

The attack on the **sedes doctrinae** by the wholeness of Scripture.

The theologians of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia wrote the Theses of Agreement as the doctrinal foundation for the union of the two churches in the Lutheran Church of Australia. This document teaches that the norm of Scripture (known as the **analogia fidei**) that must establish articles of faith is the **sedes doctrinae**. This is a doctrinal methodology used by Luther himself (most notably against Zwingli) that establishes an article of faith by concentrating on those clear passages of Scripture that are the foundation or seat (**sedes**) of the doctrine under discussion, and not on a heterogeneous collection of passages scattered throughout 'the whole of Scripture'. The Theses of Agreement is using the principle of the **sedes doctrinae** when it quotes the two passages, 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2. Opponents of the **sedes doctrinae** ridicule this method as simplistic 'proof-texting'. These opponents claim that they have a superior method, the so-called 'wholeness of Scripture' (**das Schriftganze**) method. This way of defining doctrine boasts that it takes into account the fullness of Scripture instead of looking at a mere one or two texts. The false teacher, Schleiermacher, is the father of this method, and it was extensively used by the nineteenth century exegete, von Hofmann. Advocates of this method argue something like the following:

If we consider the totality of Scripture, we put together a core theology (sometimes called the **analogia fidei**, or **regula fidei**, the rule or canon of faith). It is the theologian with his 'greater' insight into Scripture who is able to grasp the harmonious whole of teachings in Scripture, and these teachings then stand like a watchman over the exegesis of individual texts. So, for example, when the theologians consider God's will for the office of the public ministry, they range over the 'whole of Scripture' and they find passages that show that women were prophets and judges - Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, etc. (However, they ignore the fact that God called men only to be priests in the OT ministry.) They then focus on passages showing that God is no distinguisher of persons (e.g. Galatians 3). They combine these findings with the doctrine of salvation and with God's good and universal will for the preaching of the Gospel (John 3.16 and Matthew 28), and now, claiming they have an extensive insight into God's mind, they condense their search in an article of faith that asserts that God in love calls both men and women without distinction to be public proclaimers of his Word. This teaching, they say, is now truly Scriptural because, through the eclectic gathering of texts, it encompasses the 'whole of Scripture' and captures the tenor of God's will with regard to the calling of his servants. Only now do they look at the texts 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 (see paragraph 7 of *The Case for the Ordination of Women*¹), and they say that the prohibition of women in these texts destroys the harmony in the 'superior' teaching that they have extracted from the 'wholeness of Scripture'. In order to remove the offensiveness of these two texts, they have to find an interpretation of the texts that brings them into line with their 'higher' theology of the

¹ Located at <http://owl.lca.org.au> – [Resources](#) – *14 of the best documents published in the LCA on the topic – The case for the ordination of women – a summary (2006)*.

‘wholeness of Scripture’. By using the historical-critical method, 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 are then interpreted to show that Paul only means ‘prohibit’ in a limited sense to fit in with the social conventions of the Roman world of that time. In this way the contradiction is removed through the watchman role of the theology of the ‘wholeness of Scripture’.

This is the kind of thinking that lies behind the ‘Scripture and theology’ statement in the proposal that was brought to Synod².

The real point of controversy is not over the ordination of women, but rather the clash of these two ways of establishing articles of faith (**sedes doctrinae** over against ‘wholeness of Scripture’). This controversy has troubled the Lutheran Church for over a hundred years, especially in America; it was raised here also in Australia. In America it was the reason for calling a number of free conferences before World War I, although the issue that sparked the debate was not the ordination of women but the doctrine of election. The theologians of the Synodical Conference contended for the **sedes doctrinae** against the ‘wholeness of Scripture’. Like them, we insist that articles of faith must be found in those clear passages that deal expressly with the particular doctrine under discussion. If one contrives a superior theology out of the ‘wholeness of Scripture’ that acts as a judge over the clear passages, this cancels out the Sola Scriptura; it is an imposition of human reason to make troublesome texts conform to a pre-conceived theology.

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² See the reference that generated these words in the report of the Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations (page 1, second last paragraph), located at <http://owl.lca.org.au> – [Resources](#) – 14 of the best documents published in the LCA on the topic – CTICR Final Report on the Ordination of Women: 2000. This phrase was later used in formulation of a Synodical proposal.