

Women's Ordination Dialogue

Women's ordination *to be or not to be*, within the Lutheran church of Australia, is a theological not a secular post modern issue, because it involves the church. For this reason there is a distinct difference in the rationale of this issue, to that of the contemporary, largely atheistic culture.

The beginning of Genesis needs to be revisited. Of course it is assumed that the Lutheran understanding of the Scriptures as the inerrant Word of Godⁱ is accepted by members of this church.

Satan in the form of a serpent created doubt in Eve's heart when he said to her "did God really say?" (Gen. 3:1) When God spoke to Eve concerning her disobedience, she replied, "the serpent deceived me and I ate." Satan continues to create doubt when the Word of God is not regarded as true, reliable, and trust worthy. There are many ways of creating doubt in our hearts about the validity of the scriptures...there always has been!

The church was created by Jesus Christ our Lord who said, I will build my church (Matt. 16:18). It is not modelled on the world's premises. It is distinct from the world though it is in the world. Christ is the head of the church (Eph. 5:23). We are "fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ himself as the chief cornerstone" (Eph. 2:19-20). Christ is the head of the body the church (Col. 1:18). We are members of his body (Eph.5:30).

The body, the church is also the bride of Christ, "as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you" (Is.62:5), the bride the wife of the Lamb" (Rev. 21:9).It is seen that Christ Jesus is the head of the church and the bridegroom of his loved bride the church. Ephesians says that marriage is modelled on Christ and his church. The husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:25). The wife is to regard her husband as her head of the marriage. Her husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, for which he died. As the church submits to Christ as her leader, so wives give leadership to their husbands. The husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her; in the same way the husband is to love his wife (Eph. 5:22-28).

In these models of marriage (both human and divine) there are roles. No person is demeaned or diminished. God created this order for harmonious relations to be performed in love. No person within their role usurps or is to be envious of the role of the other.

Christ Jesus our LORD is the second person of the indivisible Holy Trinity. Nowhere is it seen in the Scriptures that Christ is envious of the Father's position; nowhere is it seen in the Scriptures that the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Holy Trinity is envious of the Son Jesus Christ's position. Rather, Christ humbles himself and is obedient to his Father's will that will involve his suffering and death for sinful rebellious humanity. The Holy Spirit was sent by the

Father to believers at Christ's request (John 15:16). This then, is the model for the church where each in their role as male and female serve the LORD as he ordained it.

There were no priestesses in the Old Testament (except in the pagan world), but there were many Godly intelligent women. They were not *shrinking violets*! In the New Testament Christ (who held women in high regard against the contemporary contempt and low regard for women) did not appoint women apostles nor were women ordained, though there were many God fearing intelligent women organizers and business managers. The early church, continuing through church history until recent times did not appoint women to these positions. Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) a brilliant, cultured woman was not afraid to confront the ecclesiastical and secular authorities of her day. She "appealed to popes and bishops, kings and the emperor himself to stand up for truth and justice, or implored them merely to look at exactly what was happening and to realize what the outcome might be." ⁱⁱ But elevating herself to the ordained clergy was never part of her agenda. There were many other well educated, Godly women including Catherine of Sienna (1347-1380) and Julian of Norwich (c. 1342-1415) who were like minded.

If the Lutheran church conforms to the world's premises, *making it more relevant*, regarding Women's Ordination will it have God's blessing? When in church history from the time of Christ himself has the church been relevant to the contemporary age? The church will never be wholly acceptable to the world. The folk of Nazareth wished to throw Christ Jesus over the cliff when he visited his home town (Luke 4:14-29). Jesus predicted and warned his disciples that they would not have an easy time in the world (Matt. 10: 5-42, Matt.24:9-14).

Women's ordination has been accepted in the Lutheran churches of Scandinavia and Germany for many decades. What is the result? Are these thriving, faith filled churches where new folk are arriving, being transformed into a new life of renewal by the Holy Spirit through Christ Jesus their Saviour? Sadly, this is not the situation.

This present world is a scientific sophisticated, materialistic world of digital technology where it seems nothing is off limits to what can be achieved by either gender. Does the church therefore bow to the secular contemporary society where God is largely forgotten and assumed irrelevant? Are the Scriptures relevant to this church or not? This is the issue now facing our church, which if women are to be ordained into the public ministry will have far reaching consequences.

Luther said of the church "we should not eliminate or change anything unless there is a clear scriptural witness against it". ⁱⁱⁱ

May the LORD bless you as you prayerfully consider this issue.

ⁱ "We base our position on the Word of God as the eternal truth". Solid Declaration; Formula of Concord, T.G. Tappert; 506:13

“We know that God does not lie...all men –may err and deceive, but God’s Word cannot err.” Luther’s Large Catechism, The Book of Concord, T.G. Tappert; 444:57

ⁱⁱ Heinrich Schipperges 1997 *The World of Hildegard of Bingen Her Life Times and Visions*. Verlag Herder, Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany, Translated by John Cumming 1998; Burns and Oates Novalis 1998, page 16.

ⁱⁱⁱ Hans Schwarz *True Faith in God the True God, An Introduction to Luther’s Life and Thought Augsburg* Fortress 1996, page 119.

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