ordination of women’.

construction by using ‘well-known’ (*episêmos*) 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’ (*episêmos en brôtois*).²⁰ 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’.²¹

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.²² Origen’s comments on the matter help us to understand what Phoebe did as 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.²³

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.²⁴ 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

²⁰ Euripides, *Hippolytus* 103. See also Heath R. Curtis, ‘A female apostle? A note re-examining the work of Burer and Wallace concerning ἐπισήμος 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 Koinē Greek.

²¹ The dative *tois apostolois* designates a group distinct from the nominative *hoitines episêmoi*.

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

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

²⁴ 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.

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 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 to 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 the 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).