

WOMEN AND THE MINISTRY Sept 1997

In a recent article in the church paper of the LCA congregation at Nambour, Kirsten Zweck reported on a weekend workshop in Brisbane run by "The Women's Ministry Network." The aim of the group is to facilitate the process by which women may be ordained in the LCA.

She reports: "Following a devotion, Pastor John Vitale (President of the LCA Queensland District) presented a key note address entitled '*Ordination, The Ordained Ministry, and the Church.*' It was a most interesting and informative paper; the conclusion of which was that he saw no theological barrier to women's ordination. My understanding is that this is a view shared by many (albeit not all) ministers and theologians in our church. However, Pastor Vitale was quick to advise a "go slow" approach to the implementation of such an eventuality, primarily for cultural reasons; one does not have to look far to view the many changes in the 30 odd years since the unification of the two synods."

By way of evaluation, quite apart from the clear verses on Scripture that say that it is a command of the Lord that women should be silent in the churches, and that this role is a 'reminder that Adam was created first, and that Eve was deceived first (1 Cor 14:33-38; 1 Tm 2: 11-14), it is worth pointing out that once a church says "Yes" to women pastors, contrary to Scripture (and contrary to the LCA's own *Theses of Agreement*), there can be no turning back. In the Uniting Church, which has had women pastors for some time now, it is quite impossible even to discuss the question, because women who have been ordained resist even the discussion of the question so stridently. In the Lutheran Church of Sweden, where a vote in parliament has sanctioned women pastors, it is now the situation that if a young man who wishes to enter the ministry opposes women pastors, he is barred from the ministry.

Pastor Vitale made the process of gradualism very explicit, and this can be documented by ourselves from the history of the process, from women voting, to women office-bearers, to women reading lessons, women delegates at conventions, women members of the General Church Council, women assisting in the distribution of the Lord's Supper, and now, in the LCA, a proposal that the office of elder should be abolished, to allow a position with similar functions, which both men and women can hold. In the LCA secondary college at Maroochydore there is already a woman listed as a chaplain on the teaching staff. When the older members who oppose some of these practices begin to push up daisies, the younger people who have been gradually accustomed to these practices will be prepared to accept more. Meanwhile, Pastor Vitale does not want the church to be split!

There will be no stopping once the first hurdle is cleared, if we can take the example of what has happened in some Australian and a number of overseas churches. Many of the women pastors in the various churches in the world have adopted feminist theology, which completely denies Scripture as the final word in matters of faith and life. Those who hold feminist theology take the view that there is much in Scripture that is patriarchal, and must be changed. Some defend abortion outright, and some are practising lesbians. Even the Gospel itself is completely vitiated in feminist theology. Not to put too fine a point on it, they do not want to be saved through the blood of the male, Jesus Christ.

Of course, we have all heard LCA members say that as soon as women pastors are approved, they will leave. The history of protest in the LCA against unscriptural practice tends to suggest that if women pastors are approved in the LCA, (highly likely when most of the Presidents and members of the CTICR, and a proportion of the lecturers at Luther Campus are in favour) these same people are then likely to say, "At least my congregation does not have a woman as pastor." They can decide not to attend other churches in the fellowship where there are women pastors, but don't they give a thought to their children and grand-children, who take their remaining in such a church as a clear stamp of approval that everything is fine, or at least tolerable? Actions speak louder than words. In such situations, voting is best done with the feet. The lesson for us in this, in terms of an old Latin proverb, is "*Resiste principiis*" (Resist the beginnings); or in terms of Scriptural principles, "*Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith*" (1 Tm 1:18-19).