**Scripture**

**alone**

Fifty eight years ago, as a Seminarian, I wrote my second sermon on the words from Acts 17:11

*The Bereans were more noble than those at Thessalonica – they were very eager to receive the word, and every day they studied the Scriptures to see if those things were so.*

Since then I have heard people speak many opinions on Christianity. However, I will follow the example of the Bereans and check what they are saying is scriptural or merely human opinions. I strongly hold the Lutheran statement of ‘***Scripture alone’*** as a guide in teaching and practice. This is my guideline as I look at a proposal before the Lutheran Church of Australia for the ordination of both female and male members.

Sadly, as I read that proposal, there is much human conjecture and incorrect interpretation and application of Scripture. Presented are six points to recommend that the LCA ordain females.

* Point 1 speaks of the uniqueness of the Apostles
* Points 2-3 cite Bible passages showing the involvement of women in the early church. The claim then is then made that these passages would truly endorse the ordination of females.
* Points 4-5 quote texts as to why women should be ordained.

 *(For me there is one vital text which is not cited.)*

* Point 6 cites Lutheran doctrinal foundations.

They all miss the teaching of the ‘***priesthood of all believers’*** as cited in 1 Peter 2:9

*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people who are his own, that you may tell others about the wonderful deeds of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.*

There is the confused mixing of the privilege given to all believers to share the Gospel with the Office of the public ministry.

**1 Women and men in the public office continue the ministry of the apostles.**

* ***However, the foundational role of the apostles was unique.***

The uniqueness of the apostles was not in the office they held, but in the message they were commissioned to share.

*I have given you all authority in heaven and earth. God, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples; baptise them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and teach them to observe them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you to the end of the age.* Matthew 28:19-20

Their message was indeed unique. There are only two faiths in the world. One being that a person must earn their right to the bliss of eternity. The other, it is a completely free gift, undeserved, graciously bestowed. This is why we as Lutherans beside the ‘***Scripture alone’*** hold to **‘*grace alone****’*, ‘***Christ alone’***. We have the scriptural words of Jesus regarding the free gift of salvation.

*I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except by me*. John 14:6

You do not need to be a member of the public office of the ordained ministry, but merely be one of the ‘**communion of saints’** to continue the ministry of the apostles. Point 1 hardly advocates the ordination of women but extolls the priesthood of all believers, which the LCA needs to more diligently promote.

**2. Women as disciples.**

* ***Jesus included women together with men in the wider circle of disciples who followed him throughout his ministry, were served him and in turn served him.***

They all have become members of the ‘*priesthood of believers’*. A disciple is an adherent who accepts the instruction given by Jesus and then in faith makes that teaching the rule for a Christlike life and living.

Can one really make a case for female ordination on the following?

* ***When Jesus predicted his impending death and resurrection to the disciples in private, women disciples were among them***.

These texts cited merely enhances the women’s position in the ‘*priesthood of all believers’.* So now they are better equipped to carry out a role in the Kingdom of God.

***Mary sat at the feet of Jesus and listened to his teaching*** Luke 10:39

 Did this qualify Mary to be ordained? She had some private tuition. Then what Mary was doing, all believers should do. Sit at the feet of Jesus. Draw strength from ***‘Scripture alone’ ‘Christ alone’***.

***One thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her.*** Luke 10.42

**3. Ministries of women in the New Testament era.**

Were these ministries conducted in the context of the **‘priesthood of all believers’** or in a church worship setting?

* ***Women served as prophets in Corinth and in Caesarea by the sea.***

Is to be a prophet identical to being a priest? In the Old Testament there were women prophets but they were never priests. Only members of the tribe of Levi could be priests. Appoint your own priests at your peril as the ten northern tribes discovered. 1 Kings 12:31

* ***Phoebe was a deacon (minister) of the church at Cenchreae.***

Can you equate the role of deacon with that of a leader of a congregation? A distinction is made in 1 Timothy 3:1ff. Verses 1-8 speak of the leader of congregational worship which is a different role of a deacon - a church helper. This has been a practice for 2000 years.

* ***Junia was prominent among the apostles***

Does the Greek word ‘‘specifically say she was an apostle or merely known among the apostles?

While all the mention of the ministries of women in the New Testament is not in dispute, the conclusion drawn is somewhat dubious. Were they merely fulfilling the role of being part of the priesthood of all believers?

At the General Pastor’s Conference we were presented with a good paper on “Church Planting”. However ought not every congregation in the Lutheran Church Australia be a Church Planting congregation? All members exercising their privileged role as people of the **‘priesthood of all believers’**.

**4. 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and 1 Corinthians 14:33b-37**

* ***This teaching was consistent with the practice of the synagogue, and was necessary for the time being to avoid offence, especially to Jewish Christians.***

If Paul did not want to give offence to Jewish Christians how are we to read his action towards Peter (Galatians 2:11-14) when Peter caved in to the opinions of the Jewish believers who wanted to enforce that the Gentile believers be circumcised?

Paul continued to write that Jews and Gentiles are saved both by faith. Is salvation by the Law or by faith?

*It is through faith that all of you are God’s sons in union with Christ Jesus*. Galatians 3:26

So much for not giving offence!

Why the omission of 1 Timothy 3:1-8? Is it because it is a variance with their propositions in the passages of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and 1 Corinthians 14:33b-37?

**5. Galatians 3:26-28**

* ***The new creation in Christ transcends and transforms any barriers built by humans which prohibit the ordination of women.***

It is true that through baptism a new unity exists in believers so they are all equal in the sight of God. However such equality does not exist within their social status. For example in Philemon you read that Philemon and his slave Onesimus are truly one as brothers in Christ. However their social status remains the same as master and slave.

In reading Ephesians 5:21-6:1 Paul points out differences between husbands and wives, parents and children, and masters and slaves. Though equal in the sight of God, yet in each group there are barriers and differences with the other.

**6. Lutheran doctrinal foundations**

* ***The overriding concern of the Augsburg Confession is that the gospel of God’s grace and forgiveness in Christ remain central of the teaching and practice of the church.***
* ***This is not dependant on the preacher, whether male or female, but on God’s promise (Isa 55:11) and the power of his Spirit.***

This is the basic principal of the ‘**communion of saints’** to uphold. It is ***Scripture alone, Christ alone, Grace alone, Faith alone.***

**My conclusion**

Having listened to the arguments for the ordination of females I am saddened that:-

* Inferences have been made based upon assumptions.
* Bible passages misinterpreted.
* 1 Timothy 3:1-8 is not cited in the whole document. In that passage we have the qualification for a pastorate spelled out.

Unfortunately the document for the ordination of both women and men does not pass the test of Acts 17:11.

**Church divisiveness**

The DNA of the Lutheran Church indicates division.

* The early Lutherans came in 1838 to Australia because they could not tolerate the Union Church imposed upon them by the King of Prussia.
* In 1846 Chiliasm caused a split between Kavel and Fritsche?

With respect to female ordination supposedly not being church divisive since it is not a ‘core doctrine’, yet is it perhaps on the same level as Chiliasm?

* How we to read what are in the Theses of Agreement Article 1 point 4 section (a)?

*We believe that where differences in teaching and practice exist or arise between Churches uniting, these differences are to be removed by willingly submitting to the authority of the Word of God. Where a difference in teaching or practice is a departure from the doctrine of the Bible, such differences cannot be tolerated, but must be pointed out as error, on the basis of clear passages of Holy Writ; and if error is persisted in, in spite of instruction, warning and earnest witness, it must at last lead to a separation.*

***So the question is ‘do we uphold ‘Scripture alone’?***

**Donald W Heyne**

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