

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 50 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 whole-heartedly. 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.¹ 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.² 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 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

¹ It could be argued that eighty percent of the world's Lutherans belong to synods which include both men and women in ordained ministry.

² Minutes of the Thirteenth General Synod of the Lutheran Church of Australia, 23-27 July 2000, pages 25,26.

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 (Mk 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 (Mk 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’ (Mk 14:9).³

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 (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 (e.g. 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 whom 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 (vs 27). The townspeople, men and women, young and old alike, ‘come to faith’ on the basis of the woman’s testifying (*martyreô*, vs.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).

³ There is a delightful irony in the dismissive comment made by the disciples: ‘Why was the ointment wasted in this way?’ (vs 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 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.⁴ 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.⁵ In the first century, women were not accepted as witnesses in a court of law.⁶ 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.⁷

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

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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 us 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)

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

⁷ 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'.

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),⁸ 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, 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.⁹

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 male¹⁰ 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 no lesser or different role from men. The texts provide an important context for viewing the main texts from Paul.

⁸ 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).

⁹ Some scholars argue that the person *Iunian* (accusative of *Iunia*) must be derived from the name *Iunias*, 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).

¹⁰ 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 an historical succession of male apostles. Matthias serves as 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.¹¹

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 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

¹¹ This paper draws on the Tappert edition of *The Book of Concord*.

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.¹² The text proper tells us that while others were leading in worship, the women were asking disruptive questions, thereby acting insubordinately,¹³ bringing shame¹⁴ upon their husbands and the church, and bringing the gospel into disrepute (vss 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 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.¹⁵ 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,

¹² 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 Cor 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.

¹³ 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).

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

¹⁵ 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 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 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.¹⁶ The ministry is not nullified by the immoral, or cowardly, character of the minister.¹⁷

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.

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ 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 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).

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.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹

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 (Matthew 28:19). God's mission in Christ drove St. Paul to undertake 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

¹⁸ On the basis of 2 Corinthians 11:2, where Paul speaks of promising the Corinthians in marriage to one husband (*anēr*), 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.

¹⁹ 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.

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,²⁰ 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.

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 an 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; Tit 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,²¹ 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,²² 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

²⁰ 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.

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

²² The nouns are masculine, the inclusive gender with Greek plurals.

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