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Theological Observer

Germany and Australia: Ordination of Women?

The issue of the ordination of women has surfaced within our German sister church, the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELK). One crystal-clear response was provided by the Working Group on Biblical Theology, and Church (*Ev. Luth. Arbeitskreis Bibeltheologie und Kirche*), in the theses translated and gratefully reprinted below. The Department of Systematic Theology of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, continues to view the ordination of women as a matter of the gravest, and church-divisive significance. In the spirit of mutual confessional accountability we urge the widest possible attention to the important German theses.

These theses are particularly relevant to the present emergency in the Lutheran Church of Australia, which is in danger of being robbed of its solemn, official confession of the truth in this matter. The tragedy is that the new, permissive position now being advocated in that church radically disavows the faithful testimony of men like the late Doctors Hermann Sasse and H. P. Hamann Jr. Humanly speaking, it was Sasse whose humble, persistent theological work brought the two Lutheran churches in Australia together in 1965, on the constitutional basis of the *Theses of Agreement*. The *Theses* clearly confess:

Though women prophets were used by the Spirit of God in the Old as well as in the New Testament, 1 Cor. 14:34-35 and 1 Tim. 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 (VI, 11).

Now to set aside this truth once so clearly recognized would be to repudiate the confessional foundation of the Australian Lutheran Union and to undo its integrity and legitimacy—which may God graciously avert!

* * * * *

**Theses for the "Discussion Concerning the Ordination of
Women into the Office of the Church in the SELK"
(Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church [Germany])**

Evangelical Lutheran Working Group on Biblical Theology,
and Church

1. The decision whether women may be admitted to the pastoral office may be based only on the statements of Holy Scripture. Scripture interprets itself and is thus the sole authority for churchly doctrine and practice (John 8:31ff.; 2 Timothy 3:16ff., among others), which also means that Scripture itself determines the temporary or permanent validity of its statements. Every biblical exegesis is bound to this principle (2 Peter 1:19-21), if such exegesis occurs in unconditional obedience to Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church.

Thereby is rejected the opinion, that extra-biblical anthropologies and world-views may govern the understanding of biblical texts.

2. The question whether women may be ordained into the pastoral office directly touches the office of the church instituted by Christ, and must therefore be answered on the basis of such biblical texts as treat of this (especially 1 Corinthians 14; 1 Timothy 2). The binding force of these texts means that no one in the church has the right to judge otherwise on the issue.

Thereby is rejected the opinion, that it lies within the discretion of a church whether to admit women into the pastoral office or not. Traditions, pragmatic considerations, and the like, may neither theoretically nor practically be placed above the biblical statements.

3. The office of proclaiming the Word and administering the Sacraments is instituted by Christ (Matthew 16:19; 18:18; John 20:21ff.; 1 Corinthians 4:1, among others) and is to be understood out of His words ("christonomically"). It is derived from the office of the Apostles called directly [immediately] by Christ. They set in place presbyters here and there (one may see Acts 14:23), in order that they might

“tend” the congregation of Christ (1 Peter 5:1ff.; Acts 20:28), which is God’s people (1 Peter 2:9ff.) and “His Body” (1 Corinthians 12). The character of this office is not that of ruling (1 Corinthians 4:8), but of serving (Matthew 20:25ff., par.). It can be clearly defined on the basis of the biblical statements, and is thus to be distinguished, also in respect of its incumbents, from the services and gifts otherwise existing in the congregation. It is not in competition with those offices and charisms.

Thereby is rejected the opinion, that the office of proclaiming the Word and administering the Sacraments

- can, on account of the variety of services and charisms in today’s congregation or church, no longer be defined unambiguously,
 - does not stand in direct connection with today’s shepherding office,
 - includes a (worldly) claim of power, and that the exclusion of women represents discrimination.
4. What the Apostle Paul specifies regarding the position of woman in the congregation carries weight also for the preaching office. In 1 Corinthians 14 it is a matter of the “command of the Lord.” In 1 Timothy 2:13 the divine order of creation is adduced in support. This order is not invalidated by the equality before God in Christ, attested in Galatians 3:28 (see also Ephesians 5:21-25).

Thereby is rejected the opinion,

- that 1 Corinthians 14:33-40 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15 no longer have binding significance for the church of the present day,
- that they may not be applied to the question of the ordination of women to the pastoral office,
- that they are at best to do with statements that belong into the realm of *adiaphora* (indifferent things).¹

¹The original of these theses may be found in *Lutherische Beiträge* 3 (1998): 313-314. The translation is by Professor Kurt E. Marquart.

Why We Need a Critical Edition of Walther

Time spent in St. Louis recently brought several significant revelations. Among them is the fact that under the leadership of Daniel Preus, Concordia Historical Institute has now catalogued and indexed all the holdings having to do with C.F.W. Walther (No small task!). This includes some 1200 letters written by Walther; a couple of dozen *Gutachten* written on behalf of the St. Louis faculty, signed by Walther; *et alia*. Interesting too has been the discovery of long forgotten notes for several other series of "Luther Hour" lectures ("Law and Gospel" was produced from such notes) regarding the inspiration of Scripture, justification, and a series on Luther's Great Confession on the Holy Supper (1528).

A second revelation was the fact that CHI is now pursuing funding for a critical edition of Walther's works. One can only hale the prospect—long overdue—of a significant collection of Walther's writings. Lamentably, the series envisioned will by no means be complete (15 volumes are proposed). And while it purposes to bring forth in English much which is thus far available only in the original, the German text will unfortunately not be included. In a perfect world we would have an interleaved edition. Nor is Walther's *opus magnum*, the so-called "Baier-Walther Compendium," the standard "Pieper" before Pieper, included in the project. If we are to have Walther, why can't we have the whole Walther? We have had enough abridgments and piecemeal efforts! Is he or is he not one of the most significant of the nineteenth-century American Lutherans?

Norman Nagel has repeatedly pointed out where others have played fast and loose in translating Walther. The standard translation of *Church and Ministry* (what happened to the *Amt* in *Kirche und Amt*?) and other works will have to be completely reworked (and this is, thankfully, envisioned). If Walther writes "Kirche" the reader must see "church" in the English text (not "congregation"), and let it be the reader who decides in which sense church is to be understood.¹ But not only so. Walther must

¹For example, *Church and Ministry*, page 192, line 15.

be read according to his own worthy criteria (Scripture, the Confessions, Luther and the fathers, law and gospel), and so comes the "critical" factor in the envisioned project. We here highlight one such criterion. Because Walther above all desired to demonstrate a continuity in his theology with the fathers of the church, special attention needs to be given to whom Walther is quoting, and the context of the statement of the churchman being quoted.

Case in point: under Thesis V on the authority of the Office of the Ministry in *Church and Ministry* (translated by J. T. Mueller), we read a citation from Chemnitz' *Examin* delimiting the powers of the pastoral office. Among them:

. . . with the consent of the congregation introduce ceremonies that serve the ministry, are not at variance with God's Word, do not burden consciences, but promote order, dignity, propriety, peace, and edification.

Walther's German reads, ". . . mit Konsens der Gemeinde einrichten,"² that is, just as Mueller rendered it, "with the consent of the congregation," if *Gemeinde* is simply to be rendered "congregation" according to Walther's intent (which is likely). German editions of *Kirche und Amt* give us Chemnitz' Latin in a footnote: ". . . constituere cum consensu ecclesiae ritus servientes ministerio."³ Walther rendered Chemnitz' "with the consent of the Church (*ecclesiae*)" as "with the consent of the *Gemeinde*," which Mueller renders "with the consent of the *Congregation*." Thus we've traveled from *ecclesia* to congregation via *Gemeinde*. Did Chemnitz mean to state that inherent in the authority of the Office of the Ministry was the power for each pastor to introduce or change the ceremonies (that is, liturgy) as long as his *congregation* consented?

A quick peek at the *Examin* provides the answer. Trent asserted,

If anyone says that the received and approved rites of the Catholic Church, customarily used in the solemn

²*Kirche und Amt*, 1911, 241.

³*De Sacramento Ordinis* I, 3; *Examin*, Preuss edition, 474a.

administration of the sacraments, can without sin be either despised or omitted at their pleasure by the ministers [*a ministris pro libitu omitti*], or be changed into other new ones by any pastor of the churches, let him be anathema. Canon XIII.⁴

Chemnitz notes that the intent of the canon is to guard papal authority by asserting the sinful character of any change to a papal decree. That stated, Chemnitz grants:

And indeed, for the sake of order and decorum it should not be permitted to everyone willfully, without the decision and consent of the church [*Ecclesiae iudicio et consensu*], just because he desires it [*pro libidine*], either to omit or change anything even in external and indifferent things [*in externis adiaphoris*].⁵

Later in the section Chemnitz elaborates:

Those rites also which are retained should remain what in fact they are - indifferent ceremonies, in order that they may not become snares of consciences but be freely observed without any idea that they are necessary, so that, barring offence, they can be omitted or be changed or abrogated by the direction and consent of the church [*Ecclesiae ordinatione et consensu*]. For this should not be permitted privately to the whim of anyone [*privatim cuiusvis*] . . .⁶

In these two passages does "church" equal "congregation"? No. And a final source demonstrates this. Not long after assuming the position of *Generalissimus* Superintendent of the Duchy of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel Chemnitz penned a document in behalf of the ministerium under the jurisdiction of the free city of Braunschweig (something like Ft. Wayne or St. Louis in the number of Lutheran congregations). These "Articles

⁴*Examination of the Council of Trent*, Kramer, II, 108; Preuss, 259d.

⁵*Examination*, II, 108; Preuss, 259d.

⁶*Examination*, II, 117; Preuss, 263c.

to be subscribed by those received into the ministry of this church [*hac ecclesia* - singular]⁷ include the following:

5. Let him retain the rites in use and received ceremonies of this church [*huius ecclesiae* - singular], and not presume to change anything by private decision without a common decree [*privato arbitrio sine communi decreto*].

Thus we now have an English Walther quoting Chemnitz to make a point which is the complete opposite of what Chemnitz actually stated. A critical Walther edition will have to note such things. Perusing Walther's enormous bibliography demonstrates that he still has much to say to 20th century Lutheranism. He wrote eloquently and at length regarding Lutheran-Reformed Union, the necessity of remaining a liturgical church, the dangers of the 'new measures,' and on many other very contemporary topics, along with of course, Church and Office. We need Walther. We need the real Walther. And we need to read Walther critically, according to his own excellent criteria. May the planned project progress in every way.

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⁷Sehling, KO VI/1, 471.