

THE TEMPLE, OR THE LORD OF THE TEMPLE?

In the article "Issues before the Church, Ordination of Women", in *The Lutheran*, 16 February, 1998, page 8 the first two paragraphs were:

"I love my church", said Dr Vic Pfitzner at the December meeting of the General Church Council (GCC) when it was discussing ordination of women. "I won't leave the church no matter which way the decision goes. I do not regard ordination of women as a part of the key dogma or doctrine of the church."

"I have committed myself to working for consensus on this issue", the president of the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA), Dr Lance Steicke, said in his December Newsletter to pastors.

What can we say about that first paragraph? We read in Jeremiah chapter 7 "Do not trust in deceptive words and say, 'This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord!'" Doesn't this attitude reveal that Dr Pfitzner is putting the organised church at the centre of his loyalty rather than the Lord and His Word? What he says also means that the Word of God about women pastors (1 Cor 14:33-39 and 1 Tm 2:11-14) does not bind his conscience? And doesn't what he says mean that "dogma" and "the doctrine of the church" is a different thing from what the Bible has said? Has not Jesus Christ bound His disciples to keep and to teach all that He has commanded?

What Dr Lance Steicke said about "working for consensus" also indicates that the crucial point has been missed. There can be no God-pleasing consensus apart from what God's Word requires people to keep and to teach. Whatever consensus is different from this is human compromise of the truth of God's Word for the sake of unity.

That people are speaking like this is not surprising, indeed. For the LCA has painted itself into a corner on the issue of women pastors. If it decides for them, some will leave. If it decides against them, some on the other side of the wide doctrinal spectrum will leave. It is symptomatic for the LCA that some want to talk about discrepancies in the Scripture, use higher critical theories, allow for some evolutionary views, unionistic involvement, church pronouncements on social issues, and so on, and others do not.

In the rest of the article we read about "an extraordinary meeting devoted exclusively to the study of ordination of women." How seriously can we take that, when there are already four women pastors associated with the LCA in one way or another? Already the Queensland District of the LCA already has an ordained women minister serving as a Chaplain in one of its Lutheran Colleges. The 1998 Calendar of the Board for Church Co-operation and World Mission has, towards the back, the photographs of two Lutheran women pastors, Pastor Penny Chin, of the Basel Christian Church of Malaysia, and Rev. Rugun Sitio, of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Indonesia, who are "both on a one-year Graduate Diploma in Ministry course at Luther Seminary. They are called "LCA scholarship holders." The fourth is Pastor Graue, who is currently lecturing in theology at Martin Luther Seminary, New Guinea. She was previously surnamed Scheitel, an ordained woman pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. At the Canberra General Pastors' Conference of the LCA in 1990, she was then serving as a minister in the Uniting Church, but she was given permission by majority vote of the Pastors' Conference to attend whatever sessions of the Pastors' Conference she wished. She was the one who would have preached at the Sunday service at the seminar on injustice at Adelaide in March 1992 if the arrangement by a large number of pastors and chaplains had not been countermanded at the last moment by Dr Steicke after agitation by Pastor and Mrs Robert Winderlich. If the LCA were honest about women pastors, it would not be beating the gun on this issue. It would be holding to what the Theses of Agreement say:

Though women prophets were used by the Spirit of God in the Old as well as in the New Testament, 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-14 prohibit a woman from being called into the office of the public ministry for the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments. This apostolic rule is binding on all Christendom; hereby her rights as a member of the spiritual priesthood are in no wise impaired.

Does this not raise serious questions about how truthful the LCA is in its subscription to the Theses of Agreement? Are we not justified in alleging that it is being regarded merely as a holding operation, a temporary document, until people are prepared to accept something different? That is not how Jesus Christ expects His church to proclaim His Word. Doctrine cannot be held with a date stamp on. It should be professed as if it were before the judgment seat of Christ!

Furthermore, if the LCA were serious about its Theses, it would not have taken even associate membership in the Lutheran World Federation, for many of its member churches have women pastors. One of the German churches has a woman bishop.

It should be very clear that in what the LCA has already agreed to in the role of women, including voting in congregational meetings, voting at conventions, reading lessons in church, assisting in distribution of the Lord's Supper, service on church councils, being elders (although they are called "lay assistants." the functions of elders are the same), every precedent that would have held them back from the ministry on the basis of 1 Cor 14:33-38 and 1 Tim 2:11-14 has already been conceded. The only thing that could stand in the way of women pastors in AD 2000 is the fear of splitting the church. In other words, it may not be a majority vote that prevents it, but a vote dictated by "consensus" out of fear of a split.

Paul calls the requirement for women not to speak in the churches in contexts where one speaks and the rest listen (compare the context, 1 Cor 14:26-35). They are not allowed to speak, but must be subordinate. 1 Tim 2 says that the reasons for this are how things were at the beginning. The man was formed first, and the woman was deceived first. Paul says that the Law forbids it. He says that it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. This is different from a custom (contrast 1 Cor 11:16). Paul calls it a "commandment of the Lord." When the Lord commands, the only appropriate response is obedience. The best attested reading for 1 Corinthians 14:38 is "If anyone does not acknowledge this, he is not acknowledged." It means, "The Lord does not acknowledge him / her. What a terrible thing! Surely that should make people take notice.