

Women and the Ministry

A study document on women and the office of the public ministry prepared by the Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations of the Lutheran Church of Australia.

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Foreword

This study on women and the office of the public ministry has been prepared in the hope that it will stimulate serious and helpful discussion on this important and controversial issue. It is intended for use by members of the Lutheran Church of Australia, and by other Christians who want to study the issue.

In the *Theses of Agreement* which the Lutheran Church of Australia adopted at its constituting convention in 1966, there is a clear statement opposing the calling of women into the office of the public ministry (see *Theses VI, 11*). However, since these statements were adopted, the Lutheran church in Australia and New Zealand has undertaken no church-wide study of this issue.

The official statement on women's ordination, adopted over 25 years ago, is rather brief, and does not take into account the ferment which this topic has caused and is still causing in major segments of the church in Australia; so the Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations proposed in 1987 that an in-depth study of this topic should be undertaken. After clear terms of reference had been drawn up, a committee was appointed to carry out the study.

Those appointed to serve were: Ms A.J. Braunack-Mayer; the Rev. P.A. Kriewaldt (secretary); Dr V.C. Pfitzner (chair); the Rev. J.A. Sabel; and Mrs S.A. Schubert. Drs J.T.E. Renner and J.G. Strelan were later appointed as consultants. The Commission acknowledges with thanks the intensive and competent work done by the study committee over a period of three years, as it noted the various arguments put forward in recent years, and as it considered the latest discussion by biblical scholars on the biblical texts. The task of the committee was long and difficult, since the body of relevant documents and materials was huge. The committee presented its final report to the Commission in September 1991.

After discussing the report at length, but without coming to a conclusion, the Commission decided that a briefer study document should be prepared, so that the church as a whole can study and discuss the question. As a result, the present document was prepared for the Commission by Dr John Strelan.

The Commission, with the cooperation of Lutheran Publishing House, is now making this document available to the members of the Lutheran Church of Australia, and to others who choose to use it as a study guide. Ten sets of questions for study and discussion have been prepared by the Rev. John Pfitzner.

This study deliberately focuses on the relevant Bible passages and the truths they present. This is only natural in a church that is committed to the Scriptures alone as the original source and norm of doctrine and practice. Issues such as the changing attitudes to women in society, the influence of the feminist movement, and the questioning of old traditions will no doubt be drawn into our discussions. But they should never be of primary concern in determining one's doctrinal position.

The Commission hopes that the church-wide discussions that will now take place will in effect become in-depth Bible studies. This is in line with our first aim: that church members should be well informed on this topic, and come to clear convictions. This will then mean that in due course the Lutheran Church of Australia can adopt a definitive statement on the subject of women and the office of the ministry. This statement will then provide a basis for public teaching on the issue, one that members of the church are firmly committed to.

We pray that God's Spirit will bless our discussions, preserve us in unity and harmony as we engage in debate, and guide us into a clear consensus on this challenging issue.

Noel E. Weiss, chair, Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations; Elmore Leske, secretary

This document forms part of the RESOURCES section of 'Ordination. We're listening' at owl.lca.org.au

INTRODUCTION

Why take another look?

This study tries to give readers an understanding of some of the problems involved in studying the question of women and the ministry. It presents some of the data needed for an informed and responsible discussion. The aim is not to give a complete argument either for or against the ordination of women. The frame of reference for the study is the position that the Lutheran Church of Australia has taken on the matters discussed.

The office of the public ministry

The Lutheran church teaches that human beings did not invent the public ministry of the church. Instead, Jesus Christ himself established it so that the gospel would be preached and the sacraments would be administered. Through these means the Holy Spirit works saving faith in the hearts of people.

The Lutheran church also teaches that people cannot call or elect themselves into the public ministry. Nor can they claim this role or function (the office) for themselves as a right. On the contrary: the office itself is Christ's gift to his church, and so is the call to the office. As he sees fit, Christ, the Lord of the church, gives to individuals an inner vocation to the public ministry. He also equips the individual with the personal gifts that are needed. However, the person's inner call must be confirmed by the call of the church, and the personal gifts must be tested and developed. Only after careful preparation and examination is a candidate approved for ordination to the public office of word and sacrament.

Males only

From its earliest days in Australia until now, the Lutheran church has insisted that candidates for the office of the public ministry be male: the pastor must be a man, not a woman. An important public document of the Lutheran Church of Australia says:

Though women prophets were used by the Spirit of God in the Old as well as the New Testament, 1 Corinthians 14:34,35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-14 prohibit a woman from being called into the office of the public ministry for the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments. This apostolic rule is binding on all Christendom; hereby her rights as a member of the spiritual priesthood are in no wise impaired (*Theses of Agreement VI,11*).

As the final sentence indicates, the Lutheran Church of Australia believes that it is not just stubbornly going its own way when it says that pastors must be males. Rather, it is obeying God's command, which is binding on all Christian churches.

For about 1900 years, almost all branches of the Christian church admitted only males to the public ministry or priesthood. Lutheran churches, with no exceptions, ordained only men. Now, at the close of the twentieth century, most Lutheran churches in the world officially approve the ordination of women as well as men. However, a majority of Christians still officially approve the ordination of men only.

The climate of change

The change in teaching and practice that has taken place in many churches is part of a change in thinking and attitudes concerning the wider question of the role of women in the church and, it may be added, in society. Western society especially has seen a dramatic change in the role and status of women. Women's suffrage is taken for granted. Women's rights are protected by the law. Women are taking leading positions in politics, in the world of business, and other fields. People are recognising the evils of sexual stereotyping, sexual discrimination, and sexual harassment. Social

justice for women is high on the agenda of many forums. Many people believe that a change in church practices is a matter of the church catching up with recognised social justice.

The official statements of the Lutheran Church of Australia reveal that it is responding to legitimate urgings to look again at its position on the role of women in the church. In 1966 and 1968 the church rather hesitatingly accepted an opinion of its seminary faculty concerning women's suffrage in church and congregation. A 1978 statement on the role of women in the church acknowledged, among other things, that women have 'the right to act as delegates at Conventions of the Church'. In 1984 the church in Convention acknowledged that

since the Holy Spirit endows both men and women with his gifts, the church should not hesitate to acknowledge this and provide also for women avenues of service in those areas of responsibility associated with the individual and collective membership of Boards, Councils and Commissions.

In the past decade, women have taken on new roles (such as lectors, servitors, and lay assistants), and a few have undertaken theological studies. However, there is evidence to suggest that a gap exists between the official statements of the church and what in fact happens in the church. Some members are hurt and distressed by this. They see that lay people, pastors, and elected leaders seem reluctant to actively promote the equal responsibilities of men and women in the church, and to develop the full use of the gifts that women bring to the church - gifts that the Lord of the church has provided.

In short, official statements and changes in attitudes have not kept pace with each other.

In many cases people are feeling pain more because the church neglects the gifts of women than because they are not admitted to the public ministry. These people perceive that women are treated as 'second-class members' of the church. But at the same time the matter of women in the ministry is part of the larger question of the role of women in the church.

If the Lutheran Church of Australia is to study seriously the role of women in the church, it cannot ignore the fact that many Lutheran churches do admit women to the public office, and that they have taken this step after thorough scriptural and theological study.

Nor can the Lutheran church ignore the fact that other Christians in Australia are debating the issue of the ordination of women. It is a topic of discussion among Australian Christians; Lutherans should be ready to explain their theological position clearly and convincingly.

Finally, the Lutheran Church of Australia cannot ignore the fact that responsible and knowledgeable Christians have made numerous studies on this question in the 30 years since the church made its statements on women and the ministry. These studies have looked again at old data, and have presented new data and new arguments.

Discussion in the church

In society the debate on the role of women has often been marred by aggressiveness. Both sides have resorted to bitter name-calling and hatred, and have refused to listen to another point of view. The result has often been that people seem to lose all good sense, including their sense of humour. A huge chasm develops between the two sides, and both parties throw their good judgment and good manners into the chasm.

This should not be so in the church. God calls us Christians to be gentle and courteous in all our dealings with each other (Titus 3:2). We should, therefore, strive to establish an atmosphere for discussion in which gentleness and courtesy are indeed practised.

The way our Lord dealt with both women and men provides an example for the church: our discussion should be responsible, peace-seeking, loving, and courteous; we should be ready both to listen to each other and to be obedient to God's word.

This study aims to help members of the church to look at the arguments old and new, and to learn for themselves what the will of God is in the issue of women in the public office of the ministry.

For study and discussion

1. Have you been in a situation where a woman minister (from another denomination or in a Lutheran church overseas) has conducted a service? What was your reaction?
2. What is your present attitude to the ordination of women? Are you opposed to it? Are you in favour of it? Are you undecided? If you have an attitude for or against, do you feel that you can support your position with convincing arguments?
3. How does the question of ordaining women make you feel? Does it make you feel anxious, confused, angry, afraid, frustrated? Do you find it easy or difficult to express your views on this matter in an open and calm way? Do you find it easy or difficult to listen to other views on this matter in an open and sensitive way?
4. Discuss the changes in the role and status of women that have taken place in society and the church in recent times.
5. Do you think there are good reasons to look again at what the Bible has to say about women in the ministry? If so, what are these reasons?

CHAPTER ONE

Key texts: Challenges for the interpreter

One of the important principles of Lutheran churches is 'Scripture alone': the word of God alone decides what the church is to believe and teach. In keeping with this principle, the Lutheran Church of Australia has insisted, and still insists, that the question of women and the ordained ministry must be settled from the holy Scriptures. The church says that we should not put contemporary developments, human judgments, cultural values, and practical considerations above the authority of Scripture. On the other hand, the church recognises that sociological and psychological factors do influence our understanding of the biblical material.

In other words, the Lutheran Church of Australia confesses that the Old and New Testaments are the infallible word of God and the only source and measuring stick for Christian doctrine. The Bible is the sure and authoritative guide for what happens in the church and in the lives of Christians. But the church does not teach that the human interpreters never make mistakes: they, like all people, are the product of their own social, cultural, and church history, and they bring all this 'baggage' with them as they read and interpret a passage of Scripture.

In view of the Lutheran emphasis on the authority of Scripture, it is not surprising that the Lutheran Church of Australia has said in its official documents that two New Testament texts are all-important for deciding the question of women in the public ministry: 1 Corinthians 14:33-36 and 1 Timothy 2:13,14. This study will not attempt to offer a complete commentary on these key passages; indeed, it would be impossible for a single commentary to reflect the different views of responsible scholars. Instead, we now briefly discuss those points that most scholars agree are crucial for a proper understanding of the texts. For more detailed study, readers may consult the commentaries in the list of books for further reading (see Appendix A, page 44).

Note

The various points of interpretation set out in two columns on the next pages do not represent a 'for' side and an 'against' side. Although eventually we have to make a decision, we should not take sides before we even begin to study a text. Instead, we should recognise that there are often several defensible ways of interpreting a word or phrase or verse. A good interpreter will do his or her work without being influenced by any pressure to make the text say one thing or another; to bow to such pressure would mean being unfaithful to the text.

1 Corinthians 14:33b-36

^{33b}As in all the churches of the saints, ³⁴women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. ³⁵If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.

³⁶Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only ones it has reached? (NRSV)

1. Verse 33b: 'As in all the churches of the saints'

This sentence belongs with verse 33 (as in the New English Bible margin). Paul is saying that the rule that 'the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets' (verse 32) is one that is observed in all the churches. The sentence belongs with verse 34 (as in most English versions). Paul is saying that his rule that women are not to 'speak' in the churches is one that is followed by all the churches.

2. What Paul means here by women 'not speaking'

Paul does not forbid all forms of speaking by women in the church service. What he is saying is that women should not take a leading role in preaching and teaching the word. Such a role would mean that women are claiming an authority that God does not permit them to have.

Rather than forbidding all forms of speaking by women in the church service, Paul is opposed to undisciplined interjection, strident assertion, and argumentative challenge, which disrupts public worship. (Presumably this would apply to men, too, if the cap fitted.)

3. Does this prohibition apply to all churches?

Paul's words state a fundamental truth for the whole church. The real disorder is not disorderly speaking, but any 'speaking' that is inappropriate for a woman; speaking by women is inappropriate if it contradicts (a) the subordinate position of women, (b) the teaching of the law and the command of the Lord, and (c) accepted practice in the church.

Paul is writing about a local problem in the young church at Corinth. Some women were abusing their right to speak. They were caught up in the spiritual fervour that was sweeping Corinth, and were contributing to charismatic excesses that were causing divisions in the Corinthian congregation(s).

4. The Greek word that in this text is translated 'women'

The word can also be translated 'wives'. Here Paul has wives in mind, as we see by his reference to the need for an attitude of subordination or submission (see Ephesians 5:22-24), and by his reference to asking 'their husbands at home' (verse 35). In the cultural environment of the time, it was 'shameful' for a wife to take a leading speaking role in public, when her husband was in the same public gathering.

Although the word can also be translated 'wives', here Paul has all women in mind, as we see by his reference to the need for an attitude of subordination or submission (see Genesis 2:18-25 and 1 Timothy 2:13). In the predominantly Jewish religious environment of the early church, it was 'shameful' for a woman to take a leading speaking role in public worship. More importantly, in the context of this passage, it was 'shameful' for a woman to ignore what the law of God says.

5. The 'law' (verse 34)

Paul means a fixed order of subordination, as expressed by God when he said to Eve after the fall: 'Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you' (Genesis 3:16). Compare 1 Timothy 2:13, 14, where Paul argues that Adam was made before Eve, and Eve was the first to be deceived. The subordinate position of woman goes back to the beginning in these two ways.

Paul means wither the Jewish oral tradition or, more likely, custom and prevailing usage in the church. Paul is insisting on a common rule for the churches of the time, determined by accepted practice, as in 1 Corinthians 11:16. The 'law' is the will of God, which here means what Paul has said about good order in the church. As spiritual people, the Corinthians should know that Paul is the Lord's apostle, and that he also possesses the Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 7:40 and 14:37).

6. The problem of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

In chapter 11 Paul permits women to speak in the public worship service. He allows a woman to use her charismatic gift in public because she is acting as God's mouthpiece. But she is to behave in a way considered proper when she does speak, that is, she is to have her head properly covered.

In chapter 11 Paul indicates that he permits women to prophesy, but verses 2-16 do not refer specifically to the worship service. And even if they do, permission to exercise the charismatic gift of prophecy is not the same as permission to take a leading role in teaching in public worship.

7. The problem of 1 Timothy 2:11-15

The 1 Timothy passage clarifies the meaning of 1 Corinthians 14:33-36. We can and should use the clear words of 1 Timothy to interpret any unclear points in 1 Corinthians 14:33-36.

We are uncertain about the situation Paul was writing to, and about the meaning of several key words (see below). This makes the 1 Timothy passage of doubtful value in clarifying the meaning of 1 Corinthians 14:33-36.

1 Timothy 2:11-15

¹¹Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. ¹²I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. ¹³For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. ¹⁵Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty. (NRSV)

The first letter to Timothy was written so that Timothy would know how one ought to behave in the household of God (3:15). Some people have regarded it of lesser value in the study of the ordained ministry and women's place in it, because there are doubts about who wrote the letter. But the Lutheran Church of Australia sees 1 Timothy as part of the Christian Scriptures; it is the word of God with full authority, and it has the same value in the discussion as 1 Corinthians or any other New Testament book.

The second chapter of 1 Timothy takes up matters concerning worship. Paul first gives the basis of Christian worship (verses 1-7), and then gives specific instructions to men first (verse 8), and then to women (verses 9-15). Our discussion here focuses particularly on verses 11-15. These verses appear to echo the thought of 1 Corinthians 14:33-36, and like them they pose a number of problems for the interpreter. Below are the main points where there are different interpretations.

1. The situation

As verse 8 shows, the context is public worship. Men are to pray in a certain way. While we can see verses 9, 10 as general ethical instruction on the proper behaviour of women (see also 1 Peter 3:3), they also relate to worship. Dress reflects an attitude of the heart. The central statement of verses 11, 12 comes in two parallel sentences that interpret each other. The key concept is women's silence: it stands at each end of the statement in verses 11, 12. Such silence is not absolute wordlessness, but a reserve that shows an attitude of submissiveness. This means that in the worship service women are to learn with quiet receptivity; they are not to do the teaching, that is, they should not formally and publicly proclaim the faith.

The section verses 8-15 mixes instruction on worship with general ethical instruction. The words about women refer to more than public worship; they are more radical and far-reaching than 1 Corinthians 14:33-36. The wider problem Paul is writing about seems to be that women were being deceived by false teachers (compare 1 Timothy 5:11-14 and 2 Timothy 3:6-9). It seems that wrong ideas about spiritual gifts were leading women to behave in ways that people of the time considered improper, also in worship. This meant a breakdown of the Jewish practices where only men recited prayers in synagogues, a practice that had been inherited by the early church.

2. The meaning of the verb 'to have authority over' (a verb used only once in the New Testament)

It is not at all certain what the verb means here. In non-biblical literature, the verb usually conveys the idea of 'forcefulness'. Here the verb, used together with the verb 'to teach', could mean: 'to teach autonomously, acting on one's own authority'; or: 'to teach in a contentious, pushy way'; or 'to teach in a domineering, high-handed way'. Very likely Paul is saying that women, when they teach, should not do so in an aggressive, domineering way.

The verb translated 'to have authority over' means just that: women may teach other women or children (see Titus 2:3, 4), but in worship they are not to teach men, for this would involve exercising authority over them. So the verb 'to have authority over' explains what kind of teaching is meant. The verb does not mean 'to domineer'; here it means the grabbing of any authority that would be the opposite of the attitude of submissiveness that God requires of women.

3. The arguments from Genesis 2 and 3

Paul uses two arguments to support his command that women should be silent. The first is that 'Adam was formed first'; he has the rights and special responsibilities of the first-born. Just as Christ has top spot as the first-born of all creation (Colossians 1:15-18), so Adam has authority over Eve, man over woman. Secondly, 'Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived'. This was the result of asserting her independence from Adam. Eve represents all women who break the God-given order and thus become susceptible to deception. As heirs of Eve, women are disqualified from leading men or exercising authority over them. Genesis 3:16 probably stands behind the thought of 1 Timothy 2:15: the pain of child-bearing is the result of Eve's sin.

Paul uses the argument from Genesis to show how *wives* should conduct themselves in church and at home. A good parallel is the way Paul argues from Genesis 2 and 3 in his discussion of the marriage relationship in Ephesians 5. The Genesis record repeatedly refers to Adam and Eve as husband and wife (eg Genesis 2:21-25; 3:6,8,16,17,20,21). In presenting his teaching on the relationship between husband and wife, Paul argues from the situation between husband and wife 'in the beginning'. Furthermore, the difficult and puzzling verse 15 makes good sense if verses 11-14 refer to the marriage relationship.

What does the Lutheran Church of Australia say?

The Lutheran Church of Australia does not insist on only one interpretation of every word and phrase in 1 Corinthians 14:33-36 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15.

*However, the Lutheran Church of Australia, together with many other churches, has drawn certain **conclusions** from these passages: Paul, arguing that man has greater authority than woman because he was created first (1 Corinthians 11:2- 16; 1 Timothy 2:12,13), is opposed to public teaching and preaching by women in the church (1 Timothy 2:11, 12; 1 Corinthians 14:35). Women can prophesy and participate in prayer (1 Corinthians 12), but they cannot speak and teach in a leadership role in public worship. In Paul's view, this is one of the Lord's commands.*

For study and discussion

1. Read the whole of chapter 14 in 1 Corinthians in order to see verses 33b-36 in context (you may find it useful to look at earlier chapters as well). From what St Paul says here, try to describe the situation at Corinth that led him to write as he does in chapter 14.
2. Read 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36. Discuss the parts of this text that are unclear to you or that you find difficult to understand. Discuss those parts of the text that seem clear to you.
3. Read the whole of chapter 2 in 1 Timothy in order to see verses 11-15 in context. What is St Paul advising Timothy about in this chapter?
4. Read 1 Timothy 2:11-15.

Discuss the parts of this text that are unclear to you or that you find difficult to understand.

Discuss those parts of the text that seem clear to you.

6. If scholars differ in their interpretation of these two key passages, what does this mean for the church's teaching about the ordination of women?

CHAPTER TWO

Interpreting Scripture: Arguing from precedent

In our brief look at some of the points of debate in interpreting two key texts, we have seen that biblical studies over the past 40-50 years have raised important questions concerning the interpretation of the two texts. In fact, these questions concern the principles involved in interpreting *any* biblical text.

For example, both 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and 1 Corinthians 14:33-36 speak of an attitude of 'submission' or 'subordination'. What is meant? What is this concept based on? Both texts were written in real historical, cultural, and social situations. To what extent, if any, do these factors influence our understanding of the texts and how we should apply them? Both texts come from an apostle; they state or imply a command of the Lord of the church. Is this command binding on the church today? If not, why not? Both texts place some kind of restriction on women. Is this a restriction consistent with the roles that God gave to women in both Israel and the early church? Do the practices in biblical times have any authority when it comes to deciding on church teaching and practice? What is the relationship between biblical precedent and biblical command? Paul argues from Old Testament material to support his teaching. What is the relationship between the two Testaments? And so forth.

These and other questions need to be faced, so that Christians can be sure that what they believe about the role of women in ordained ministry is in keeping with the will of God. In seeking answers to various questions, we have to consider a wide range of biblical evidence, as well as taking into account the light that Christian doctrine throws on the questions. We take up first the question of precedent: Do the practices and situations in biblical times have authority for us now?

Women at work: Examples from Scripture

Among the Old Testament people of God, some women were consistently recognised as having the gift of prophecy: Miriam, Deborah, and Huldah, for example (Exodus 15:20; Judges 4:4; 2 Kings 22:14). There is no suggestion that women with these gifts were stepping onto territory reserved for males only, or that their prophecy was inferior to that of a male prophet.

On the other hand, the priesthood within Israel and Judaism was limited to males. It was in paganism (eg Baalism) that women priests were prominent.

We recall that God chose not only men, but also women, to be agents of his plan of salvation: woman like Sarah, Ruth, Bathsheba, and the blessed Virgin Mary, the mother of our Lord.

When we look at the New Testament, we note that Jesus of Nazareth is a male, and that he appointed only males to the circle of the twelve apostles. The men and women who proposed candidates to replace Judas considered only males (Acts 1:14-26). Peter recalled Scripture to show that the position held by Judas must be taken by a male, so that the choice was among men who had been with Jesus from the beginning and were witnesses to the resurrection. (No doubt some women, in fact, also met these criteria.)

The Gentile world, which was familiar with female priests and prophets, probably would have accepted a female counterpart to Paul. And yet Jesus did not make such an appointment; some people argue that his reason was that the male Jesus must be represented by males.

We note that Jesus chose women to be the first bearers of the resurrection message. This document forms part of the RESOURCES section of 'Ordination. We're listening' at owl.lca.org.au

According to Acts and the New Testament letters, women were leaders and teachers in the congregations. Priscilla joined with her husband in instructing Apollos (Acts 18:2,18, 26). This married couple are described by Paul as his 'fellow-workers' (Romans 16:3). Paul uses the same phrase to describe the women Euodia and Syntyche who, together with others, 'struggled beside me in the work of the gospel' (Philippians 4:3).

In Romans 16:7 two relatives (or fellow Jews) of Paul -a man named Andronicus and a woman named Junia (according to the King James, New King James, and New Revised Standard versions) are described as 'apostles'; presumably they belonged to the wider circle of apostles who were sent out to establish churches (Acts 13:1-3). It should be noted, however, that the reference in Romans 16:7 is uncertain: is the name Junias (masculine) or Junia (feminine)?

In Romans 16:1, 2 Paul greets a woman named Phoebe. He describes her as a 'servant' or 'deacon' of the church in Cenchreae. In 1 Timothy 3:8-13 the position of 'deacon' seems to be one of leadership in the congregation. Furthermore, Phoebe is said to have been the 'helper' or 'patron' or 'president' of Paul (Romans 16:2). Scholars are not completely sure what the noun means; but it is possible that Phoebe was more than just Paul's assistant.

In 1 Timothy 3:1-7, where Paul discusses the qualities and gifts of a 'bishop', he speaks only of men.

Contradictory conclusions

Other examples of practices from the early church could be given. The conclusions that different people have drawn from the available data are contradictory. On the one hand, some have argued that Jesus chose only men to be the twelve apostles; so the divine action is consistent with the divine word when 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 14 say that women are excluded from public teaching and preaching in the church.

On the other hand, other people have argued that God used women as prophets in the Old Testament, and the apostles recognised women as fellow apostles and fellow workers in spreading the gospel. So, for the divine word to be consistent with divine action, the commands in 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 14 that women are to be 'silent' cannot mean that all women for all time are excluded from leadership positions in the worshipping community. These people argue that there must be some other meaning to these 'women must be silent' passages.

What does the Lutheran Church of Australia say?

The Lutheran Church of Australia has taken the view that we cannot argue from precedent; what was done in biblical times or in the early church does not establish doctrine or prescribe practice for us. We may use such precedent to confirm a particular interpretation of Scripture; it may even become a guiding light when there is no clear word of God. But precedent, no matter how weighty, does not decide what the church teaches and practices. Thus, the fact that Jesus called only men to form the Twelve does not by itself mean that Jesus wants all pastors to be males. Likewise, even if we could be reasonably sure that Junia(s) was a woman with apostolic authority, this would not, by itself, mean that women can or should be pastors in the church. In any case, it is clear that our situation today is different from the situation at the time of our Lord's earthly life or in the early church, and that there is no direct link between the two. Even in the best of cases, arguments from precedent are shaky.

For study and discussion

- Look up the following Old Testament passages that speak of women who were prophets:

Exodus 15:20 (Miriam)

Judges 4:4 (Deborah)

2 Kings 22:14 (Huldah)

Look up the following New Testament passages that refer to various women and the roles they played in the ministry of Jesus and in the early church:

Luke 8:1-3 (women who accompanied Jesus)

Luke 23:55-24:1, 8-10 (witnesses of the resurrection)

Acts 1:12-14 (women believers)

Acts 18:2, 18,26; Romans 16:3 (Priscilla)

Philippians 4:2, 3 (Euodia and Syntyche)

Romans 16:1, 2 (Phoebe)

Romans 16:7 (Junia. Note that it is not certain whether this person is a woman or a man.)

On the other hand, read Acts 1:14-26, taking special note of verses 21 and 22, where Peter said that the replacement for Judas had to be a man.

- 'The Lutheran Church of Australia has taken the view that we cannot argue from precedent; what was done in biblical times or in the early church does not establish doctrine or prescribe practice.' Why do you think the church has had this attitude? On what basis does the church 'establish doctrine' and 'prescribe practice'?

CHAPTER THREE

Relating Scripture to Scripture

When we turn to the Scriptures to discover the will of God on a particular matter, we should take the Bible as a whole. We should not just look at separate bits and pieces, or see the Bible as a collection of proof-texts isolated from their contexts. If we look at the Scriptures as a whole in connection with the question of women and the ordained ministry, we come against the problem of relating the two Testaments to each other, and of relating one passage of Scripture to another. This problem becomes acute in three areas:

1. In 1 Timothy 2:13, 14 Paul appeals to Genesis 2 and 3 to support his command that women should be 'silent' in the churches and should not have authority over men. Furthermore, in 1 Corinthians 14:33-36 he appeals to 'the law', which might mean an Old Testament text or texts.
2. Paul's instructions regarding the role of women in worship services seem to be different in 1 Corinthians 11 from what they are in 1 Corinthians 14.
3. Many Christians are convinced that we must interpret and apply 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 in the light of the overwhelming 'gospel principle' that in Christ we are all equal in God's sight. They see this spelt out in Galatians 3:28 and supported by the basic equality of the sexes taught in Genesis 1:26, 27.

The Old Testament and the New Testament

The Old Testament foreshadows the New Testament, while the New Testament interprets the Old Testament. This ancient saying tells us that texts of the Old Testament can come alive with new meaning in a new situation, without changing the original meaning of the text. Christ gives new meaning to Old Testament texts, because Christ is the heart and centre of the Scriptures; they bear witness to him (Luke 24:27; John 5:39, 46).

The New Testament use of the Old sometimes becomes complicated when the New Testament quotes an Old Testament text without referring to its original setting and meaning. For instance, in Acts 1:16-22 St Peter quotes two passages from the Psalms (69:25 and 109:8) and says that they refer to Judas and his fall. But originally the psalmist was talking about his own enemies. So here is an example of an Old Testament passage finishing up with two meanings: the original one and the one given to it by the New Testament writer.

In 1 Timothy 2:12, 13 Paul draws the conclusion that Adam (= man) has greater authority than Eve (= woman), since he was created first. We accept that this is the meaning of Genesis 2:7-25, or a legitimate conclusion to be drawn from the passage, because we believe that the Holy Spirit is his own best interpreter, and God does not deceive us. But the meaning that Paul draws from Genesis 2 is not immediately clear in the text. Indeed, some interpreters say that Paul has imposed his meaning on the text, and not drawn it out of the text. Therefore, since Paul's interpretation is forced and even false, his conclusions are false. But we cannot accept this way of arguing.

The real question here is not *how* Paul used the Genesis material, but *why*: what was his purpose in referring to the creation and fall of man and woman in the beginning? This question will be further discussed in chapter five.

The relationship between 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and 1 Corinthians 14:33-36

In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul takes it for granted that a woman can prophesy and pray in the worship services of the church. He demands only that she keep her head covered, apparently out of respect for what people of that culture thought was proper. So, provided that woman behave properly, Paul seems to have nothing against them praying and prophesying in church. We have this situation, then: in the same letter, Paul permits a 'speaking' by the female prophets in Corinth (1 Corinthians 11) and forbids all 'speaking' by all women in Corinth in worship services (1 Corinthians 14).

One scholar comments on the dilemma: 'As far as I know there is no completely convincing solution to this problem of interpretation'.

The following are some of the solutions that scholars have suggested:

- The prophesying and praying by women in 1 Corinthians is meant in the context of the home rather than the church.
- Paul forbids women the right to preach and teach, but not to prophesy.
- The female prophets in 1 Corinthians represent an exceptional situation, for which Paul make an unwilling concession.
- Paul, quite unawares, contradicted himself.
- Paul is concerned with the same thing in both passages: the subordinate relationship of women to men. His concern is with any kind of speaking that upsets the God-given relationships.

Old creation and new; old order and new

According to Genesis 1:26, 27 and 5:1, 2, both man and woman are created in the image of God, and thus bear the divine image. Scripture does not support any attempts to limit the extent of the divine image in woman, and does not support any theories that woman in her creatureliness is inferior to man.

What Scripture does teach emphatically is that male and female equally reflect the glory of their Creator in his original design. They are also equally guilty in their rebellion against their Maker, wanting to be more than his image (Genesis 3:5; Romans 3:23; 5:11-21). As a result, disrupted and distorted (Genesis 3:14-19; Romans 1:18-32).

In Christ, who is the perfect image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15; 2 Corinthians 4:4-6), the image of God in fallen humanity is being restored in the believer. Christians are being conformed to the likeness of God's Son (Romans 8:29), who is the head of the new creation (Colossians 1:18). In him Christians are made new creatures or a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17).

This new order that Christ has begun is a matter of faith, not sight. Yet we can see its effects already as relationships belonging to the old order are transformed. For the gospel is more than a promise of future salvation; it is God's message that we are set free now from the power of sin and guilt, and from being dominated by the distorted relationships that belong to fallen humanity. The gospel is the power of God that changes, here and now, the lives of those who are in Christ (Ephesians 2:11-22; Galatians 3:26-28).

The church and individual Christians live in a tension. In Christ freedom has come, and with it the privilege of abundant living; but the reality of sin and Satan and death is still with us, limiting what we can do.

Galatians 3:28: The 'breakthrough'?

Many people regard Galatians 3:28 as the key text in the debate on the role of women in the ordained ministry. It is an authoritative and relevant word of God that has to be considered in the discussion, alongside of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and 1 Corinthians 14:33-36. The Galatians passage reads: This document forms part of the RESOURCES section of 'Ordination. We're listening' at owl.lca.org.au

²⁶for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. ²⁷As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (NRSV)

Here Paul stresses the entirely new status before God of all people who are in Christ. There was a time, before his conversion to Christ, when Paul probably joined his fellow rabbis in thanking God that he had not been born a girl; for as a man he had the privilege of learning and teaching the Scriptures. In Jewish thinking of the time, this was forbidden to a woman. Now Paul teaches that in Christ our standing before God does not depend on the old divisions and distinctions. Believers are one in the body of Christ, no matter what their natural situation may be. All believers share an equality as children of God.

Those who see Galatians 3:28 as the key text argue that the church is obliged to draw certain definite conclusions from the message that we are all equal in Christ. One of these conclusions concerns the role of women in the church, and specifically in the ordained ministry in the church. They argue that Galatians 3:28 announces that a new order has replaced the old. In 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and 1 Corinthians 14:33-36 Paul is arguing on the basis of the old order because of the sinful disorders in the congregations. But a change has taken place in Christ through baptism; the real, God-pleasing situation in the *church* is that there is now a new order, in which God has placed both men and women so that they carry out the ministry of the gospel to the glory of God.

This line of argument, then, is based on Galatians 3:28 and the nature of the gospel (the good news that in Christ God loves us and sets us free). It insists that the gospel of Jesus Christ has priority over any regulations of an apostle that refer to specific situations in the early church. God redeems, and sanctifies, and bestows gifts on men and women; it is the gospel of this God that determines the ministry of the church and how it is structured.

Our purpose in this chapter has been to reflect on some of the difficulties involved in relating Scripture to Scripture.

What does the Lutheran Church of Australia say?

The Lutheran Church of Australia has been guided by some basic principles of interpretation:

- *The sacred Scriptures are the only source and ultimate judge, rule, and standard of all doctrines of the church. The Scriptures do not lie, nor do they deceive us in any way on any matter.*
- *Christ is the heart of the Scriptures. God has revealed himself in Christ, and this revelation ties together the whole of the written word and gives it focus. This word of God speaks to us as either law or gospel.*
- *We must distinguish between law and gospel, but not separate them. The law tells us what God requires of us, and it always accuses us. The gospel (good news) is the message that God looks favourably on us and accepts us because of Christ. God's intention is for all people to be saved, and so the gospel is always the final word God wants to speak to us. In this sense, the saving gospel supersedes the condemning law; but as God's stated will for holy living and his means for controlling and condemning godless living, the law is not abolished.*
- *Scripture interprets Scripture. This means, among other things, that an obscure passage should be interpreted by a clear one.*
- *No interpretation of a passage of Scripture can conflict with the gospel. Likewise, no teaching of the church can contradict the gospel. ('Gospel' here includes a proper understanding of our sinful condition and of the holy lives Christians lead under the Spirit.) This applies also to church order. However, we can't arrive at teachings and practices simply from the gospel without support from specific texts. Each doctrine of the church must be derived from explicit, clear statements of the written word of God.*

- *Any teaching of the church must be based on all the clear evidence of Scripture taken together, and not on an isolated text whose meaning is uncertain.*

The Lutheran Church of Australia has said the following about matters discussed in this section:

- When Paul quotes from the Old Testament to support his argument, especially from the Genesis record, this shows that his commands as an apostle express God's will for the church for all time.*
- There is no contradiction between 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and 1 Corinthians 14:33-36, especially in the light of 1 Timothy 2:11-15. Paul has the same concern in all three passages: women should not speak in worship services in any way that goes against the God-ordained relationships between man and woman; that is, they should not speak in a way that involves the woman having teaching authority over a man.*
- According to Galatians 3:28, Christ transforms all the relationships of Christians, but he does not abolish all role differences. The gospel does not mean that people are all immediately equal in society or have the same function. Indeed, if we take Galatians 3:28 as a blueprint for a new order we are turning the gospel into law, and we are then bringing this text into conflict with others that speak of an original created order that is not abolished by the gospel.*

To summarise: 1. We can't draw any direct conclusions from Galatians 3:28 about how the office of the ministry or society should be structured. 2. The public ministry is different from the priesthood of all believers; all baptised people belong to the priesthood of all believers, but the ministry depends on God's special gift and call. 3. Human society is not the same as the church, which is the body of Christ. The two should not be confused with each other.

For study and discussion

1. Read Genesis 2:7, 21, 22 and 1 Timothy 2:11-14. Discuss the way that St Paul uses the Genesis passages to support his argument in 1 Timothy. Do you think his use of those passages is legitimate? What attitude should we take toward St Paul's use of the Old Testament in this passage?
2. Read 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and 1 Corinthians 14:33-36. Do you see any contradiction between these passages? If so, can you see any way of resolving the apparent contradiction?
3. Read Galatians 3:26-28. What does St Paul mean when he says that 'there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus'? Do you see this passage as being relevant to the discussion about women and the ministry?

CHAPTER FOUR

Interpreting Scripture: The influence of culture

The early church lived in complex surroundings. It was influenced by the Old Testament, the teachings of the rabbis, Greek and Roman culture, current philosophies, and public and private religions. The church accepted some of the customs of the time and rejected others. In interpreting the Scripture, Paul used the methods of the Jewish rabbis, and in debating issues he used ancient Roman methods. The apostles even adapted ethical and moral codes from heathen philosophers of the time; they used them to express the will of God for his new people (as in Ephesians 4:25-6:10 and 1 Peter 2:13-3:7).

The question arises: Which of these commands from the apostles applied only to a particular culture and are therefore not binding on the church for all time, and which ones are binding on the church forever – even though they were written in a particular culture and perhaps borrowed from the culture and philosophy of the time? And how do we arrive at an answer?

As we tackle these questions, we should take the following factors into account:

- Every piece of writing, including Scripture, is tied to a particular culture because it is written in the language of a certain people; it uses language symbols, logic, thought-forms, and references to situations at the time that had meaning and messages for the first readers. Indeed, the Christian church sees this as an act of God's grace, that when he revealed himself and his will he chose to do so in a human culture and in human history.
- However, revelation and culture are not the same thing. God's revelation is not identical with any specific culture. In fact, revelation and sinful culture are opposites (as we see in the message of the prophets). God's word attacks whatever is evil in any culture.
- Every interpretation of Scripture is related to a particular culture; whenever we read any literature, we have certain understandings and assumptions that we get from our culture or subculture. It is important that we are aware of the cultural or ideological 'freight' that we bring with us when we interpret a text of Scripture. A Melanesian, a media magnate, a feminist, a teenager, an artist, a paraplegic, a Calcutta beggar all will read and understand the Scriptures in very different ways, even though they all might be Christians.
- Some texts themselves indicate clearly whether their directives apply to the church for all time or only to the people of a particular time. For example, if a passage appeals to the law of God or to a command of the Lord, we see that it holds for all times and places and is still binding; but if a text tells people how to dress or to wear their hair (as in 1 Timothy 2:9 and 1 Corinthians 11:2-16), it applies only to that culture and time.
- Some texts reveal truth that clearly does not depend on the way a particular culture expresses it. For example, many people in our Western society today don't know or understand the Jewish sacrificial system, but that doesn't mean that the scriptural

statements about the atoning sacrifice of Christ apply only to the ancient Jewish society or are only relatively valid.

- When we consider 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and 1 Corinthians 14:33-36, we should concentrate on the specific historical background of these texts (such as the time of writing and the place and particular situation of the readers). We should not try to pass judgment on how relevant the texts are today by speculating on what the changing cultural values of the time were. We simply do not know enough about the status of women in society at Corinth or Ephesus to be able to decide clearly on cultural and social questions such as whether or not it would have been considered acceptable for women to speak up in public.

What does the Lutheran Church of Australia say?

The Lutheran Church of Australia has maintained that the Bible has a truly human side. The holy writers kept the distinctive features of their personalities, including their language styles and the words they used, and their culture(s). But the final authority of scripture remains; we can't set it aside, saying that the authors are simply reflecting their particular world view or cultural bias, or the conditions at the time.

The Lutheran church has said that in 1 Timothy 2:11- 15 and 1 Corinthians 14:33-36 Paul's appeal to the Old Testament and the beginnings of things shows that he is not arguing on the basis of local custom. His decision is based on God's will and Christ's command (see 1 Corinthians 14:37). This is in contrast to 1 Corinthians 11:2- 16, in the discussion of head coverings. In this passage Paul makes his final appeal on the basis of custom: 'But if anyone is disposed to be contentious -we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God' (1 Corinthians 11:16 NRSV). This, in turn, contrasts with Paul's teaching on the Lord's Supper a few verses later, which he begins with the words: 'I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you' (1 Corinthians 11:23 NRSV). The Lord's Supper has cultural trappings, but in spite of these its celebration is not optional or a take-it-or-leave-it matter for Christians. The Lord's command is clear.

For study and discussion

1. Try to identify, as honestly as possible, the particular ideas, attitudes, values, and convictions (based on early influences in your life) that you bring to the study of women and the ministry. Have you modified or changed your views on this matter at any time in your life?
2. Do you think that developments in our own culture and society are affecting your thoughts and attitudes about women in the ministry? To what extent should we take notice of these developments?
3. In chapter 2 of 1 Timothy, compare verses 8-10 with verses 11-15. Discuss the cultural background of these passages. What still applies to us today and what doesn't? How can we decide?
4. Compare 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 with 1 Corinthians 14:26-40. Discuss the cultural background of these passages. What still applies to us today and what doesn't? How can we decide?

CHAPTER FIVE

Theological principles (1): God's structures in creation

Since the time of the Reformation, the Lutheran church has emphasised the teaching that God has assigned to each person a place in the world, the family, and the church. And these 'places' that we have are themselves part of the orders or structures that God has established. We need these structures to exist; they are God's unchanging will for his creation. God constantly evaluates human activity in this world according to these structures.

God's act of giving order to human society in this way expresses his good will; and when he places me within these structures he is calling me to take my place within the relationships determined by those structures. So I am a citizen of Australia (or New Zealand or Papua New Guinea); and I am a teacher in a church school (or pastor, elder, deacon). I am all these things, not by chance but by God's good ordering of my life. He calls me to take my place in different structures that involved different sets of relationships, responsibilities, and functions.

For many centuries the church has taught the subordination of woman to man within certain orders or estates instituted by God, such as marriage and worship.

The argument supporting this is complex. It begins with Genesis 1-3, and says that God established the role and function of men and women, as well as their relationship to each other, before their fall into sin, and he confirmed this structure after the fall. The discussion for and against this view includes the following points:

- Man was created first, and so, like the first-born of Israel, he receives special authority (see 1 Timothy 2:13). However, some people argue that Eve, as the last to be created, could just as well be seen as the climax or pinnacle of God's creative activity.
- Adam showed his authority over the animals by naming them (Genesis 2:19, 20); his naming of Eve (2:23) indicates that he also had authority over her. But some people point out that Eve also had authority over the animals (Genesis 1:28), and that Adam's naming of Eve was not an act of authority on his part, but his joyful response when he saw that here at last was one who corresponded to him in every way, a fellow human being.
- Eve was created as a 'helper' for Adam, not vice versa (Genesis 2:18, 20). She had her origin from Adam; she was created for him (compare 1 Corinthians 11:8, 9 and 1 Timothy 2:13).

The alternative view is along these lines: the word translated 'helper' occurs 19 times in the Old Testament; in 15 cases it is used of God who comes to the aid of his people. God is their 'helper', but he is in no way subordinate to them. In Genesis 2:18, 20 the woman is seen as man's equal and counterpart. The word 'helper' suggests mutual help, not the role of subordinate assistant.

- The curse after the fall (Genesis 3:16) did not establish the subordinate role of woman; she was given that role before the fall. But since the fall, the role has been infected and affected by sin.

Some people answer that Genesis 3:16 is descriptive, not prescriptive: it says what *will* be, not what *must* be. It states a sad reality, a perversion of God's order. Where there was once equality, there is now dominance of one over the other. No fixed order is prescribed. What Genesis 3 says so clearly is that both man and woman sinned; both are guilty; both are judged; both are in need of a Saviour (Romans 5).

Summary of the discussion

Does Genesis 1-3 teach the subordination of woman to man?

1. If so, did God establish this subordination
 - a) before the fall, or
 - b) after the fall, or
 - c) both before and after the fall?
2. If Genesis 1-3 teaches such a subordination
 - a) is this a general subordination of woman to man as an unchangeable part of God's created order, or
 - b) is the subordination of woman to man only in certain God-given structures and relationship?

In discussing this matter of subordination in Genesis 13, scholars have also looked at the rest of Scripture. In fact, the teaching that God has placed men and women into an unchangeable order is supported mainly by the New Testament. So we need to look at what the New Testament says about (1) subordination or submission, and (2) man as 'head' of woman.

For study and discussion

1. Do you think that women in our society are seen and treated as being subordinate to men? Is the situation in the church the same or different? Are attitudes and behaviour changing?
2. Do you think that women are meant by God to be subordinate to men? If so, does this apply in all situations or only in certain specific situations?
3. Read Genesis 1:26 -3:34. Are there verses here that, in your opinion, indicate that women have been created by God in a subordinate position to men? In these verses do you see evidence of women and men being created by God with equal status?

CHAPTER SIX

Theological principles (2): 'Subordination' and 'submission' in the New Testament

The argument

Various New Testament passages call on wives to be subordinate to their husbands (Ephesians 5:22, 24; Colossians 3:18; Titus 2:5; 1 Peter 3:1,5). But this call is part of a larger New Testament pattern that asks all Christians to be in submission to others in the home, in society, and in the church. Wives are to be subject to husbands and husbands to wives (Ephesians 5:21); children to parents (Hebrews 12:9); slaves to masters (Titus 2:9; 1 Peter 2:18); citizens to rulers (Romans 13:1; 1 Peter 2:13,14); Christians to each other (Ephesians 5:21); Christians to church leaders (1 Corinthians 16:16; 1 Peter 5:5); and Christians to Christ (Ephesians 5:24).

Those who believe that the given orders or structures of creation express God's unchanging will argue as follows: The New Testament pattern of subordination (as in the examples given above) shows that the orders of creation are not abolished in the church, but rather confirmed. The verb 'be subordinate/submissive' suggests that those who are called to be subordinate are to behave in conformity to a certain given structure or 'order'. Thus the subordination of wives to husbands confirms the order of marriage; that of children to parents confirms the order of family; that of citizen to government confirms the order of the state; that of Christians to their leaders confirms the liturgical order of the church. This conforming to the 'orders' is not optional for Christians; it is the law of God (1 Corinthians 14:34, 37).

Evaluation

We should look at the argument concerning subordination in the light of the following points:

- The form of the Greek verb which is translated 'to be subordinate or submissive' does not necessarily in itself mean to act according to a God-ordained social order or a predetermined place within it. In the New Testament (except for Luke 10:17, 20), it means voluntarily placing oneself under someone else in the surrender of one's own will.
- When the apostle appeals for submission, he is talking about a new order in Christ that is not based on exercising power but on *servicing*. The apostle calls on those in dominant positions to act toward dependent persons in ways that go beyond any legal or moral requirements. So husbands are to give themselves in love to their wives, and serve their needs; fathers are not to goad their children to anger; and masters are to treat their slaves fairly, even to the point of serving them.
- The motivation for submissive behaviour is not the law, in the form of a given structure of creation, but the gospel of Christ's love in their lives. This is what life 'in the Lord' means. Submission to fellow Christians, which is submission to the Lord (Ephesians 5:22; 6:5), serves

as a witness to the gospel and its power to change lives (1 Peter 2:12; 3:1-6). Such behaviour comes as a result of Christ's work of salvation (Titus 2:9-14).

Which 'women'?

The traditional argument for the subordination of women concentrates on conclusions we can draw from the way women are to behave in worship. Seven texts speak of subordination in a church or worship setting: 1 Corinthians 14:32, 34; 16:16; 2 Corinthians 9:13; Galatians 2:5; Ephesians 5:21; 1 Timothy 2:11, 12. It is important to know whom the apostle is addressing in these texts.

In two of the seven passages (1 Corinthians 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:11, 12) the apostle is calling on 'women' or 'wives' (the Greek word used can mean either) to be subordinate or submissive. In both cases the context suggests that it is actually *wives* who are being addressed: see 1 Corinthians 14:35, and 1 Timothy 2:15. If we interpret these two texts literally we could then argue that it is married women who should not be ordained.

However, we should also consider these points:

- Paul seems to be addressing wives, rather than women generally, simply because he assumes that most if not all adult women are married.
- 1 Corinthians 11:3-12 is also relevant. Even though it speaks about the husband or man as being the 'head', rather than about subordination, it refers to women generally in worship, and not only wives. Verse 3 mentions wives, but the following verses in this passage seem to speak more generally about man and woman without reference to the marriage relationship.

It is helpful to look at the reasons Paul gives for the submissive behaviour of women or wives. In one case, it is what is 'fitting in the Lord' (Colossians 3:18). In two cases, it is a matter of faithful witness (Titus 2:5; 1 Peter 3:1). The apostle gives a reason based on the God-given order of creation in three passages: 1 Corinthians 14:34; 1 Timothy 2:11-13; and Ephesians 5:22, 23. The gospel provides the motivation for submissive service, but these three passages show that such submission is also to be followed within the male-female relationships as ordained by God.

For study and discussion

1. Read the following passages that speak about wives being subject to their husbands: Ephesians 5:22, 24; Colossians 3:18; Titus 2:5; 1 Peter 3:1, 5. How do you understand these passages? What do they mean in actual practice for us today?
2. Read the following passages that speak of how husbands should behave toward their wives, and of how Christians should relate to one another: Ephesians 5:21, 25, 28, 33; Colossians 3:19; Romans 12:10. Do these passages have an effect on your understanding of the earlier passages about wives being subject to their husbands?
3. Do 1 Corinthians 14:34, 35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15 appear to you to be referring to women in general or only to wives? Does it make a difference to our use of these passages in relation to the ordination of women?
4. Discuss the motivation for the submissive behaviour of women and wives in the light of the following passages: Ephesians 5:22, 23; Colossians 3:18; Titus 2:5; 1 Peter 3:1.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Theological principles (3): the meaning of 'head'

The relevant New Testament texts speak of

- God as the 'head' of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:3);
- Christ as the 'head' of all things, including all rule and authority, the church, and every man (Ephesians 1:22,23; 4:15,16; 5:23; Colossians 1:18; 2:10,19; 1 Corinthians 11:3);
- the husband as the 'head' of his wife (1 Corinthians 11:3, Ephesians 5:23).

The traditional understanding

Scholars have hotly disputed exactly what 'head' means in these passages. However, they agree that 1 Corinthians 11:3 is crucial for understanding the New Testament ideas of both 'head' and 'subordination'. On the one hand, Christ cannot be 'under' God the Father in any sense that denies his full divinity and oneness with the Father. So 'head' does not mean 'superiority' in the sense of one being inferior to another. On the other hand, during his earthly ministry, in what is called his 'state of humiliation', Jesus, true God and true man, freely and willingly subordinated and submitted himself to his heavenly Father – and, in fact, also to his earthly parents (Philippians 2:6-8; Luke 2:51).

Some scholars have said that 'head' means what comes first; it is what determines or leads. It is the power that begins things and determines how they are. According to the teaching that God has ordained a structure of creation that prescribes for women a subordinate role under the authority of men, 'head' is the male role of leadership and authority, corresponding to the female role of subordination and submission. So 'head' in 1 Corinthians 11:3 and Ephesians 5:23 confirms the teaching that God has assigns men and women distinctive functions in their relation to each other, and this structure was given in creation. The principle of male headship is valid for all time, even though a particular application (eg 1 Corinthians 11:2-16) may be only temporary.

Challenges to the traditional view

Since 1954 some scholars have attacked the assumption that 'head' means 'authority' when used of man or of Christ. (This view arose independently of the debate on the ordination of women.) The argument of such scholars is, briefly, that the word is used most commonly in the New Testament to mean 'source'. My physical head is the source of supply for my body; my father is head of the family because he is the one from whose seed I came; Adam is the head or source of the human race; and the head of a river is its source or starting point. Sometimes in Greek literature 'head' is used to mean a high-ranking person or leader, but such usage is rare.

Biblical scholars are able to find out through word studies the normal meaning of a word and an exceptional meaning. The question here is whether the New Testament use of the word 'head' reflects the idea of 'authority' or of 'source'. Often the more usual meaning of the word (that is, 'source') makes good sense, for example: Colossians 1:18; 2:10, 19; Ephesians 1:22; 4:15. But in two

texts, where the man or husband is spoken of as 'head', some scholars have made a case for the meaning 'authority':

1. In **1 Corinthians 11:3** Paul gives an ordered list or hierarchy: God is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of man, and man is the head of woman. The woman who wears a veil (or a certain headdress) when praying or prophesying acknowledges that she has been placed in a God-given order. If she accepts this order it will show in her behaviour, and only then will people recognise that she has authority to speak - possibly with a special sign of such authority on her physical head (verse 10). Headship implies authority, but the woman possesses no authority in her own right as woman.

Others question whether 'head' must mean primarily 'authority' in this passage. They argue that in fact the normal meaning of 'head' (that is, 'source') is still in place; the idea of authority has to be read into 1 Corinthians 11:3 from verse 10. Paul's statement here means that the woman does have 'authority' or 'power' on her head, and thus she has the authority to pray and prophesy in her own right. Certainly she stands in an order, but that order is not one of power but of origin.

Furthermore, God is the head of Christ in the sense that God the Father is the source of Christ's saving work as Messiah (but not of what he is as the Son). Christ is the head of man in the sense that he is the agent of the man's creation. The woman also owes her origin to Christ in this sense, but she occupies a special position since she was 'made from man' (verses 8, 9). Man is her source in the sense that Eve was created from Adam. Paul is thus using 'head' in the normal sense. Woman is to act as she was created - as woman. It becomes even clearer that Paul is not talking about one having authority over the other when he reminds us that every man now comes from woman, and that in the Lord men and women are dependent on each other (verses 11, 12).

2. In **Ephesians 5:23, 24**, the 'authority' concept is even clearer, since 'headship' is linked with subordination: 'The husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church'. 'Headship' is here seen as 'authority' since the wife is to be subject to her husband 'just as' the church is subject to Christ. One can understand how Christ is the head of the church in the sense of 'source', but how is the husband the source of his wife?

The argument of those who disagree runs along these lines: In Ephesians 5:23, 24 Paul is not talking about male-female relations in general, but of the relation of husband and wife within marriage. Paul gives this as an example of the mutual submission that all Christians are asked to show out of reverence for Christ (verse 21). According to Genesis 2:18-24, a wife is derived from her husband and made for him. So the husband is head because only in connection with him can the wife really become what she was made to be.

Paul makes this specific point: Christ is head because he gives his own life for the church, and similarly the husband is head because in the beginning he gave her the gift of life from himself (as Eve was formed out of Adam) and he gives her the ongoing gift of selfless love (Ephesians 5:25). Being 'head' here means sacrificial giving, and the husband is made responsible for such giving in a special way. 'Subjection' does not mean being subdued by authority, but willingly submitting to serving out of love. In this way the gospel transforms the traditional pattern for the husband-wife relationship, with its theme of subjection.

Scholars continue to debate what 'head' means in these passages. For some, the 'head' concept is a further proof that women must be subordinate to man within a God-given order of creation. Others recognise that Paul's statements about man being head recall his theology of creation, but they deny that he is talking about an order of authority. They rather stress that, for Paul, the head and body form a unity. Being head implies taking the initiative in service.

Finally, some scholars are convinced that 'head' primarily means 'source' or 'origin', but that it gains the added idea of authority. So if you are 'head' you do more than govern. You are actually the source and origin of what you govern.

What kind of authority?

If being head does imply authority, it is the authority to take the initiative in loving service. Among Christians there is to be no lording it over others (Luke 22:25, 26; Matthew 20:25; Mark 10:42). 'Elders' are not to boss those who belong to Christ's flock (1 Peter 5:3). In the same context, Peter calls on wives to be submissive to their husbands, just as Sarah showed the spirit of obedience by calling Abraham 'lord'. But as 'lord' the husband has the duty to honour his wife as a joint-heir of grace (3:5-7).

Husband and wife do not rule over their own bodies, but they are to serve each other (1 Corinthians 7:4). This mutual interdependence goes beyond sexual relationships (1 Corinthians 11:11, 12).

Although Paul refers to Genesis 3, he never quotes verse 16 (which says that the man will rule over the woman). He seems to avoid using the verb 'to lord over' when speaking of husband-wife relationships. That verb suggests a disordered relationship, not the ordered one of creation. By using 'head' instead of 'lord' for the husband, Paul is emphasising love, service, and the giving of honour, rather than rank, status, and authority.

What does the Lutheran Church of Australia say?

The Lutheran Church of Australia has said the following about the matters studied in chapters 5-7:

- 1. It is proper and useful to speak of the orders or structures of creation. These structures serve to define people's relationships and responsibilities to each other in the family, government, society, and church. So Lutherans, following Luther's Catechism, learnt to examine themselves in terms of whether they are father, mother, son, daughter, and so forth.*
- 2. The church is a community of those God has redeemed and renewed through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. People in this community have a new relationship with their Redeemer and with each other. This new creation of God's does not overthrow the old structures or orders, but works within the old creation, beginning to transform it.*

The old orders of creation, affected by sin, continue to the end, when Christ will return. At the same time, the new orders of the new creation run alongside the old. They influence relationships within the old structures, but they do not change the basic shape of the structures. So while Christ's redeeming activity in the present age renews people, it doesn't eliminate the distinctive identities of man and woman in their relations to each other, as given by God at creation. These distinctions should be reflected in the church.

- 3. 'Headship' is an order that endures; it is not done away with in the coming of God's kingdom. It implies a subordination of one to the other. Christ himself, in his relations to his Father and to the church, has shown us clearly what 'headship' and 'subordination' means. According to our Lord, headship exists for the sake of serving and building up others.*

In the Christian church, 'subordination' does not mean that one person dominates the other. Rather, within the God-given relationship between man and woman, each looks to the other's needs and both freely accept their position. Subordination exists for the order and unity of community.

- 4. God has established certain structures of creation, including the headship-subordination relationship between man and woman. However, by itself this doesn't necessarily mean that God forbids the ordination of women. But this given man-woman relationship becomes relevant because of Paul's command that women are not to teach but are to be silent in the*

churches. So basically the question is not one of ordination as such, but of who is to exercise authority in the church.

For study and discussion

1. Read Ephesians 1:22, 23; 4:5,16; 5:23; Colossians 1 :18; 2:10,19; 1 Corinthians 11:3. What do you think it means when Christ is spoken of as the 'head'?
2. Read 1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 5:23. What do you think it means when a husband is spoken of as the 'head' of his wife'?
3. In the Christian church, what does it mean for someone to have authority? (The following passages may be helpful: Matthew 20:25-27; 1 Peter 5:3; 3:5-7.)

CHAPTER EIGHT

Theological principles (4): Ordination, the pastor, and authority in the church

In all ministry, including the public ministry of word and sacrament, God's holy people are involved in serving others. The authority, power, and gifts to be able to carry out this ministry come from God alone.

The New Testament says that in the church there are many ministries (kinds of service) in which women can participate. But the question here is: Does the office of the ordained ministry (with its authority publicly to preach, teach, and administer the sacraments) by its very nature exclude women? In discussing this question we need to consider the following factors:

- People may have particular qualities and gifts suitable for ministry, but that alone does not give them the right to exercise the authority of word and sacrament. A person must still be called, chosen, elected, ordained (the Lutheran Confessions use these terms interchangeably).
- The public ministry is Christ's gift to the church, and not just an occupation that people choose to enter. So ordination is not a matter of human justice or equal rights, but of God-given calling, privilege, and authority.
- Pastors do not represent themselves, but Christ. The authority to represent Christ comes from God's word; it does not depend on any human qualities pastors have, such as particular moral or physical characteristics (and many Christians insist that the authority should not depend on gender, either). In other words, according to Lutheran teaching, pastoral authority is not linked intrinsically to the person of the pastor, but to the word of God; the Lord instituted the ministry of word and sacrament, and he calls people to it.

What does the Lutheran Church of Australia say?

The Lutheran Church of Australia has said that although the public office of the ministry is a service (like other forms of ministry in the church), it is also a special God-given structure or order (as the word 'ordination' suggests). God has assigned a subordinate role to women, and this limits the authority a woman may have in the church. In other words, it is true that the pastor's authority comes from God and not from the person of the pastor; but the Scriptures indicate that within certain orders women are not to have authority over men. This applies especially in the church, where obedience to the word of God should be a matter of course.

Some people argue that women in government positions, for example, are allowed to have authority over men, and so the same thing can happen in the church. But this argument is a confusion of the various orders; the functions and methods of the church and of society are different. It is in the church especially that God's will is to be done and seen to be done.

For study and discussion

1. What would you say to a woman friend who says: 'I feel that God has given me special gifts for ministry that I should use by becoming a pastor'?
2. What would you say to the same woman friend when she says: 'It a great injustice and a denial of human rights that I am not allowed to be a pastor'?
3. What does it mean that the authority of a pastor to represent Christ is not linked to the person but to the word of God?

If this statement is true, should the church take into account whether a person is male or female when making decisions about candidates for ordination? If so, why?

CHAPTER NINE

The arguments for and against: A summary

Below is an outline of the arguments for and against the ordination of women. This summary is provided as a kind of conclusion to the study, so that readers can go back over the material that has been studied, clarify their own thinking on the matter, and look again at the points that support or undermine their view.

The argument in favour

Those who are convinced that women do have a place in the public ministry of the church maintain that the subordination of women is a result of the fall of humanity into sin. We must read the New Testament commands for the submission of women in worship in the light of specific situations in the early church.

Only a legalistic reading of these texts leads to the conclusion that there is an unchangeable created order that lays down fixed male-female relationships. The church today needs to structure its public ministry in such a way that the cause of the gospel is not impeded, but promoted. It is the gospel itself that provides the authority of the public office. The authority of the public ministry does not come from the person of the pastor, but from God.

So it is not a question of women's rights, but of affirming the gifts God has given to all his people, male and female. It is strange that women may take leading positions in the world, but not in the church, for if there is one place where the freedom of the gospel should rule, it is in the church. If the argument in favour of subordination is valid, then the church should protest against women assuming positions of leadership in government and business.

The tradition of a male clergy is a long one. The Spirit preserves tradition; but the Spirit also leads the church to change in the light of the gospel. Tradition and gospel should not be in conflict. A tradition competes with the gospel if, by that tradition, persons are alienated from the gospel rather than drawn to it.

Summary The acceptance of women's ordination as God's will rests on three pillars:

1. the need to interpret Scripture from its heart and centre, the gospel, and to draw lessons from the gospel;
2. the understanding of the public ministry and its authority as being based on the gospel; and
3. the need to understand particular biblical statements on the role of women in the church within a historical framework and from a historical perspective.

The argument against

Those who are convinced that it is not God's will that women have a place in the public ministry of the church maintain that the function that God assigned to women does not come from the gospel; rather, it is based on the created order and the commands given through the apostles. This is not an order that came after the fall, but one that God established before the fall. It is the Creator's gracious will that within orders such as marriage and public worship man functions as the head, and the woman maintains a subordinate position. The fall only perverts this order, so that leadership can turn into domination.

The coming of Christ does not change the order. While Jesus gives new dignity to women, he affirms the order in calling only male apostles. Paul, likewise, confirms the order in speaking of the headship of man, and calling on women to be subordinate. This order is actually an expression of God's good and gracious will. His order not only serves to preserve human society; it also serves the spread of the gospel.

Summary The rejection of women's ordination rests on three main pillars:

1. the need clearly to distinguish between law and gospel;
2. the explicit teaching of Scripture that women are not to take the lead in worship; and
3. the development of a consistent theological principle that undergirds this teaching: the subordinate position of women in the church according to creation, a position that is not changed in this life by the work of redemption.

For study and discussion

1. What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the argument in favour of the ordination of women?
2. What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the argument against the ordination of women?
3. What effect has this study had on your thinking?
Has it left you as confused as you were before? Has it made you more confused?
Has it clarified some things for you?
Has it strengthened your original attitudes?
Has it led you to modify or change your ideas?

In Conclusion

The material that has been presented in this study does not cover all aspects of this topic, but has been selective. In the opinion of the Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations, it adequately represents the depth and breadth of the discussion.

The Commission commends this study to the members of the Lutheran Church of Australia (and to others who may be interested) in the hope and prayer that it will lead people to study God's word and to consider the theological issues involved in the question of calling women into the public office of the church.

Appendix A gives suggestions for further reading. Appendix B gives the present Rite of Ordination used in the Lutheran Church of Australia. Although the discussion is not about the rite but about the theology of ordained ministry, the rite does reflect a theological understanding.

May the blessing of God rest upon all who study his word and seek to know his will regarding the role of women in the public ministry of the church.

Appendix A

For further reading

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1963 *The Pastoral Epistles* (Black's NT Commentaries), A & C Black, London.

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1985 *Women in the Church: Scriptural Principles and Ecclesial Practice*, A report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, St Louis.

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1987 *Women, Authority and the Bible: An Evangelical Breakthrough in the Biblical Debate*, Marshall Pickering, London.

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Uniting Church of Australia

Appendix B

The Rite of Ordination of the Lutheran Church of Australia

The following rite occurs within the liturgy.

The ordinand is presented by a representative of the church, who says:

..... *full name*, is here presented for ordination into the public ministry of word and sacrament. He has been prepared, examined, and approved for this work, and has been called to be a pastor of the Lutheran Church of Australia.

The president or an assistant addresses the ordinand:

M. According to apostolic practice you are now to be ordained to the office of the public ministry by the laying on of hands and by prayer. Our Lord Jesus Christ says: 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you. Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.' (John 20:21-23)

And again: 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.' (Matt 28:18-20)

St Paul writes: 'I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said: "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.' (1 Cor 11:23-26)

The minister questions the ordinand:

M. Before almighty God, to whom you must give account, and in the presence of this congregation, I ask: Do you assume this office, believing that the Lord has called you through his church to the ministry of word and sacrament?

R. I do, with the help of God.

M. Do you believe and accept without reservation the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as a whole and in all their parts, as the divinely inspired, written, and inerrant word of God, and as the only infallible source and norm for all matters of faith, doctrine, and life.

R. I do, with the help of God.

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M. Do you acknowledge and accept as true expositions of the word of God and as your own confession of faith all the symbolical writings of the evangelical Lutheran church contained in the Book of Concord of 1580?

R. I do, with the help of God.

M. Do you intend to carry out the duties of your ministry faithfully in accordance with the holy Scriptures and the Confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church, and to abide by the regulations in force among us?

R. I do, with the help of God.

M. Do you intend to be diligent in the study of the Scriptures and in the use of the sacraments; to pray for God's people and nourish them with the gospel; and to lead them by your own example in faithful service and holy living?

R. I do, with the help of God.

M. Almighty God, who has given you the will to do these things, graciously give you the strength and compassion to perform them.

C. Amen.

The ordinand kneels. The minister extends his hands toward the ordinand and says:

M. Eternal God, through your Son, Jesus Christ, pour out your Holy Spirit on name and Fill him with the gifts of grace for his ministry to your people.

C. Amen.

The minister lays both hands on the head of the ordinand. Other clergy may add their right hands. The minister speaks the formula of ordination:

M. By the authority which our Lord Jesus Christ has given to his church, I ordain and consecrate you, name, to the holy office of the public ministry, in the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit.

The newly ordained pastor may remain kneeling as he is invested with the stole.

M. Receive this stole as a mark of the ministry which you have by the mercy of God.

The newly ordained pastor stands; the minister raises his right hand as he says:

M. I hereby declare you to be a pastor of the Lutheran Church of Australia.

The assisting clergy in turn greet the newly ordained pastor. The following passages are suitable greetings:

Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. (1 Tim 6:11, 12)

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he has bought with his own blood. (Acts 20:28)

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers -not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. (1 Peter 5:2-4)

This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. (1 Cor 4:1, 2)

Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant -not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (2 Cor 3:4-6)

The minister addresses this charge to the newly ordained pastor:

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M. Since you have this ministry by the mercy of God, care for God's people, bear their burdens, and do not betray their confidence. Give and receive comfort as you serve within the church. So discipline yourself in life and teaching that you give no offence. And be confident, for God has called you, and your labour in the Lord will not be in vain.

The newly ordained pastor may kneel for the blessing.

M. The God of peace who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in you that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory now and forever.

C. Amen.

The minister presents the newly ordained pastor to the congregation.

M. As God's people, receive *name*..... as an ambassador of Jesus Christ. He has Christ's authority to serve his people by proclaiming the word and administering the sacraments.

The congregation may offer acclamation with applause.

The service continues.