

Mayer on Women Pastors in the Lutheran Confessions

In an issue of the *Lutheran Theological Journal* in 1997 there is an article by Pastor Rolf Mayer on whether the Lutheran Confessions permit the ordination of women. He had presented it to the Commission on Theology and Inter-church Relations of the LCA. He begins:

“Many years ago I overheard a conversation between Hermann Sasse and David Preus, president of the American Lutheran Church. Sasse challenged Preus with the question, ‘How can you maintain that the ALC is loyal to the Lutheran Confessions when it agrees to ordain women?’ Preus’s reply was, ‘Many of us believe that it is precisely because of our loyalty to the Confessions that we have no problem with such ordination.’ I do not claim that these were the exact words, but they are the gist of the exchange.”

Pastor Mayer indicates his personal position in the final paragraph:

“Are the Pauline directives that women be silent] among those things that the apostles ordained but which they did not set down as though they could not be changed? I suggest that a ‘yes’ to these questions would not be inconsistent with what the Confessions say about the nature of the office of the ministry as outlined above.”

It is unthinkable that the writers of the Lutheran Confessions would have ignored the fact that Paul calls the principle that the women should be silent in the churches “the commandment of the Lord” (1 Cor 14:37). The article fails to state that having women pastors would have been absolutely unthinkable for the writers of the Lutheran Confessions. Pastor Mayer also fails to distinguish between whether the Gospel is valid no matter who preaches it, and the disobedience that is involved when a woman does it contrary to the Scriptures.

In examining passages in the Confessions that speak about the public ministry of the Gospel, and mention preaching and teaching among its principal functions, Pastor Mayer ignores the fact that the Scriptures forbid individual speaking in a leading role in the churches and the teaching of men to women (1 Cor 14:33-37; 1 Tm 2:11-14).

When Pastor Mayer discusses the view in the Confessions that the ordained ministers function “in the person of Christ”, he overlooks the fact that in a section he quotes from the *Apology*, where the English translation has “When the sacraments are administered by unworthy men”, the Latin text has a masculine form *per indignos*. It would have been simply unthinkable for the writers of the Confessions to write *per indignos et indignas* (by unworthy men and women). When the writers of the Confessions emphasise that the Word, and not the person of the minister, produces God’s intended results, they would never have dreamt that they were implicitly approving women ministers. They knew well enough that such a question was not debatable, and could not be.

With such an approach, by the time Pastor Mayer comes to asking,

“The question now is: If a woman is called, appointed, and ordained by the church in the same way as a man and for the same reasons, is her office less valid than that of a man?”

The whole point, that the Scriptures disallow it, and the writers of the Confessions would never have considered it, has been bypassed, and the whole question has been begged! When the wish controls the thought in sacred matters, nothing but disaster looms. Where such things go on in the theological leadership of the church, pity for those who are oppressed by them! They need our prayers.