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Female ordination: biblical, confessional and hermeneutical perspectives

Anna Nürnberger

In the homeland of Martin Luther women have been integrated into the institutionalised ministry of the church since the 17th century;¹ women preached the Word and administered the sacraments during and partially after the second World War;² and the ordination of women was eventually implemented in almost all of the Lutheran *Landeskirchen* between 1965 and 1975.³

Having grown up in Germany with female pastors as common practice, I was, after relocating to Australia, surprised to learn that the status quo regarding female ordination within the Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand (LCANZ) is vastly different, despite various attempts to change the public teaching of the church on this issue.⁴ While relevant proposals have been submitted for consideration by delegates at the 2023 Convention of General Synod that call for the ordination of both women and men,⁵ it can be expected that such a move will again face opposition from those within the LCANZ who wish to maintain the status quo as per the Theses of Agreement VI.11 (initially adopted in 1950). The position that rules out a female pastorate is based on reading 1 Cor 14:34–35 as a command delivered by Paul that among other things applies ‘to a wider Christian community than the congregation in Corinth (1 Cor 14:33b)’ and 1 Tim 2:11–14 as an equally universal proclamation of ‘the Lord’s will’.⁶

Since I started working for Australian Lutheran College in early 2020, I have been on a journey of understanding the backgrounds of the LCANZ’s debate over female ordination and its underlying principles of scriptural interpretation—and have found through listening, learning and reading that my own hermeneutical presuppositions differ significantly from

1 Kenneth G. Appold, ‘Frauen im frühneuzeitlichen Luthertum: Kirchliche Ämter und die Frage der Ordination,’ *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 103, no. 2 (June 2006), 253–279.

2 Ellen Ueberschar, *Fürchtet euch nicht!: Frauen machen Kirche* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Kreuz Verlag, 2012), 48–60.

3 Konferenz der Frauenreferate und Gleichstellungsstellen in den Gliedkirchen der EKD; Studienzentrum der EKD für Genderfragen in Kirche und Theologie Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, eds., *Atlas zur Gleichstellung von Frauen und Männern in der evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland. Ergänzungsband 1: Gleichstellung im geistlichen Amt* (Hannover: Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, 2017).

4 Lutheran Church of Australia, Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations (CTICR), ‘The ordination debate in the LCA: background,’ <http://owl.lca.org.au/>, accessed 22 September 2022.

5 Lutheran Church of Australia, ‘General Synod to discuss ordination for fifth time,’ 17 June 2022, accessed 22 September 2022, <https://www.lca.org.au/general-synod-to-discuss-ordination-for-fifth-time/>.

6 Lutheran Church of Australia, CTICR, ‘Why affirm the teaching of the church to call and ordain men only to the office of the public ministry?,’ <http://owl.lca.org.au/>.

those formalised in LCA's statements. Hence, since the Theses of Agreement VI.11 specifically claim 1 Cor 14:34–35 and 1 Tim 2:11–14 as an 'apostolic rule' which is 'binding on all Christendom' to prohibit women from 'from being called into the office of the public ministry for the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments',⁷ I would like to offer an alternative voice, which foregrounds a number of points which either haven't been addressed or have seemingly only played a marginal role in the debate as documented via LCA's *Ordination: We're Listening* website⁸ and beyond.

1 Cor 14:34–35 and 1 Tim 2:11–14 as an 'apostolic' and universal rule?

The alleged 'application of the command to a wider Christian community than the congregation in Corinth (1 Cor 14:33b)⁹ is based on the *exegetical* decision to join v. 33b (ὡς ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τῶν ἀγίων) with v. 34a.¹⁰ In principle and at first sight, this appears to be a possible reading, since extant Greek manuscripts on which our New Testament translations are based were written in *scriptio continua*, that is, as a text predominantly without spaces between words or sentences and without punctuation. Taken together, the text then reads: 'As in all the congregations of the Saints, women should remain silent in the congregations...', opening up the possibility of viewing the prohibition on female speech in the churches as a generic and ahistorical, that is, timeless rule.¹¹

However, v. 33b 'is by most of the ancients, by Luther, and by our versions connected with the preceding sentence',¹² functioning as a supporting statement to conclude what is said in vv. 30–33a. By implication, scriptural reference to a universal practice is ruled out. Scholarship has collected significant evidence that affirms such a reading, including the observation that v. 33b corresponds with Paul's own pattern of *concluding* statements in 1 Corinthians 4:17 and 11:16. There is more to say about the evidence against 1 Cor 14:33b

7 Lutheran Church of Australia, *Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions (DSTO), Volume 1 A. Theses of Agreement. VI: Theses on the office of the ministry*, Theses VI.11, <https://www.lca.org.au/departments/commissions/ctcic/> (accessed 22 August 2022).

8 Lutheran Church of Australia, *Ordination: We're Listening*, accessed 20 May 2022, <http://owl.lca.org.au/>.

9 Lutheran Church of Australia, 'Why affirm the teaching of the church to call and ordain men only to the office of the public ministry?', <http://owl.lca.org.au/>.

10 LCA's 'Study document on women and the office of the public ministry' has made this exegetical decision, see Lutheran Church of Australia, Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations, *Women and the Ministry: A Study on Women and the Office of the Public Ministry* (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1992), 6. For a list of Greek New Testament editions and scholars that regard v. 33b as belonging together with 1 Cor 14:34–35, see Alesja Lavrinovica, '1 Cor 14.34–5 without "in all the churches of the saints": external evidence,' *New Testament Studies* 63, no. 3 (2017), 370–389, 371–373. There is a considerable number among these scholars who consider v. 33b to be a part of a shorter or longer interpolation (i.e. the conscious insertion of foreign material into a text).

11 Of course the internal evidence against a universal application, as stated in-text below, would still remain just as valid. Additionally, other exegetical considerations that speak against this prohibition being read as the timelessly valid will of God need to be taken into account, for instance the intended addressees of 1 Corinthians or the social norms in Corinth at the time of authorship, which are very different to our own.

12 Richard C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), 614. What Lenski means by 'our versions' is not made clear. It could either refer to Greek New Testament editions, which at the time Lenski wrote this statement read v. 33b jointly with v. 33a and apart from vv. 34–35, or to the English translations based on these Greek New Testament editions.

having been intended as a preamble to the following two verses, but let us first revisit the host of difficulties that one encounters in 1 Cor 14:34–36 and its context.

With regard to indications in 1 Corinthians itself (internal evidence) and in the extant manuscript tradition (external evidence), which point towards 1 Cor 14:34–36 not representing Paul's own position, the following aspects need to be considered:¹³

1. The verses interrupt the discussion about speaking in tongues and prophesying, to which Paul returns in vv. 37–40.
2. The prohibition of women speaking in church seems to counter what Paul has already admitted in 11:5, where he spoke of a 'woman who prays or prophesies' (in a common worship service), even though he criticized one who did so 'with uncovered head.' Perhaps too it runs counter to the 'all' used of prophecy in 14:31.
3. The allusion to 'the law' in v. 34 is a most unusual way of arguing for Paul.
4. In v. 36, although 'you' (*hymōn, hymas*) could be either masc. or fem., in the second question it is modified by a masc. adj., *monous*, 'alone,' which raises a question about who is meant by 'you.'
5. Some [manuscripts] of the Western text-tradition (D, E, F, G, 88*), some forms of the Vetus Itala (d, g), and some patristic or medieval writers...read vv. 34–35 after what is now 14:40...
6. This prohibition...is similar to 1 Tim 2:11–12...[I]t uses some of the same vocabulary as the Corinthian passage...The nature of v. 36, which is sometimes separated from vv. 34–35 and sometimes related to them, is just as problematic as v. 33b (does it belong to v. 33a, or does it introduce vv. 34–35/36)?

Moreover, if v. 33b is read in conjunction with v. 34a, there is an apparent redundancy in the second mentioning of the phrase 'in the churches', which needs to be explained.¹⁴

The most plausible solutions to these problems and observations to date assume either a post-Pauline interpolation (that is, that vv. 34–35 were inserted, at an early date, into the original or existing versions),¹⁵ or that Paul quotes¹⁶ in vv. 34–35

what some Corinthian Christian men have been maintaining against women who have been speaking out in cultic assemblies...Paul's reaction to the statement quoted

¹³ Taken from Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians, A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 529.

¹⁴ Some of those who acknowledge this redundancy created by joining v. 33b with v. 34a have attempted to resolve the issue in creative and sometimes questionable ways, for example by assigning two different meanings to *ἐκκλησία*, cf. Anthony C. Thiselton, *First Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 250.

¹⁵ Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 529–530, presents five positions in scholarship of how this passage has been interpreted, one of which is the understanding of vv. 34–36 as a post-Pauline interpolation, supported, with varying nuances, by the 'majority of commentators today.' Most proponents of the interpolation hypothesis regard the passage as a marginal gloss by a later author or scribe, inserted after v. 33 or v. 40.

¹⁶ Ancient Greek had no quotation marks. It was common in antiquity to pose and refute objections, even without identifying the source of such an objection, cf. e.g. Cicero *Scaur.* 9.18; 18.41. See further Rom 3:1–9 for an example of Paul's employment of such an interactive style.

is expressed in v. 36, which is introduced by the disjunctive particle $\bar{\epsilon}$, ‘or,’ used here twice with two rhetorical questions (as also in 11:22b), along with the masc. *monous*...referring to such Corinthian men...His reaction is expressed in v. 36...and its implication would be egalitarian and would contradict neither 11:5 nor Gal 3:28.¹⁷

Since the interpolation hypothesis is not without problems,¹⁸ a growing number of scholars regard 1 Cor 14:34–35 as a non-Pauline sentiment which Paul sharply objected to in v. 36. This latter hypothesis is further supported by the fact that the initial disjunctive particle $\bar{\epsilon}$ cannot only be translated as an unpunctuated conjunction ‘or’, but also as an accentuated expletive ‘What!/?’. In 1 Cor 14:36 it then plausibly conveys Paul’s incredulity, ‘a sense of indignation toward the previous statement,¹⁹ or a witty, sarcastic, emphatic negation of the Corinthian quote.²⁰

Thus, 1 Cor 14:30–40 can be rendered as such:

If someone sitting receives a revelation, the first person should be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged (and the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets, for God is a God not of disorder but of peace), as in all the churches of the saints.

‘Women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is something they want to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.’

quotation

What? Did the word of God originate with you [men], or to you [men] only has it come?

refutation

Anyone who claims to be a prophet or otherwise gifted by the Spirit should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. Anyone who does not recognise this is not to be recognised. So, my brothers and sisters, strive to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues, but all things should be done decently and in order.

Kirk MacGregor, advocating for understanding vv. 34–35 as a sentiment that the apostle found in the letter which the Corinthians had previously sent him and which he condemns, helpfully explains:

Far from attempting to silence women...Paul is rebuking the Corinthian men for prohibiting women from speaking in the assemblies, for he regards such a restriction

17 Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 530.

18 See, for example, Kirk R. MacGregor, ‘1 Corinthians 14:33b–38 as a Pauline quotation-refutation device,’ *Priscilla Papers* 32, no. 1 (2018), 23–28.

19 Joseph A.P. Wilson, ‘Recasting Paul as a chauvinist within the Western text-type manuscript tradition: implications for the authorship debate on 1 Corinthians 14.34–35,’ *Religions* 13, no. 5 (2022), 4, doi.org/10.3390/rel13050432.

20 David W. Odell-Scott, ‘In defense of an egalitarian interpretation of 1 Cor 14: 34-36: A Reply to Murphy-O’Connor’s critique,’ *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 17 (1987), 101.

as tantamount to alleging that the word of God belongs properly to the men and merely derivatively to any woman married to one of them. Paul summarily exposes the absurdity of this allegation with each part of the rhetorical question, whose form (not to mention the context) requires a negative answer to each part. Obviously, the word of God neither originated with men nor has come only to men; hence it is ridiculous, and contrary to the character of the gospel, to act as though the word belongs properly to men by disallowing women from discoursing about it or asking questions about it in church.²¹

That Paul is quoting (vv. 34–35) and then refuting (v. 36) a position of contention within the Corinthian church—first proposed in 1889 on the basis on a plain-text reading²²—would best resolve the difficulties concerning this passage in its context, including the pronoun gender issue and the problem posed by the use of ‘law’ in v. 34b which does not align with the apostle’s usual use of that term: Paul never invokes ‘the authority of the Law to found a moral attitude’.²³

The mentioning of the ‘law’ in v. 34b most likely refers to the Jewish oral Torah and not to the written Torah, since, contrary to the Jewish oral law, there is no command for women’s silence and/or submission in assemblies in any Old Testament text.²⁴ Given that Paul in his letters repeatedly exhorts his congregations not to follow oral Torah’s rules, since their observation may even mean ‘cutting oneself off from Christ’ (cf. Gal 4:9–11; 5:1,4), it is highly implausible that he would invoke ‘the law’ in 1 Cor 14:34 as a basis for demanding silence of women in churches and their subordination.²⁵ Rather, the oral Torah is here appealed to by the Judaizing faction within the Corinthian church that Paul seeks to oppose.

That Paul disagrees with the sentiment expressed in vv. 34–35 is underpinned by external evidence besides the above-mentioned manuscripts. Contrary to common assumptions that there were no structural markers in the early manuscripts, a recent study by Alesja Lavrinovica has brought to light that the oldest and most relevant extant witnesses that contain 1 Cor 14:33b–35 consider v. 33b to be a part of v. 33a, with most of these clearly reading 1 Cor 14:34–35 as a separate paragraph, indicating the beginning of a new thought.²⁶ These findings strongly affirm that reading v. 33b with what follows is ‘a modern

21 MacGregor, ‘1 Corinthians 14:33b–38 as a Pauline quotation-refutation device,’ 25.

22 Katharine C. Bushnell, ‘Keep silence,’ *The Union Signal* 15, no. 37 (1889), 7. Available online: <https://archive.org/details/mdu-043103/page/n558/mode/1up> (accessed 11 July 2022).

23 Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, ‘Interpolations in 1 Corinthians,’ *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 48 (1986), 91.

24 See MacGregor, ‘1 Corinthians 14:33b–38 as a Pauline quotation-refutation device,’ 26–27.

25 In every case when Paul specially refers to scripture, he says it is written (1 Cor. 1:19, 1:31, 2:9, 3:19, 10:7, 15:45) and consistently *quotes* from scripture to prove his point. And where Paul explicitly appeals to the ‘law’ in 1 Corinthians to support his own argument, he likewise *quotes* from written scripture (cf. e.g. 1 Cor 9:9, 14:21).

26 Alesja Lavrinovica, ‘1 Cor 14.34–5.’ Lavrinovica, *ibid.*, 383, also points out that contrary to the practice of Greek New Testament editions since the time of Erasmus, 20th and 21st century Greek New Testament editions tend to link v. 33b with what follows, which ‘is based not on external evidence’, but rather reflects exegetical decisions ‘with...far-reaching exegetical implications—that is, introducing the prohibition on women’s speech and validating this prohibition by appealing to the customary practice of all the other churches.’

phenomenon altogether²⁷, which may well be driven by specific agendas. They also add further weight to the argument that vv. 34–35 cannot be regarded as an ‘apostolic rule’, since v. 33b does not introduce these verses and since vv. 34–35 very likely represent a quote whose content neither aligns with the ample textual evidence for Paul’s support of women in positions of early Christian leadership,²⁸ nor with Paul’s elsewhere attested conviction that through Christ old orders and social norms have become obsolete (Gal 3:26–28; cf. also 2 Cor 5:16–20).²⁹ Regarding the latter, Brian Robinson has convincingly argued recently that Paul throughout 1 Corinthians intentionally undermines first-century Roman norms of masculinity, aiming to ‘limit the use and abuse of patriarchal systems and institutions that oppress those of lower social standing’.³⁰

To hold that Paul in 1 Cor 14:36 opposes the quoted view in vv. 34–35 can moreover be supported by the fact that this pattern (Paul states a Corinthian position and subsequently corrects it) occurs also in several earlier places in 1 Corinthians.³¹ These points further suggests that it is most plausible to understand 1 Cor 14:34–35 as not representing Paul’s own viewpoint. Paul’s reply in 1 Cor 14:36³² ‘silenced (at least for a time) those who would silence women in church. Paul’s position was clear: women are to speak in church.’³³

1 Tim 2:11–14—the other set of verses that are central to the claim that the bible forbids women from becoming authoritative leaders in worship—are even less likely to represent Paul’s own thoughts. First Timothy was almost certainly penned in the post-apostolic generations after Paul’s death by ‘Paulinists’ that used his name as a pseudonym.³⁴ Claiming someone else’s name for one’s own writing was common practice in antiquity, mostly with the intention to impart specific authority that would ensure wider attention

27 Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 697, n. 49

28 A very helpful publication on this matter is Cynthia Long Westfall, *Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostle’s Vision for Men and Women in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016).

29 While the authors of the document published in 2005 in the LCA ‘1 Corinthians 14:33b–38 and 1 Timothy 2:11–14 permit the ordination of women’ (http://owl.lca.org.au/?page_id=47) mention both the possibility of a post-Pauline interpolation and of a quote as interpretations of 1 Cor 14:34–35 along with reasons that caution against each option, they do not engage with a number of the significant internal and external issues of 1 Cor 14:33b–36 mentioned above that also ought to be taken into account. Here and in most other documents published by the LCA on this matter, genuine Pauline authorship remains the underlying assumption.

30 Brian J. Robinson, *Being Subordinate Men: Paul’s Rhetoric of Gender and Power in 1 Corinthians* (Lanham, MD: Fortress Academic, 2018), 1.

31 See especially 1 Cor 2:12–13 and 3:4, where Paul also counters what is said by certain Corinthians with rhetorical questions. Cf. further 1:13; 6:2,16; 9:6–10; 11:13,22 for Paul introducing rhetorical questions with ‘What!?’/‘or’ (ε) to express disapproval of Corinthian practices or positions.

32 Important early witnesses (e.g. Papyrus 46 [P46], Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Vaticanus, Codex Alexandrinus, Codex Athous Lavrensis) clearly indicate that v. 36 introduces a separate paragraph, and hence a new thought. Photos of New Testament manuscripts are accessible via <https://manuscripts.csntm.org/>.

33 Odell-Scott, ‘In defense of an egalitarian interpretation of 1 Cor 14: 34-36,’ 102.

34 Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 600–602.

and circulation. First Timothy is one of the so-called pastoral epistles which, according to the overwhelming majority of modern scholars, represent a later stage of development (compared to the ‘apostolic’ period of the early church), when congregations had begun to establish church hierarchies and needed to come up with criteria of suitability for various roles.³⁵ The pastoral epistles differ greatly from those generally assumed to be authentic writings of Paul (1 Thess, 1 Cor, 2 Cor, Gal, Phil, Phlm and Rom), especially with regard to vocabulary and language, theology, and the presupposed congregational and ministry structure. In addition, the details about the situation of the apostle in the pastoral epistles can neither be reconciled with the information in Acts nor with that in the authentic Pauline letters.³⁶

Further weight against Pauline authorship is added when the manuscript evidence is taken into consideration:

The Pastoral Epistles were not uniformly known or accepted within the early church... All three Pastoral Epistles are absent in the earliest codices Ɔ46 (c.175–225 CE) and Vaticanus/Unical 03 (c. mid fourth century CE). It is possible a small Pastoral codex was added later to the canon... Early authors indirectly alluded to them, but not until c.180 CE did Irenaeus of Smyrna (c.130–202 CE) directly cite and ascribe 1 Timothy to Paul. Evidence of the canonization of the Pastorals first appears in the Muratoria fragment, an Old-Latin canon list dating somewhere between the late second and the mid fourth century...³⁷

Additionally, among those scholars who regard First Timothy as pseudonymous and 1 Cor 14:34–35 as not reflecting Paul’s own conviction, it is commonly accepted that the author of First Timothy ‘reverse[s] positions once held by Paul’.³⁸ This reversal not only applies to the stance on women speaking in church (which Paul encouraged; see above), but also to the Adam-Eve metaphor that in 1Tim 2:11–14 has been viewed as serving as the grounds for denying women the right to teach. This passage is

...definitely un-Pauline in its attitude towards Adam and Eve: ‘Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor’ (v 14). For Paul, on the contrary, Adam was the transgressor *par excellence* (Rom 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:21-22, 45-49); and Eve was the prototype of the entire Corinthian community and not merely of the feminine element (2 Cor 11:3).³⁹

35 The pastoral epistles ‘were probably written sometime during the reign of Trajan (98–117) or Hadrian (117–138), whose imperial emphases on *pietas/eusebeia* (“piety”) they seem to reiterate and reappropriate for the Christ-believing communities of their own day, claiming—in the face of suspicion—to be no threat to imperial rule (see esp. 1 Tim 2:2) or to conventional patriarchal societal norms.’ Margaret M. Mitchell, ‘The life and letters of Paul,’ in *The Cambridge Companion to the New Testament*, ed. Patrick Gray (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 81.

36 See, for example, Raymond F. Collins, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 2–9.

37 Wilson, ‘Recasting Paul as a chauvinist,’ 5–6.

38 Odell-Scott, ‘In defense of an egalitarian interpretation of 1 Cor 14:34–36,’ 102.

39 Murphy-O’Connor, ‘Interpolations in 1 Corinthians,’ 92.

It is likely that 1 Cor 14:34–35 was either misunderstood,⁴⁰ or deliberately misinterpreted⁴¹ and taken out of context to serve as a template for 1 Tim 2:11–14 (which explains the similarity in language) in order to reinterpret Paul's authentic message and thus legitimise later ecclesiastical interests and institutionalising tendencies.⁴² Contrary to Paul's humble self-understanding as 'the least of the apostles' (1 Cor 15:9–11), in the pastoral letters, he is fashioned as the prototype of a Christian and the guarantor of 'sound doctrine' (1 Tim 1:10–11; Tit 1:1,3).

We know that

The neutral continuous script of the manuscripts (lacking spaces or punctuation) resulted in variable reading renditions, interpretive scoring, and quote-harvesting at an early phase of transmission. ...Inconspicuous reading aids were deleted by knowledgeable scribes concerned with gatekeeping subtle meanings... Paul's... bold provocative wordplay was decontextualized and isolated into discrete dogmatic claims. Paul's agenda and later church agendas became muddled. Ian Elmer says, 'it seems clear that from the very earliest years after Paul's death, his disciples in the late first-century church attempted to press-gang the departed apostle into the service of their causes'.⁴³

Cissie Fairchild's observations add to this important shift in the early church, when she describes how despite the canonical gospels' numerous examples of Jesus elevating, empowering, liberating and including women in Jesus' ministry,⁴⁴ and Pauline passages that argue for the broad equality of all,⁴⁵ patriarchal interpretations of the bible, supported by inter alia 1 Tim 2:12–14, soon began to domineer the discourse. This was at least in part due to the opposition the early church's male leaders expected to face from the male-dominated Roman Empire if they continued to allow women to teach, preach, and lead as was the practice in emergent, apostolic Christianity's time.⁴⁶

All of the arguments mentioned above strongly suggest that 1 Tim neither stems from

40 Perhaps even 'out of good intentions', as Ian Elmer notes, cf. Ian J. Elmer, 'The Pauline letters as community documents,' in *Collecting Early Christian Letters from the Apostle Paul to Late Antiquity*, ed. B. Neil and P. Allen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 43.

41 Did the author of 2 Peter, writing around 130 CE, perhaps have 1 Cor 14:34–35 as one of the passages in mind when he asserts: 'So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures.' (2 Pet 3:15b–16 NRSV)?

42 Another way of reading 1 Tim 2:8–15 proposed by Fergus J. King and Dorothy A. Lee is also worth considering: See Fergus J. King and Dorothy A. Lee, 'Lost in translation: rethinking words about women in 1–2 Timothy,' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 74 (2021), esp. 55–60.

43 Wilson, 'Recasting Paul as a chauvinist,' 2, quoting Elmer, 'The Pauline letters as community documents,' 41.

44 Cf. e.g. Mark 1:29–31 parr., 3:31–35 parr., 5:21–43 parr., Luke 6:17; 7:36–50; 8:1–3; 13:11–17; John 4:28–29, 39; Acts 9:36.

45 Cf. e.g. Gal 3:26–28; Phlm 1:15–17; 1 Cor 11:11–12; 2 Cor 8:14.

46 Cissie C. Fairchild, *Women in Early Modern Europe, 1500–1700* (Harlow, UK: Pearson Education, 2007), 11.

Paul's own quill nor represents an 'apostolic' writing. The 'ban' on women's teaching⁴⁷ is context-specific, post-apostolic, and contradicts Paul's egalitarian vision.

Authors of documents prepared by the LCAZ's Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations (CTICR) who assume Paul's handwriting in the pastoral epistles, hence go against both the manuscript evidence and the grain of scholarship, and those that consider and carefully weigh the results of biblical criticism are left to wonder why. Are they not aware of such findings or do they deliberately ignore historical-critical research? It may well be the latter, for an acknowledgement would mean having to depart from the notion of 1 Tim 2:11–14 or other sections from the pastoral letters representing 'apostolic rules' that are said to carry critical weight in arguments surrounding the order of the ministry. Even more significant may be the implications of accepting the pastoral epistles as non-apostolic writings for loyalty towards the Theses of Agreement VI.11 in their present state as well as the teaching of biblical inerrancy, which, contrary to most other Lutheran churches, is upheld in the LCAZ.⁴⁸

Lessons from Reformation-time hermeneutics

If the evidence laid out above, together with more detailed scholarly studies are taken into account and carefully weighed, it is difficult not to arrive at the conclusion that in 1 Cor 14:34–36 Paul argues *against* those Corinthians who wanted to silence women in congregation, and that 1 Tim 2:11–14 is part of a writing *not* penned by the apostle Paul. Nevertheless, 1 Tim is in the New Testament canon, and some will, despite all arguments to the contrary, still hold fast to their opinion that 1 Cor 14:34–35 represents Paul's own position. Therefore, it seems sensible to explore how Martin Luther and the Lutheran Confessions used scripture to lift out the meaning of biblical texts and discerned their significance for contemporary audiences, so that one may consider whether an understanding of the bible as the 'inerrant' Word of God in the sense that it commands timeless rules is indeed genuinely 'Lutheran' and 'confessional'.

47 Luke in Acts 18:26 shows that female teaching was within the scope of Paul's mission. For a discussion on why 1 Tim 2:11–14 is unsuitable for justifying female subordination to male authority or a blanket ban on women's teaching, even if Pauline authorship is assumed, see Andrew C. Perriman, 'What Eve did, what women shouldn't do: The meaning of ἀυθεντέω in 1 Timothy 2:12,' *Tyndale Bulletin* 44, no. 1 (1993), 129–142. See also Noel C. Schulz, *Neither Male Nor Female: The Bible, Women & the Ministry of the Church* (Bayswater, VIC: Coventry Press, 2020), 60–68. With regard to the LCAZ, Schulz, *ibid.*, 66, writes: 'The use of this word [αυθεντειν] in the Theses of Agreement...strongly suggests that if a woman, properly qualified and duly called, were to preach a sermon or exercise some other element of pastoral ministry she would be behaving in a self-willed arbitrary, controlling manner over against the men and women who have called her into this office! To make such a claim seventy years ago and to repeat it decade after decade is surely a gross misuse of a passage which has been clearly misunderstood, misinterpreted and unfairly applied to women in ministry.' See further *ibid.*, 75–78, for a helpful summary of reasons that speak against using 1 Tim 2:8–15 as a basis against female ordination.

48 Lutheran Church of Australia, *Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions (DSTO), Volume 1 A. Theses of Agreement. VIII: Theses on Scripture and Inspiration* (Thesis 10 states: '...Holy Scripture, being God's Word written by men and for men, presents this truth in such a way that it can be appropriated by men. With the whole true Church of God we confess the Bible to be the inerrant Word of God...') and Lutheran Church of Australia, *Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions (DSTO), Volume 1 B. The Scriptures: A Consensus Statement on Holy Scripture*.

Let's remember that the doctrine of inerrancy is not found in Luther's works or the Lutheran Confessions. What we do find in Reformation thought, however, is the high regard for the bible as the Word of God couched in human words. For Luther, the touchstone and final authority of bible interpretation was scripture, never an external authority.⁴⁹ This principle is also the basis for any justification for the church's teachings and their evaluation, as affirmed by the Lutheran Confessions.⁵⁰ When the Reformers speak of the bible as the 'Word of God', then in the conviction that in and through the words of scripture, God himself speaks to humanity. At the same time, and in line with what New Testament texts themselves conceive of as the Word of God,⁵¹ they confess the *gospel of Jesus Christ* as the definitive Word of God within the diversity of scripture.⁵² In light of the variedness of biblical texts, the gospel of Jesus Christ with its promise of justification and redemption is thus the centre of scripture ('*Mitte der Schrift*') not only in the sense of content and purpose of God's Word but also as the hermeneutical guideline from and toward which the bible as a whole is to be interpreted and understood.⁵³ Martin Luther's orientation on Jesus Christ as the centre of scripture with regard to its use is manifest in his conviction that not all bible verses or writings are of equal 'clarity' or have equal theological weight.⁵⁴ Pointedly, Luther was convinced that Christ should not only be mobilised against individual verses, but also against a whole book of the bible if their claim obscures the message of Jesus Christ as the gospel.⁵⁵ In other words, biblical passages should be read in the context of the books of which they are part, and of the bible as a whole, so that scripture interprets itself (*scriptura sui ipsius interpres*).⁵⁶

Contrary to the tradition of his time, which held that scripture contains a double meaning, literal and spiritual,⁵⁷ he advocated for the primacy of the 'literal' sense as a safeguard against allegories (or other 'spiritual' interpretations), which he saw as 'empty speculations'.⁵⁸ What Luther meant by 'literal' ought not to be misunderstood based on the

49 WA 2:279, 23–25; 7:97. WA, followed by volume number and page number, refers here and throughout this article to *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1893–2009).

50 Epitome of the Formula of Concord 2. and 3.7 (Kolb and Wengert: 486–487). Quotations from the Lutheran Confessions are from Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000).

51 Cf. in particular Joh 1,1; Rom 1:16–17; 1 Cor 1:18; Gal 1:6–12; Hebr 1:1–3; Rev 19:13.

52 Confessio Augustana V; Smalcald Articles III,4.

53 Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, ed., *Die Bedeutung der Bibel für kirchenleitende Entscheidungen: Ein Grundlagentext des Rates der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2021), 34–35. Luther's lectures on Romans (1515/16) contain a methodical guide to scripture interpretation: Starting with a division of a biblical book into sections of meaning, these are first philologically examined and translated. This is followed by a theological analysis with the focus on the action-pragmatic interpretation of Scripture in the light of the gospel's promise of justification and redemption.

54 Cf. e.g. WA DB 6:9–10; 7:2; 7:344.

55 Cf. e.g. WA 45:35, 28; WA 39/1:47, 19–20; WA 3:12, 32–35.

56 WA 7:97, 21–23.

57 Cf. e.g. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I 1:10.

58 WA 42:173 = LW 1:283. LW refers to the American Edition of Luther's Works, published in 55 volumes by Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO, 1955–1986.

modern meaning of that term.⁵⁹ For him, the literal sense is the ‘historical sense’;⁶⁰ and it is only through the historical-literal method that the original intention and meaning of a text can be detected, which may then serve as a framework for sound doctrine. Although for Luther bible interpretation is a philological work, it has to understand particular passages in light of the Scriptural whole, which is always centred on Christ, that is, it has to prove itself theologically. In this respect, ‘Luther is never concerned with a generally binding and timelessly valid interpretation, but with a current appropriation of the living Word of God.’⁶¹

The Lutheran Confessions, particularly the *Confessio Augustana*, reflect such an appropriation of the Word of God along with an adherence to the principle of the gospel of Jesus Christ as the centre of scripture, when the Reformers allow for a purely contextual (historical, cultural-historical) interpretation of certain scriptural content—such as the wearing of the headscarf or an orderly hairstyle during church service:

[B]ishops or pastors may make regulations for the sake of good order in the church, but not thereby to obtain God’s grace, to make satisfaction for sin, or to bind consciences, nor to regard such as a service of God or to consider it a sin when these rules are broken without giving offense. So St. Paul prescribed in Corinthians that women should cover their heads in the assembly (1 Cor. 11:5), and that preachers in the assembly should not all speak at once, but in order, one after the other (1 Cor. 14:30–33)... [C]onsciences should not be burdened by holding that such things are necessary for salvation or by considering it a sin when they are violated without giving offense to others; just as no one would say that a woman commits a sin if, without offending people, she leaves the house with her head uncovered.⁶²

The Confessions further demonstrate that the Reformers were open to a reappraisal of formerly held convictions as testified by scripture, and that there are apostolic instructions that are to be regarded as having time limitations.⁶³ This is evident when the *Confessio Augustana* refers to the apostolic direction in Acts 15:20 (and 21:25):

The apostles directed that one should abstain from blood and from what is strangled. But who observes this now? Yet those who do not observe it commit no sin. For the apostles themselves did not want to burden consciences with such bondage, but prohibited such eating for a time to avoid offense. For in this ordinance one must pay attention to the chief part of Christian doctrine which is not abolished by this decree.⁶⁴

Such examples as the above from Reformation times make it abundantly clear that heeding to

59 That Luther did not understand the bible ‘literally’ is evinced by LW 54:452, for example.

60 WA 42:173 = LW 1:283.

61 Markus Wriedt, ‘Luther, Martin (NT),’ in *Wiblex* (2019), accessed 10 September 2022, <https://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/stichwort/59466/>, transl. by author. See also Victor C. Pfitzner, ‘The Hermeneutical problem and preaching (1966),’ in idem, *Early Christian Witnesses: Biblical and Theological Explorations. Selected Essays by Victor C Pfitzner* (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2021), 28–29.

62 *Confessio Augustana* 28.53–56 (Kolb and Wengert: 99–100).

63 Similar also Stephen Hultgren, ‘Canon, creeds, and confessions: an exercise in Lutheran hermeneutics’ *Lutheran Theological Journal* 46, no. 1 (May 2012), esp. 30–31.

64 *Confessio Augustana* 28.65–66 (Kolb and Wengert: 100).

the authority of scripture does not mean that every single verse and instruction has universal application. They show that neither the ‘clarity of scripture’ nor the hermeneutical rule of scripture being its own interpreter (*sacra scriptura sui ipsius interpres*), were at the time of the Reformation understood as implying that every New Testament command has ahistoric, timeless value or is not in need of appropriation for each generation of interpreters who live under altered social conditions compared with the early church. If one takes seriously the LCANZ’s assertion that ‘[t]he Creeds and Confessions contained in the Book of Concord are the doctrinal standard of the Church because they summarise the doctrine (right teaching) of the Word of God,⁶⁵ does then the ‘right teaching’ not include the Confession’s principles regarding the application of scripture for contemporary issues within the church?

The Evangelical Church in Germany on the use of scripture with regard to contemporary questions facing the church

Many Lutheran churches that allow both women and men to be ordained recognise not only that different social conditions require scripture to be re-interpreted accordingly but also that not everything in the bible carries equal weight or significance.⁶⁶ The *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland* (EKD), for example, sees the gospel as the main message of scripture (the ‘Mitte der Schrift’ in Reformation terms), so that the belief in Jesus Christ as the risen Lord weighs heavier than the question of whether women ought to wear a head scarves or to remain silent. The EKD has understood that biblical criticism has roots in Reformation-time uses of scripture, which means that historical-critical approaches to interpreting the bible are nothing ‘alien’ which theology has to bend to out of necessity. Hence, she has come to the conclusion that social ordinances such as the monarchy, slavery or the ‘headship’ of men over women can no longer be legitimised through scripture. The EKD further acknowledges that the biblical verses that are traditionally claimed to deny a female pastorate (1 Cor 14:34–35; 1 Tim 2:11–14) do not speak of this issue (‘ordination of women to the ministerial office’), especially not with regard to preaching or the administration of the sacraments.⁶⁷ Although the EKD is aware that there are no direct mandates within the New Testament for or against the ordination of women, she recognises that only through a responsible, well-informed interpretation of the bible⁶⁸ can it be assessed if or what the bible has to say with regard to a contemporary question or problem.

65 Lutheran Church of Australia, CTICR, ‘Q&A 7, Why is the ordination of women a doctrinal issue for the LCA?’, <http://owl.lca.org.au/>.

66 On this and the following, see Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, *Die Bedeutung der Bibel für kirchenleitende Entscheidungen*, esp. 43–44, 67, 87.

67 On the issue of finding proof in the bible, Luther asserts: ‘Heretofore I have held that where something was to be proved by the Scriptures, *the Scriptures quoted must really refer to the point at issue*. I learn now that it is not enough to throw many passages together helter-skelter whether they fit or not. If this is to be the way, then I can easily prove from the Scriptures that beer is better than wine.’ (WA 6:301, 19–21; emphasis added).

68 For the EKD’s understanding of the bible as the living and inspired ‘Word of God’, see, for example, Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, *Die Bedeutung der Bibel für kirchenleitende Entscheidungen*, 30–34; 39–40.

Conclusion

In this article I have tried to argue that neither 1 Cor 14:34–35 nor 1 Tim 2:11–14 should be understood as apostolic, universal and timeless rules, and that it is most plausible to conclude from careful research into 1 Cor 14:34–35 and 1 Tim 2:11–14 that neither passage represents Paul's own position. The LCANZ is faced with the ongoing difficulty of deciding whether it is still legitimate and plausible to defend a doctrine of male-only ordination that is based on only two New Testament passages that have been viewed as speaking to this issue, thereby ignoring the variety of other voices on female engagement and authority in the early church.⁶⁹ Isolating bible verses to support a gender-biased agenda runs counter not only to an understanding of the church as a body of and for equality, but also to a well-informed hermeneutical approach to scripture that takes seriously contemporary and judicious research in biblical studies, and which is grounded in confessional principles and practices of using scripture, including such that are relevant for finding solutions to current issues in church and society.⁷⁰ Despite Martin Luther's well-attested belief in the authority and truthfulness of scripture, he was nevertheless aware of not all scriptural verses qualifying as espousing immediate 'clarity'⁷¹ or as equally promoting Christ, and hence warned against ripping out individual phrases or words from the bible, which he regards as helping the devil in his diabolical work.⁷² One must not, according to Luther, 'pick out one word and insist on it, one must consider the meaning of the whole text in its context'.⁷³ Hence, with regard to Luther's and also to the Confessions' view of scriptural authority, interpretation and appropriation for contemporary issues, it is vital to understand that no literalism nor 'biblicism' was intended, which insists on individual verses and sees them as God's dictated word'.⁷⁴

Coda

Those who remain unconvinced regarding the inclusion of women in the pastorate are encouraged to consider Jesus' own example as recorded in Mark 7:24–29 and Matthew 15:21–28. Here, we witness how Jesus is challenged, learns a lesson in inclusivity, and subsequently changes his mind—through the teaching of a woman.

69 It is moreover ignoring the clear signs of anti-feminist redactions in the Western text-type recensions of Acts and the epistles (cf. Wilson, 'Recasting Paul as a chauvinist,' esp. 10–11), as well as archaeological and iconographic evidence that demonstrates a wide-spread tradition of female leadership in early Christianity (Cynthia Finlayson, 'New perspectives on the ritual and cultic importance of women at Palmyra and Dura Europos: Processions and temples,' *Studia Palmyrenskie* 12 [2013]: 61–85; Ally Kateusz, 'Women leaders at the table in early churches,' *Priscilla Papers* 34, no. 2 [2020]: 14–22).

70 Using 'foundational texts' in isolation from the rest of the bible when interpreting the bible goes against the reformers' principle 'scripture interprets scripture', which means that 'particular passages of Scripture are best understood in the context of the books of which they are part, and of the Bible as a whole', thereby considering the 'bigger picture of Christian teaching', as a document prepared by the LCA's CTICR itself asserts, see Lutheran Church of Australia, CTICR, 'Hermeneutics and the ordination question,' <http://owl.lca.org.au/>.

71 Albrecht Beutel, 'Wort Gottes', in *Luther Handbuch*, ed. A. Beutel, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 367.

72 WA 23:225 = LW 37:112.

73 WA 18:69,9–11 (translated by author). See also WA 47:681.

74 Manfred Hauenschield, 'Luthers Grundsätze,' 2020, 19, accessed 22 June 2022, <https://homepage.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/Manfred.Hauenschield/pdf/Lutherehkn.pdf>, translated by author. See also Beutel, 'Wort Gottes', 368.