

## A Layperson's reflections on the Ordination of Women

In coming to terms with the subject as a lay person, I decided to start with the Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions Section VI, because I presumed that if women were to be allowed to be ordained, this section would need to be reviewed and a new version adopted. Reading these statements, I noticed that each one was followed by Bible verses which are meant to support the statement. My contribution to the discussion comes from the approach I would adopt as a member of my Home Bible Study Group. In our studies, we start with the bible and see what God might be telling us. So my system was: to look at the bible verses referred to in each paragraph, to see what the theme was, and then to read back at the statement which these verses were to support. And these are my observations:

1. The gospel verses refer to Jesus' commission of his disciples for the work they would have to do when he was no longer with them. In the Corinthian verses, Paul describes his own ministry and that of anyone who "plants and waters". The statement makes a doctrinal point about the means of grace including the sacraments, but the bible verses make no reference at all to Holy Communion and only one to Baptism. The verses don't actually support the statement that the "ministry is an office instituted by Christ", just that the disciples and the then apostles were appointed by Christ.
2. 2 Corinthians is the outstanding verse to me: we all have a ministry of reconciliation, because we have all been reconciled to God by Christ. In Acts 20, the elders are said to have been appointed by God, just as in Ephesians leadership gifts of various kinds were given by God, but again, the statement does not reflect or summarise the verses. No "office of the ministry" is "instituted", although if it were, it would obviously be by God, seeing as all these other roles and gifts are bestowed by him.
3. These verses again convey Jesus' commission to his disciples, specifically Peter, who was to be the founder of the church. Romans applies to all people "who call on the name of the Lord", but goes on to state the importance of the preachers whose message brings them to Christ. The theme is the importance of preaching and making disciples through Baptism. No reference is made to Holy Communion. Apart from that, the statement would seem to reflect the bible verses pretty well.
4. These verses refer to the fact that Christians are a "royal priesthood", called to "declare God's wonderful gifts". One of those gifts was the Office of the Keys, given to the disciples and also apparently to Jesus' wider audience (there was at least one child in the crowd). Many other gifts are mentioned. The statement reflects the bible verses, but is obviously making a subtle point about distinguishing the office of the ministry from the various offices that we all might hold as given by God individually.
5. These verses exhort leaders to be humble. If there is such a thing as "the office of the ministry" those ministers would obviously be included in these exhortations.
6. These verses are about job delineations. Elders and apostles were to concentrate on the spiritual work, and others to do the charity work. There are certain personal qualities required of bishops and elders. The statement refers to the sacraments, but administering sacraments is never referred to in the texts.
7. Christian leaders' personal qualities are described, their job is summarised, and interestingly, where there was a choice between potential leaders, it was God who made the call after the

people prayed about it. The statement refers to qualified people and a calling to an office, which is fine.

8. The statement describes ordination as a "rite". If the rite does not contradict scripture that's fine, and these verses seem to neither forbid nor require such a rite.
9. The apostles appointed others to jobs, and I guess we can follow their example, as the statement kindly allows us to do.
10. The statement speaks of a "liberty and authority" which the verses don't seem to contradict.
11. These verses would certainly prevent a woman from being part of "the office of public ministry". They would also preclude her from many current LCA practices, including reading from the Bible during church services and from holding any other offices that involved public speaking. They would not preclude her from administering the sacraments as these could be done in silence if a man was present to "say the words".

In Summary, the bible verses speak much of leadership as a gift granted by God and involving commands given by God. There are all kinds of leadership and terms given to leadership, ranging from Bishop to elder to teacher to interpreter of tongues, and it is implied that preaching of the word is the primary function of a special kind of leader. But to synthesise these verses into a doctrine of "The Office of Ministry" seems to be reading way too much into it. And administration of the sacraments, especially Holy Communion, seems to be just about absent altogether. As far as the topic of The Ordination of Women is concerned, the bible verses would seem to be saying the following:

1. God ordains his people to do all kinds of things. He grants gifts to each of us as he wills. There is no hint in any verse that he ordains his people to do anything on the basis of their gender.
2. The verses in Statement 11 are a big problem, or at least would be if God ordained a woman to a role which we would think involved speaking in church. It seems that these verses are a real anomaly and perhaps need to be understood in a different way lest they contradict the general tenor of the rest of the verses.

John Lutze from St. Luke's Nambour Qld.