

Scripture and the Exclusion of Women from the Pastorate (I)

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The essay which is published here is a further contribution by this journal to the ongoing efforts being made in the Lutheran Church of Australia [LCA] to re-examine the grounds for its teaching on the ordination of women (cf vol 28, no 3, pp 129-134).

Dr Kleinig's essay is a summary of a number of presentations which he made in response to requests from students at Luther Campus that he share with them his understanding of the theological and biblical bases for the present teaching and practice of the LCA.

— Editor

All too quickly one denomination after another has overturned the traditional teaching on the exclusion of women from the apostolic ministry of the Word. In most cases this has happened with little theological debate. The scriptural texts which have in the past been taken to establish this teaching have been dismissed as obscure or secondary or irrelevant. The traditional theological rationale has been rejected as untenable and sexist. This momentous innovation has been embraced by whole denominations, even though it lacks any clear dominical mandate or even an agreed theological rationale. As in the early church, the traditional teaching has been assailed by modern Marcionites operating with the gospel as a critical principle, modern gnostics denying the divinely created order, and modern Montanists basing their authority on spiritual giftedness.

In the face of these developments and the pressure to ordain women in the Lutheran Church of Australia I propose to examine the scriptural foundations for the traditional position. In the process I want to remove from the traditional position any unwarranted assumptions and overinflated conclusions. My hope is that we will eventually decide the question of the ordination of women exegetically and theologically rather than culturally and politically.

1. PRESUPPOSITIONS

a. Hermeneutical Presuppositions

The case for an exclusively male pastorate rests on certain basic presuppositions about the authority of the Holy Scriptures and its interpretation, as well as about the institution and nature of the public ministry. Since Australian Lutherans, as far as I can gather, largely agree on these, I shall not spell them out in any detail; that has been done elsewhere (Prenter, Gärtner, Kleinig).

- 1) The Holy Scriptures are the inspired, authoritative word of the Triune God. As such they are normative for the church in its preaching and in its formulation of doctrine. Since they record God's final and complete revelation to us in Christ, there can be no new revelation to the church about the ordination of women either from history or from what appear to be prophetic movements in the church. Cultural movements such as feminism do not produce new doctrines, but they can lead the church, as guided by the Holy Spirit, to a fuller understanding of that doctrine already given by Christ in the Holy Scriptures.
- 2) The two passages which traditionally have been used to exclude women from the pastorate, 1 Cor 14:34-35 and 1 Tim 2:11-15, are apostolic and canonical. This has indeed been questioned, but, for want of space, I shall merely assert that I do not accept the arguments for the interpolation of 1 Cor 14:34-35 (see Fee: 699-705; Hauke: 365-372, 390-394; Wire: 149-152) and against the apostolic authority of 1 Timothy.
- 3) Doctrine is to be established from those passages in the Holy Scriptures which clearly and explicitly deal with the subject matter of that doctrine, that is, the *sedes doctrinae*. If we wish to resolve any controversy theologically, we must then first identify these foundational texts. They should be statements or directives by Christ and his apostles rather than scriptural precedents which can, however, be used to elucidate the sense of those foundational texts.
- 4) Deductions from general theological principles, such as the universality of grace or the equality of the sexes before God or even the gospel itself (see Habel and Wurst), cannot be used to override and discount the content of a particular passage, such as 1 Cor 14:33^b-38. Thus, for example, we do not derive our teaching on the Lord's Supper from the doctrine of justification by grace but from the words of Christ which institute and interpret it.
- 5) Even though all commandments in the Scriptures are the word of God, they are not all equally applicable. Christ's commands to his apostles, such as his instructions to celebrate the sacrament in remembrance of him (Luke 22:19), are universally applicable for the church. When an apostle gives a directive, he usually indicates by what authority he speaks and to whom it applies. In determining the weight of a command, such as the command for silence in 1 Cor 14:34, we must therefore establish by what authority the

apostle is speaking as well as to whom that command extends. However, even this endeavour must presuppose a willingness to submit to the authority of Scripture.

b. Theological Presuppositions about the Ministry of Word and Sacrament

Before we can settle who may be ordained, we must first establish the origin, nature, and function of the ministry which is conferred by ordination. While it is true that some evangelicals exclude women from positions of leadership in the church on the principle of universal male leadership of men over women in the order of creation, the traditional orthodox position has rested on the following presuppositions about the public ministry of word and sacrament:

- 1) Christ did not just give his word and sacraments to the church through the apostles, but he also simultaneously instituted the ministry for their administration. The public ministry of word and sacrament is apostolic in origin and character. It has not been invented by the church nor arranged by it to suit its particular social and cultural context. If that were so, the question of its occupancy would be determined purely by sociological factors.
- 2) When Christ instituted the ministry of word and sacrament, he entrusted it to his apostles as his representatives and leaders in his church. They, in turn, conferred that ministry on those whom they had instructed, and appointed them as leaders in the congregations which they established (Acts 14:23; 20:17-21,27; 2 Tim 2:1-2; Tit 1:5). Through the apostles and their successors in the apostolic ministry, God the Father (1 Cor 12:28), the Son (Eph 4:11), and the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28) gave the church its pastors-teachers. The public ministry of the church is therefore not derived from the priesthood of believers in the congregation. If that were so, all of the baptised would be eligible for it.
- 3) Christ calls people into the apostolic ministry of the word through the church and its leaders. He does not confer that ministry on them by endowing them with special spiritual gifts through his Holy Spirit. In fact, when the leaders of the church consider whether or not to ordain someone, they are urged to assess the character of the candidate and his faithfulness to the apostolic tradition rather than his giftedness (1 Tim 3:1-7; 2 Tim 2:1-2; Tit 1:5-9). If spiritual giftedness were the basic qualification for the ministry, women could not possibly be excluded from the pastorate.
- 4) Since Christ instituted the apostolic ministry of the word, he determines its nature and function. Just as he commissioned the apostles, so he commissions their successors to preach and teach (Matt 28:16-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 9:1-2; 24:44-49), to baptise (Matt 29:16-20; cf Mark 16:16), to celebrate the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:19-20; 1 Cor 11:23-25), and to forgive sins (John 20:22-23; cf Matt 16:19; 20:18-20). When they fulfil these tasks, they do not merely perform certain functions for Christ which have little or nothing to do with them as people, but they actually thereby represent him and his heavenly Father personally to the assembled congregation (Matt

10:40; Luke 10:16; John 13:20). The function of the pastoral office cannot therefore be divorced from the character and presence of the pastor as a personal representative of the Son and his heavenly Father.

- 5) The office of pastor which is clearly defined and readily assessed is to be distinguished from the gift of prophecy which is not generally exercised and immediately recognised in the church today. While some pastors, like some apostles, may indeed prophesy, they do not receive their message directly from God by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but they derive it from the Old Testament and the apostolic tradition in the New Testament. If, as Habel and Wurst suppose (131), the public ministry of the church were based on the gift of prophecy or identified with it, women could not be excluded from the pastorate, since the gift of prophecy is equally available to women and men (Acts 21:9; 1 Cor 11:5; 14:31).

2. SCRIPTURAL FOUNDATIONS

Traditionally 1 Cor 14:34-35 and 1 Tim 2:11-12 have provided the scriptural basis for the exclusion of women from the apostolic ministry. Despite recent efforts to discount the relevance of these texts to the question of ordination of women, they have, I believe, withstood the attacks on them. In fact, the scrutiny of them in their context has led to a clearer understanding of them and their significance.

a. 1 Corinthians 14:33^b-38

1) Translation and structure

Whereas commentators have in the past often despaired at making sense of 1 Cor 14:34-35, concentration on the structure of the passage in context and its pattern of rhetoric have established the unity of vv 33^b-38 as a coherent argument (see Dautzenberg: 253-273, 291-298; Hauke: 364-396). Its argument is structured as follows:

- a) As in all the churches of the saints,
the women *must remain silent* in the churches,
for it is not permitted for them to speak,
but they must be subordinate, as the law says.
- b) If they wish to learn something,
let them question their husbands at home,
for it is shameful for a woman to speak in church -
did the word of God really originate from you,
or has it reached you alone?
- c) If any considers that he is a prophet or a spiritual person,
let him acknowledge that what I write is a command of the Lord.
- (d) If, on the other hand, anybody disregards it,
he is disregarded (by God).

Rhetorically speaking, the passage falls into two main parts. It begins with an unqualified directive for silence from women, with the reasons for it. Paul then

treats three problems associated with this directive in three conditional sentences about wives challenging their husbands on some point of teaching, the need for compliance with this directive as a command from the Lord, and the consequence of non-compliance.

In keeping with the pattern established in vv 26-33^b, the flow of the argument is determined by two categorical third person imperatives for silence and subordination in v 34 followed by two conditional imperatives about the questioning of husbands and the acknowledgement of Christ's authority in vv 35-36. This culminates in the conditional threat about the rejection of dissenters in v 37. Moreover, as Paul develops his argument, he gives six reasons for his instructions, in subordinate clauses: ecumenical practice (33^b), the prohibition of women speaking in church (34^a), the content of the law (34^b), the shamefulness of women speaking in church (35), the origin of the apostolic teaching (36^a), and its reception (36^b).

Thus the passage is a coherent piece of Pauline rhetoric which is presented in the form of regulations for the operation of the church as a liturgical community (Hauke: 267, 370-371).

2) The place of the passage in 1 Corinthians 14:26-40

Paul's directives on the silence of women are part of his larger discussion in 1 Corinthians chapters 12-14 about the use of spiritual gifts in the church of Corinth, as well as the place of tongues and prophecy in public worship. More immediately, it comes as the culmination of Paul's liturgical regulations in 1 Corinthians 14:26-40. In this section Paul deals with three problems: the demand by some charismatics for the right to 'speak' in tongues in the church; the demand by some prophets for the right to 'speak' their words of prophecy; and the demand by female prophets for recognition as 'speakers in the church'. Paul counters these demands for the right to speak with the demand for appropriate silence in vv 28, 30, and 34.

In keeping with this theme, the material in 1 Cor 14:26-40 is arranged as follows:

- a) Introduction (26)
 - i) General problem: involvement of charismatics in public worship.
 - ii) General directive: edification of the congregation.
- b) Speaking in tongues (27-28)
 - i) Permissible speaking, if there is an interpreter.
 - ii) Silence, with private speaking to God, if there is no interpreter.
- c) Speaking of prophecy (29-33^a)
 - i) Permissible speaking with assessment of prophecies.
 - ii) Silence, if another prophet receives a revelation.
- d) Speaking of women (33^b-38)
 - i) Silence of women in the church.
 - ii) Prohibition of speaking except for questioning at home.

- e) Conclusion
- i) Encouragement of prophecy without prohibition of tongues.
 - ii) Need for ordered worship.

It is evident from this that in vv 33^b-38 Paul reverses the previous pattern of permission for speaking with the need for appropriate silence in vv 27-33^a by his categorical demand for silence and his prohibition of speaking.

There is growing recognition among scholars that the link between 14:27-33^a and 14:33^b-38 is provided by Paul's requirement in 14:29 that all prophecies must be duly weighed and assessed to discover their significance and prayer application (Clark: 186; Hurley: 188-192; Grudem: 250-251; Bacchiocchi: 167; Hauke: 376; Carson: 151). Paul does not state exactly how this is to be done. He does, however, indicate that the whole congregation ('the others') should somehow be involved in this (cf 1 John 4:6). It probably involved a general discussion (cf 1 Thess 5:19-22) which resulted in an authoritative judgment on its sense and application by the leaders of the congregation in the light of the apostolic tradition (Rev 19:10; cf Matt 7:15-27), the confession of Jesus as Lord (1 Cor 12:3), and the analogy of faith (Rom 12:6).

As Johansson (57-71) has shown from Acts 20:7-12, this kind of discussion was not restricted to the weighing of prophecies; it seems also to have been associated with the homilies given by teachers in the early church. While all members could share their insights into the meaning and application of a text from the Old Testament, they could not challenge the final teaching given by the leaders of the congregation, as some women seem to have done in Corinth (cf 14:35).

Paul's argument seems to run as follows in 1 Cor 14:20-40: Speaking in tongues is allowed in worship provided that it is properly interpreted, so that it thereby becomes an edifying prophecy for the congregation. Prophecies may also be given in the church provided that they are weighed by the apostolic community in the light of the apostolic teaching. Just as speaking in tongues is subordinated to prophecy, so prophecy is subordinated to the apostolic tradition. So, even if women speak in tongues and prophecy, they are not allowed to speak in assessing prophecy, since this involves the teaching of the Scriptures according to the apostolic tradition. This prohibition is based on Christ's command to the apostles. The word of God therefore is not only meant to order the public worship of the congregation but must be spoken in it by those who have been authorised to do so.

3) The nature of the demand for silence from women

Paul's demand for the silence of women is explained in two ways. On the one hand, they are not permitted by God to be 'speakers' in the liturgical assembly. While the verb *lalein* is used in many different ways in the New Testament, it is never used in the sense of chattering. Here, as is often the case, it is a synonym for authoritative teaching (eg Matt 9:18; 28:18; John 18:19-20; Acts 4:1; 18:25; 1 Cor 2:6-7; 2 Cor 2:17; Heb 13:7). On the other hand, the silence of the women

involves subordination. Remarkably, Paul does not mention the object of their subordination. While it has been taken as the general subordination of women to men or the subordination of husbands to wives, the context suggests that they are to be subordinate to the male teachers of the word and so to the word itself. Women are therefore not allowed to be speakers in the liturgical assembly but must be subordinate to those who have been appointed to fulfil that role.

The context shows that Paul insists on relative rather than absolute silence (cf also Luke 9:36; 20:26; Acts 12:17; 15:12; 21:40). It is clear that women may speak in tongues (1 Cor 14:5,23), prophesy in worship (1 Cor 11:5; 14:5,23,31) and engage in liturgical prayer (1 Cor 11:5; cf 1 Tim 2:1-10). The kind of speaking which Paul prohibits is defined in three ways. First, a woman may not 'act as a speaker in a liturgical assembly' (14:35; cf 34). The usual absolute form for 'speaking' indicates that Paul may be using it as a technical term for someone authorised to speak in an official capacity (Johansson: 53f). This prohibition, however, does not apply at home and would therefore seem to have nothing to do with the subordination of a wife to her husband.

Secondly, the forbidden speaking is associated with God's word which has come to Corinth via its apostolic emissaries from Jerusalem (14:36; cf Acts 1:8; 1 Thess 2:13). We may therefore conclude that its content was the application of the apostolic teaching entrusted to the leaders of the congregation.

Thirdly, while the 'speaking' which Paul has in mind here is related to prophecy and the questioning is connected with the weighing of prophecy in the congregation, it is nevertheless distinguished from prophecy and is more authoritative than prophecy, since it transmits the commands of Christ and demands the acquiescence of prophets to it (14:37-38). I therefore conclude that when Paul forbids women to act as speakers in a liturgical assembly of the church, he excludes them from the apostolic ministry of the word.

4) The basis and authority for the prohibition

Paul bases his case on four sets of authority which he marshals in ascending order of importance.

First, he appeals to ecumenical practice (14:33^b). Some scholars claim that, since Paul uses a similar ecumenical formula in 1 Cor 4:17; 7:17 and 11:16 to conclude a section of argument, this phrase must belong to v. 33^a. Yet that is most unlikely, since it is not used as a conclusion in 7:17 and it functions elsewhere to assert the catholicity of Paul's teaching rather than the catholicity of God's character (Witherington: 96; Carson: 140-141). In any case 14:34 makes it clear that Paul's ruling does not just apply to the church in Corinth but to all churches everywhere.

Secondly, he appeals to the law in the Old Testament. The absence of the far more common citation formula: 'it is written' makes it unlikely that he refers to Gen 3:16 or any other specific passage. Rather the use here of the summary formula: 'as the law says' (cf 1 Cor 9:8), argues that Paul has in mind the whole

teaching of the Pentateuch about the role of the firstborn male in a Hebrew family, or else about the legislation for the role of the male priesthood in the public worship of Israel.

Thirdly, he appeals to the sense of shame of his hearers in 14:35. For Paul, shame did not arise just from failure to meet the social expectations of peers according to customary norms, as in 1 Cor 11:6, but also from loss of face with God (Phil 1:20; 2 Tim 1:12), at failure to meet his expectations (Rom 6:21; 2 Cor 4:2; Eph 5:4,12; Col 3:8; Phil 3:19). In fact, in Eph 5:12, the only other place apart from 1 Cor 11:6 where Paul uses the formula: 'it is shameful', that formula covers what is unacceptable to God as well as what is socially unacceptable. In 14:35-36 the appeal to shame is closely allied with Paul's challenge to the presumptuousness of certain women prophets in questioning their teachers and in regarding themselves as either the originators or exclusive recipients of God's word. Since such claims cannot be sustained, they would result in public disgrace.

Lastly and most significantly, Paul appeals to a specific command of the Lord in 14:37 which he has received together with the other sayings of Jesus. It, like 1 Thessalonians 4:15, is not recorded in any of the gospels (see Johansson: 90-98 and Hauke: 385-390). As last in the list, this most weighty authority is meant to clinch the argument. When Paul speaks about the Lord's command, he most likely refers to the prohibition in v. 34 with its passive formulation to denote that it comes from God himself (Aalen). Only its divine origin provides an adequate basis for his unequivocal warning in 14:38 that those who reject Paul's ruling on the silence of women in the church are either not recognised by God as prophets and Spirit-filled people, or else will be rejected by him in his final judgment (Hauke: 383-385; cf Matt 7:23). That threat gains its sense and weight from its specific connection to Christ's prohibition of women as speakers in the church.

The appeal of Paul to such a full range of authorities discloses the gravity of the matter under discussion. If he were dealing with culturally inappropriate behaviour or disruptive chatter by women, he would have had no need to employ all these authorities. Indeed, its force would be totally disproportional to the alleged offence, much like the use of a steamroller to squash a bull ant. The only other place where he operates in a similar fashion is in 1 Cor 9:3-14 where he defends his rights as an apostle. This provides an instructive parallel which, incidentally, also supports the unity of 14:33^b-38. There he also works with four sets of authority: the precedent of apostolic practice (9:4-6), custom (9:7), the law (9:8-13) and the Lord's command (9:14). There he also arranges his authorities in ascending order of importance with the command of Christ as the capstone of his argument.

To conclude: Paul's appeal to such a wide range of authorities, his mention of Christ's command, his reference to the apostolic tradition and his responsibility for it, and his threat of divine rejection for those who reject his teaching, make sense only if he is engaged in the defence of the divinely instituted apostolic ministry of the word and the exclusion of women from it by Christ himself.

[Part II will be published in the December issue]