

Why does the LCA ordain men only? A Summary

1. In dealing with practical doctrinal matters such as the ordination of women the Lutheran Church has distinguished between two issues: those things that Christ and his apostles have commanded or forbidden and those things that are neither commanded nor forbidden by God's word. The divinely instituted things, like baptism, have to do with God's delivery of his gifts to us in the church. The things that have been neither commanded nor forbidden are permitted, provided that they promote the gospel and are consistent with what God has ordained. Adherence to them, however, should not be made compulsory, for the conscience can only be bound by God's word.
2. Thus as the LCA debates whether it may ordain women it should consider three things.
 - Is it commanded?
 - Is it forbidden?
 - Is it neither commanded nor forbidden?If it is either commanded or forbidden by Christ and his apostles, that should settle the matter. If it is neither commanded nor forbidden, then the LCA may permit the ordination of women.
3. We all agree that Christ has instituted the ministry of word and sacraments by handing on the responsibility for their administration to his apostles and their successors (*Augsburg Confession* 5; *Theses of Agreement* VI, 1-2, 6). We also all agree that Christ has not explicitly commanded women to be ministers of the gospel. The first question for consideration at this convention is whether he and his apostles have forbidden it or not.
4. We already have our public teaching on that. From its inception the LCA has held that even 'though women prophets were used by the Spirit of God in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament, 1 Cor 14:34-35 and 1 Tim 2:11-14 forbid a woman from being called into the office of the public ministry.' We teach that this is an 'apostolic rule' that 'is binding on all Christendom' (*Theses of Agreement* VI, 11).
5. Even though that rule has been challenged in every possible way over the last fifty years, it still stands. The Lutheran Church of Australia has no authority to ordain women. Christ has given it the authority to ordain men as ministers of the gospel. But not women. He has, in fact, forbidden it.

The prohibition of the ordination of women by Christ and his apostles

6. Both Jesus and his apostles were men. A number of passages in the New Testament show that in the apostolic age the ministers of the gospel were also men. When the eleven apostles chose a replacement for Judas, it 'had' to be a 'man' (Acts 1:21). They were not free to consider Mary the mother of Jesus or any of the other women who had followed Jesus. In his profile of a pastor in 1 Tim 3:2 and Tit 1:6 Paul likewise restricts consideration to suitable men who, if married, are to be 'a husband of one wife.' Yet, even though these provide important precedents, the case against the ordination of women is based on the prohibitions in 1 Cor 14:33b-38 and 1 Tim 2:11-15.
7. In 1 Cor 14:34 Paul insists that 'women are not allowed to speak in the churches.' This prohibition is not Paul's personal opinion; it is the Lord's command (14:37). Since the Lord does not allow it, neither does Paul. Here, as in 11:18, 14:19, and 14:28, 'church' means the congregation assembled to hear God's word and receive Christ's body and blood. The meaning of speaking in the churches is clarified by the context. Paul distinguishes this kind of speaking from 'speaking in tongues' (14:27, 28) and the 'speaking' of prophecy (14:29, 30). In 14:36 he identifies it with the proclamation of God's word which originated with Christ and was entrusted to the apostles and their successors. In the divine service women, like all unordained men, should not speak God's word but they should receive it in silence, without interrupting and questioning the speaker.
8. Paul repeats this prohibition in his instruction to Timothy for fixing up the problems of the church in Ephesus. After his assertion in 1 Tim 2:1-10 that both men and women are to intercede for all people, he states that women should be disciples as well, students who listen to God's teaching and submit to it (2:11). Yet even though they are to be students of God's word, they are not allowed to become teachers (2:12). He illustrates this point by using the story of Eve as a warning. Since Adam was created first as her head and teacher, she was deceived because she ceased to be a student of God's word and transgressed when she became Adam's teacher (2:13, 14). Adam sinned by disobeying God's command and following her teaching. Once again context clarifies what Paul means by 'teaching.' He connects teaching by a woman with her exercise of 'authority over a man.' As in this

whole letter, teaching here is a technical term for the exposition and application of God's word (1 Tim 2:8; 4:6, 11, 13, 16; 5:16; 6:1, 2, 3).

9. Thus in these two passages Paul forbids the appointment of women as pastors. This is not just his own opinion; it is, he claims, the Lord's command. This prohibition is confirmed by Christ's own precedent in choosing men as apostles and the precedent of the apostles in choosing Matthias to replace Judas and in appointing men as presbyters. And that has been the unanimous teaching of the whole church until modern times.

The extent of this prohibition

10. The two passages that prohibit the ordination of women show that this was not just a local measure for the troublesome congregations in Corinth and Ephesus. Paul claims that this was the practice 'in all the churches of the saints' (1 Cor 14:33). It is therefore an ecumenical rule rather than a piece of pastoral advice to deal with a local problem. This is confirmed by his assertion that his charge to Timothy in 1 Tim 2:1-4:16, which includes his rejection of women as teachers, sets out what 'must' be done not only in Ephesus, but also 'in God's household, the church of the living God' (3:15). In 1 Cor 14:38 Paul warns that those who reject the Lord's command that women should not be speakers in the church will not have their ministry recognised by God (see also 1 Cor 3:10-15). At the least, this warning could unsettle the certainty and assurance of the church about the administration of word and sacrament.

The explanation of this prohibition

11. Even though Paul bases his rejection of the ordination of women on the Lord's command, he explains that command by recalling the priority of Adam over Eve and her subordination to Adam.
12. In 1 Cor 14:34 Paul says that God's law teaches the silence of women as they listen to his word. By the law he means the book of Genesis. He elaborates this brief remark in 1 Tim 2:13-14 by speaking about God's creation of Adam before Eve and Eve's transgression. God created Adam first and instructed him about eating of life-sustaining fruit from the trees in the garden (Gen 2:15-17). But Eve did not listen to her husband. She sinned by listening to Satan rather than God's word as taught by her husband and by taking over his role as a teacher and interpreter of God's word (Gen 3:1-7). Paul therefore implies that if women teach in the church this disrupts God's order for the transmission and reception of spiritual nourishment and life from him.
13. In 1 Cor 14:34 Paul also claims that the law teaches women to 'be subordinate.' He therefore draws a parallel between the subordination of Eve to Adam and the subordination of women to their pastors. In 1 Tim 2:11 he repeats this point by insisting that as students of God's word women should learn with 'complete subordination.' This explanation must be understood in the light of the extensive teaching on subordination in the New Testament. It presupposes that God has established certain 'orders' for the communal life of people on earth in which all people are subordinate to those whom God has set over them as their heads. One such 'order' is for the church (1 Cor 14:33, 40). In it Christ is the head and pastors are heads under him. All women, like all unordained men, have their place in that order as hearers who are subordinate to Christ and listen to those who are his spokesmen. This order of headship and subordination is not a chain of command but a means for transmitting and receiving his blessings. The appointment of women as pastors disturbs that divinely given order in the church.

Conclusion

14. The church can only do what Christ has given it to do. It has no mandate from Christ to ordain women. If the LCA sanctioned the ordination of women, it would act apart from Christ and the one holy catholic and apostolic church. It could therefore not be sure that God approved of women as pastors and supports them with his Spirit. This alone would make for deep uncertainty about the validity of their ministry in the church and the possibility of a bad conscience for them and those who received their ministry. If the LCA ordained women, it would require them to serve without the assurance of God's support. This is such a serious matter that the burden of proof rests on those who wish to change the teaching of the church.
15. In fact, both Christ and Paul have forbidden the appointment of women as teachers in the divine service. This means that the ordination of women is not an open question.
16. In sum: the LCA has no authority to ordain women.

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