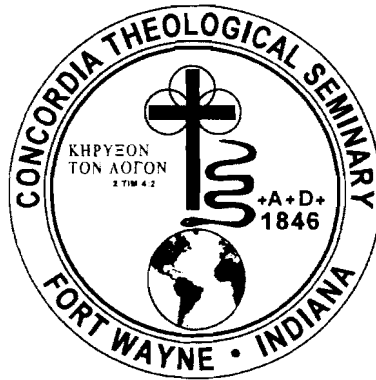


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The Argument over Women's Ordination in Lutheranism as a Paradigmatic Conflict of Dogma¹

Armin Wenz

I. An Ongoing Conflict

In the June 2006 issue of the *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, American church historian Kenneth G. Appold opened his article on women in early modern Lutheranism with the following words: "The path of Lutheranism to women's ordination is long, often controversial, and in many cases unfinished."² In view of the "possibilities that can, in hindsight, be connected with Luther's redefinition of the preaching office and his concept of the general priesthood of all believers," Appold finds it surprising that although Lutheran churches started to ordain women after World War II, there is still opposition to this practice.³ Appold, who currently works at the Ecumenical Institute in Strasbourg—probably the most important think-tank of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF)—mentions as examples "on the forefront" of such renitent behavior the Independent Evangelical-Lutheran Church (SELK) in Germany, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), but "also some churches of the Lutheran World Federation," among them explicitly the Lutheran Church in Latvia whose example shows "that the path to women's ordination also can be reversed."⁴

By doing so, Appold gives his thoughts a church-political dimension that is worth noting. Probably not by accident, Appold's essay appears at a time when the Lutheran World Federation is struggling for its existence. It thus fits nicely into the attempts of the LWF-mainstream to discipline deviants in Latvia and elsewhere. By way of example, I only point to the repression attempts against the Latvian church documented by Reinhard

¹ This essay was first published in German under the title: "Der Streit um die Frauenordination im Luthertum als paradigmatischer Dogmenkonflikt," *Lutherische Beiträge* 12 (2007): 103-127. It was translated by Holger Sonntag.

² Kenneth G. Appold, "Frauen im frühneuzeitlichen Luthertum: Kirchliche Ämter und die Frage der Ordination," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 103 (2006): 253.

³ Appold, "Frauen im frühneuzeitlichen Luthertum," 253.

⁴ Appold, "Frauen im frühneuzeitlichen Luthertum," 253. Yet for such an evaluation one would have to look carefully at how and, respectively, under what pressure the introduction of women's ordination in Latvia once had come about.

Slenczka,⁵ but also to the correspondence between the two bishops of the LWF-member churches in Sweden and Kenya concerning the episcopal consecration in the Swedish Mission Province.⁶ By his explicit reference to the SELK and its sister churches, Appold also weighs into the debate which is going on at least in the SELK, a church in which, according to Appold, the path to women's ordination "is still unfinished." Appold's judgment—"Any attempt to resist women's ordination based on tradition or some 'confessional heritage' is futile"⁷—is oil into the fire of those favoring women's ordination in the SELK.

Appold's semantics are marked by a historical axiom that is typical of much of today's Protestant theology. Resistance against women's ordination "still" takes place; the path to the desired goal is "in some cases" "not yet" finished. In some cases it is even "reversed." Such a way of speaking reveals a soteriologically charged view of history as process, which, however, strangely can no longer be made plausible to those churches exposed by Appold as *having relapsed* or *remaining backwards*. This has to do with the fact that the struggle regarding women's ordination can be perceived in a totally different matter, namely, not as progression into a future of wholeness, but as a paradigmatic conflict of dogma that touches on central aspects of church and theology, a reality that was pointed out already years ago by Bavarian Bishop Dietzfelbinger.⁸

⁵ Reinhard Slenczka writes: "The consistory, working with its partner churches, is to bring to bear its influence in the Lutheran World Federation and urge considering women's ordination, as it is being questioned, as *status confessionis* (question of confession)." "Die Heilige Schrift, das Wort des dreieinigen Gottes," *Kerygma und Dogma* 51 (2005): 177 n. 8. Thus reads the September 1996 resolution of the convention of the Lutheran territorial Church of Schleswig-Holstein quoted by Slenczka; see also 174 n. 1. For an English summary of the essay, see Holger Sonntag, "Holy Scripture, the Word of God: The Recent Debate in Germany," *Logia* 15, no. 2 (2006): 29–35. Furthermore, see Reinhard Slenczka, "Die Ordination von Frauen zum Amt der Kirche," in *Neues und Altes: Ausgewählte Aufsätze, Vorträge und Gutachten* (Neuendettelsau: Freimund, 2000), 3:183.

⁶ See the documentation of the correspondence between Archbishop Hammar and Bishop Obare in *Lutherische Beiträge* 10 (2005): 57–61; furthermore, see Johannes Junker, "Eine Missionsprovinz in Schweden," *Lutherische Beiträge* 10 (2005): 52–56. For Obare's response to the LWF inquiry, see Walter Obare Omwanza, "Choose Life!," *CTQ* 69 (2005): 309–326.

⁷ Appold, "Frauen im frühneuzeitlichen Luthertum," 279.

⁸ Hermann Dietzfelbinger, *Veränderung und Beständigkeit: Erinnerungen* (Munich: Claudius, 1984), 319: "I am convinced that the fact, that we did not, with the patience necessary, take a joint approach to this only seemingly secondary matter that in reality affects almost all basic problems of the congregation of Christ, did significantly hinder

This perception, however, is diligently combated by the proponents of process thinking. This can be seen especially in those churches where the quarrel is still going on, that is, where the path to women's ordination has "not yet" been finished, and they still find themselves in a different "phase" of the "process." By observing the debate within the SELK and the LWF, one can make an interesting discovery. Where women's ordination has not yet been introduced, it is asserted that such a step is an adiaphoron and would by no means affect the gospel; it would, therefore, not have divisive effects.⁹ Yet where women's ordination has been introduced and opposing voices do not fall silent, condemnations are issued. From this a new "ecumenical" consensus emerges that goes beyond confessions and countries. The anathema hurled against criticism of women's ordination is heard in Anglicanism¹⁰ as well as in Lutheranism, in Scandinavia as well as in Germany. The most prominent example is the 1992 statement of the Theological Commission of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) on "women's ordination and the office of bishop."¹¹ Reinhard Slenczka, who has repeatedly examined women's ordination critically, comments on this text as follows:

When at first there seemed to be only a question concerning church order, dealing with external peace and not with eternal salvation, opposition suddenly makes it clear that apparently there are, after all, questions involved which have to do with fellowship in the right

the consolidation and inner strength of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany (VELKD)."

⁹ This oft-repeated *ceterum censeo* of a lecture series of the faculty of the Lutheran Theological School at Oberursel has been published as *Frauen im kirchlichen Amt? Aspekte zum Für und Wider der Ordination von Frauen*, ed. Volker Stolle (Oberursel: Oberurseler Hefte, 1994). See the important critique of it in Gottfried Martens, *Stellungnahme zu Volker Stolle (Hrsg.): Frauen im kirchlichen Amt?* edited by Jobst Schöne (Berlin; Hanover, 1995), 10. Furthermore, Hermann Sasse, in view of this argumentation, talks about the phrases "the Gospel is not at stake" and "it is only an outward law [Ordnung] which has been altered" as the "great tranquilizer for disturbed consciences in modern churches." Sasse, "Ordination of Women?" in *The Lonely Way: Selected Essays and Letters*, trans. M. C. Harrison et al. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 2:404.

¹⁰ *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, March 11, 1994: "Wer sich der Frauenordination widersetze, irre im Glauben—ein kleiner Bannfluch ex cathedra aus Canterbury nach Rom" (translation: "Who resists women's ordination errs in the faith—a little ban ex cathedra from Canterbury to Rome").

¹¹ Kammer für Theologie, *Frauenordination und Bischofsamt* (Hanover: Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, 1992). This document was published as no. 44 in the *EKD-Texte* series. Hereafter *Frauenordination und Bischofsamt*.

doctrine and in the true church. The result is that a new consensus is not only demanded by disciplinary action, but also pushed through by doctrinal condemnations and exclusion from the church, even though the other side appeals to the conscience bound by God's word, which according to Romans 14 has not only a legal, but also a spiritual right to be protected.¹²

After a phase of appeasement thus follows the phase of the solitary rule of the advocates of women's ordination who demand the unconditional surrender of all who think differently.¹³

The *conclusion* of the development Appold longs for thus in fact leads to *exclusion*. The condemnations uttered show that the introduction of women's ordination has a *de facto* divisive effect, as it leads to the existence of two churches that *contradict each other* in many ways. In prophetic farsightedness, this was formulated already by great Lutheran theologians of the post-World War II era. Peter Brunner cautiously uttered the supposition that women's ordination could be a heretical practice, a supposition he saw validated by his inquiry.¹⁴ Anders Nygren commented on women's ordination, recommended by the Swedish government to the church in 1958, by saying that now the Church of Sweden had committed the Gnostic aberration.¹⁵

¹² Reinhard Slenczka, "Magnus Consensus: The Unity of the Church in the Truth and Society's Pluralism," *Logia* 13, no. 3 (2004): 21.

¹³ See *Frauenordination und Bischofsamt*, 8. The letter, written by bishop Walter Obare Omwanza, Kenya, to Archbishop K. G. Hammar on March 16, 2004, fits well here: "The consecration of women to the apostolic priestly office is a novelty. . . . This Gnostic novelty now demands apparently not only to rule alone in the church, but also exercises tyranny because it cannot not tolerate even a minimal cooperation with classic Christianity, as this is found especially in the Lutheran Confessions." The German is in *Lutherische Beiträge* 10 (2005): 60.

¹⁴ See Peter Brunner, "Das Hirtenamt und die Frau," in *Pro Ecclesia: Gesammelte Aufsätze zur dogmatischen Theologie*, 3rd ed. (Fürth: Flacius, 1990), 1:319. On page 332, he also writes: "The *kephalé*-structure of the relation between male and female established in the creation of man and the command of submission (*hypotagê*) that applies to the woman based on this order in a particular way are in force in the church of Jesus Christ to the Last Day. If a person were to contest the factually effective existence of this order and the factual validity of the command corresponding to this order in teaching and proclamation, he would, at a central point where ultimately the whole of the Christian message is at stake, proclaim a false teaching; he would be a heretic."

¹⁵ *Kyrkomötets protokoll* no. 4 (1958), 154: "Since the decision now made represents not only a decision concerning the limited question of female priests but, in my mind, at the same time includes the fact that our church changes over into a heretofore foreign track toward a view held in Gnosticism and among the 'enthusiasts,' I have to bring forward

Thus, the introduction of women's ordination has led both sides to make dogmatically weighty judgments that, as with all doctrinal condemnations, mark ultimate boundaries and have an eschatological quality, insofar as they bind the consciences of those judging before God. The radical nature of the change in church and theology that took place within one generation cannot be overestimated. It is a peculiar development that, parallel to the numerous efforts to reach convergence in the *ecumene*, the question of women's ordination has led to new confessional church bodies. When dissenters are denied their right to exist by dogmatic definitions, they lose the possibility to participate in spiritual life or theological discourse and are forced to continue their being the church outside the heretofore common walls. Just like at the time of the Reformation, however, such an eschatological situation of crisis offers above all a chance to study aspects of the gospel, which possibly have hardly been noticed and have now been condemned by one side as error, and to build the church by doing so.

That this really takes place becomes apparent when we first shed light on the material dogmatic dimension of the conflict regarding women's ordination in order to ask how it is possible to reach such diametrically opposed positions within the Lutheran church. For the material dogmatic decisions each presuppose fundamental theological premises in hermeneutics and the understanding of Scripture that have ecclesiological-eschatological consequences when they lead to the exclusion of differing positions. In this sense, the following elaborations are meant to measure the whole import of the conflict that has broken out.

II. The Material Dogmatic Disagreement: Between Paradigm Shifts and Deepening of the Heritage

In many areas of Lutheran theology, the justification of women's ordination has led to far-reaching modifications in doctrine, reaching from the understanding of the office via the theology of creation to the image of God. This is not to say that all advocates of women's ordination follow through with all paradigm shifts in all these areas. Yet one needs to point out that also on the level of material dogmatics there has been an increasing—process-like, at times slower, at times faster—“radicalization”

my serious complaints about the decision made and make known my reservations” (quotation furnished by E. Andrae; translation into German by J. Diestelmann). These minutes from the 1958 Church Assembly of the Church of Sweden are also quoted in Rune Imberg, *Tillsammans – Gud till ära och människor till tjänst. Om man och kvinna i den kristna kyrkan* (Gothenburg: BV-förlag & Församlingsförlaget, 1999), 41 n. 14.

of the positions,¹⁶ that therefore the "material for sharpened juxtapositions"¹⁷ has not decreased but increased during the last years, in the SELK as well as in the LWF or in the EKD.

¹⁶ There is not enough space here to report on the events in the SELK during the last 15 years. Some hints must be enough. The controversy in the SELK circles around the question, in what sense Article 7, 2 of its Constitution, according to which only males can be ordained to the preaching office, can be grounded theologically. After laborious work in commissions, partial results have been published in the past years, e.g., on the question of adiaphora or on that of order of creation. A promising elaboration of the Theological Commission on "Office, offices, and services" is currently being discussed at pastors' conferences. All these efforts are an important expression of the will to walk together on a path that can be supported by as many people as possible. However, one must not be blind to the fact that in parallel to these efforts some proponents of women's ordination have further fortified and sharpened their argumentative position. This applies especially to the attempt by Volker Stolle to introduce Luther and the Lutheran tradition as chief witnesses in favor of women's ordination, which will be discussed below. At the same time, one must not overlook that Stolle's argumentation goes hand-in-hand with an explicit paradigm shift that affects central aspects of theology, leading to a thoroughgoing destruction of Lutheran doctrinal contents. See, for instance, Stolle's book *Luther und Paulus: Die exegetischen und hermeneutischen Grundlagen der lutherischen Rechtfertigungslehre im Paulinismus Luthers* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2002). This destruction affects not only the office of the church, but also the question of justification, which in Stolle is "constructed" totally from scratch. In his book, Stolle has also applied the inner-canonical material criticism, which he practices in his argumentation for women's ordination, to other areas of the New Testament and other doctrinal questions. Since Stolle is the most important theological mentor of the proponents of women's ordination in the SELK, one must expect his further paradigm shifts to be received as well (as the tip of the iceberg, see the internet portal www.frauenordination.de, there the button "Vorgänge SELK"). Noteworthy is, for example, Stolle's compilation of clarifications, disseminated not only via the internet (the aforementioned Web site), "Ausgeblendetes, was jedoch für das Thema von großer Bedeutung ist, sowie Unklarheiten, die zu falschen Schlüssen verleiten können," on the bible study produced for the SELK's consistory: "Ordination von Frauen zum Amt der Kirche? Seminäreinheit für die theologische Weiterarbeit durch die Bezirkspfarrkonvente zum Jahresthema II/2006." The way in which one then reencounters these "clarifications" in the churchly discourse shows that one indeed is dealing here with the "formation of a school," in which one person sets the tone and others follow collectively. On Stolle's "destruction of the Lutheran whole of meaning" (thus Stolle himself in his book, *Paulus und Luther*, 438), see *Lutherische Beiträge* 8, no. 4 (2003) and my critique: "Wider die alten und neuen Antinomer: Über 'Paradigmenwechsel' in der lutherischen Theologie," in *Sana Doctrina: Heilige Schrift und theologische Ethik* (Frankfurt / Main: Lang, 2004), 335–356. See also John Stephenson, review of *Luther und Paulus: Die exegetischen und hermeneutischen Grundlagen der lutherischen Rechtfertigungslehre im Paulinismus Luthers* by Volker Stolle, *Logia* 13, no. 3 (2004): 41–43.

¹⁷ Stolle, *Frauen im kirchlichen Amt?*, 8.

For example, prominent advocates of female pastors view the churchly preaching office as merely a function or emanation of the priesthood of all believers.¹⁸ This is the point of departure and, respectively, the central theological "principle" to be kept in mind in the statement of the Theological Commission of the EKD¹⁹ as well as in Volker Stolle, the theological champion in the battle for women's ordination within the SELK. Accordingly, the office is seen as an order that is necessary for the sake of peace in the church. Any ties back to the apostolic office or even to the institution of the office by Christ himself are questioned or simply denied. Correspondingly, there can be no talk of representation of Christ by the incumbents of the office while they exercise their official duties.²⁰ The question regarding an exercise of the pastoral office by women, therefore, is exclusively answered based on the criterion of "equality" or "emancipation."²¹ A text like Galatians 3:28, therefore, relegates "the apostle's individual restrictive demands of silence and submission of women" to the realm of "taking care of current questions of order,"²² that either are not at all related to the preaching office or simply have to be seen as time-bound accommodation. In Stolle one can even read: "In the Christian congregation the difference between man and woman, as it is established in creation, . . . does not matter anymore."²³ According to this view, there can be no talk of apostolic instructions that are indissolubly connected with the gospel and therefore binding even today. They are neutralized as a time-bound snapshot. The concrete shape of the proclamation of the gospel is left to the decision of the church in its

¹⁸ See, for example, the summary of Gustaf Wingren by Regin Prenter, *Die Ordination der Frauen zu dem überlieferten Pfarramt der lutherischen Kirche* (Berlin; Hamburg: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1967), 15.

¹⁹ See also Appold, "Frauen im frühneuzeitlichen Luthertum," who repeatedly invokes Luther's connection between the general priesthood and the office without explaining how they are both related in Luther.

²⁰ See Volker Stolle, "Im Dienst Christi und der Kirche: Zur neutestamentlichen Konzeptualisierung kirchlicher Ämter," *Lutherische Theologie und Kirche* 20 (1996): 126.

²¹ On almost every page of *Frauenordination und Bischofsamt*.

²² *Frauenordination und Bischofsamt*, 6. Correspondingly, Stolle speaks of time-conditioned "structures of order" in "Neutestamentliche Aspekte zur Frage der Ordination von Frauen," in Stolle, *Frauen im kirchlichen Amt?*, 69; on this, see the critique in Martens, *Stellungnahme zu Volker Stolle*, 31.

²³ Stolle, "Neutestamentliche Aspekte zur Frage der Ordination von Frauen," 73-74. See the critique of Martens, *Stellungnahme zu Volker Stolle*, 37: "The claim that, in the Christian congregation, 'the distinction between male and female, as it is ordered in creation, plays no role anymore,' is perhaps true for certain Gnostic congregations, certainly not for Paul and his congregations. How one can arrive at such assertions in view of 1 Cor. 11: 14; Eph. 5; and 1 Tim. 2 is a mystery."

“evangelical” freedom. Yet the gospel is turned into a veritable manifesto for emancipation by means of materially critical deconstructions and reconstructions. It is thus not at all surprising that occasionally there are polemics against “andristic exegeses”²⁴ and demands to discover the femininity of God,²⁵ so that in this argument for women’s ordination even the notion of representation reappears in a transformed fashion, even though this is hardly done in a conscious manner.

On the other hand, the rejection of women’s ordination is, at least among its Lutheran representatives,²⁶ based on the perception of the institution of the ecclesiastical office by Christ himself, as it is witnessed in the Lutheran Confessions, and on the perception of the biblical statements on the creation of man as male and female in the equality of rights with a difference in gifts and callings. A decisive aspect here is the notion of the representation²⁷ that is anchored in the doctrine of the Trinity as well as in the history of salvation and that has anthropological implications. In this way, the unity of creation and redemption and, respectively, order of creation and order of redemption is emphasized as well as the correlation between the image of God (God as Father; sending of the Son) and the office of shepherd (sending of the apostles by the Son; passing on of the office to male bishops and, respectively, presbyters).²⁸ Although detailed theological reflections cannot be presented here, I will point out that the

²⁴ Stolle, “Neutestamentliche Aspekte zur Frage der Ordination von Frauen,” 78–79.

²⁵ See the elaboration by A.-E. Buchrucker, *Frauenpfarramt und Feministische Theologie* (Hanover, 1995), which was not without reason published in response to Stolle, “Frauen im kirchlichen Amt?” An English translation of Buchrucker appeared in *Logia* 9, no. 1 (2000): 9–20.

²⁶ As paradigmatic for this stance, the 1994 “Hirtenbrief zur Frage der Ordination von Frauen zum Amt der Kirche” by Bishop Jobst Schöne is to be commended, in *Botschafter an Christi Statt: Versuche* (Groß Oesingen: Lutherische Buchhandlung Harms, 1996), 70–82.

²⁷ See William Weinrich, “‘It Is not Given to Women to Teach’: A *Lex* in Search of a *Ratio*,” in *Church and Ministry Today: Three Confessional Lutheran Essays*, Preus, Mayquart, Weinrich, ed. John A. Maxfield (St. Louis: Luther Academy, 2001), 210: “We need to reflect upon the inner and organic connections which bind the speaking of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments to the inner life of the most Holy Trinity.” Note also the context of the quotation.

²⁸ See Schöne, “Hirtenbrief zur Frage der Ordination von Frauen zum Amt der Kirche,” 79: “The image of Christ as the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls (1 Peter 2:25) pales unless there are shepherds who speak and act in his name and by his commission, whom he sent as his ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:20). Experiences and wishes, needs and expectation that are deduced from humans and are related to them, especially to women, can then quickly shape a new image of God and Christ.”

conflict regarding women's ordination in the SELK has led to a deepening of neglected questions in an impressive thematic breadth. This holds for the examination of the question of whether the "one office of proclaiming the word and administering the sacraments, instituted by Christ," "exists at all and whether it can be found at least in the New Testament," done by Gottfried Martens, who works out the basic approach of the New Testament, especially of the Pastoral Letters, regarding the theology of the office.²⁹ There are furthermore the studies by Gert Kelter on the Lutheran Confessions' theology of the office and its position between the doctrinal decisions of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany (VELKD) and Rome regarding the theology of the office.³⁰ Additional contributions shed light on the "doctrine of the orders of creation" and its being anchored in the Lutheran Confessions³¹ or on the doctrine of the office in the pastoral theologians of the nineteenth century.³² Also the question of adiaphora that is constantly brought up in the debate regarding the ordination of women has been discussed on the basis of the Lutheran Confessions.³³

²⁹ Gottfried Martens, "Gibt es das 'eine, von Christus gestiftete Amt der Wortverkündigung und Sakramentsverwaltung'? Beobachtungen zur Frage von Amt und Ämtern im Neuen Testament unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Pastoralbriefe," *Lutherische Beiträge* 10 (2005): 3-20. On the New Testament situation, see also the essays by Hartmut Günther, "Ordination von Frauen zum Amt der Kirche? Erwägungen zu einer umstrittenen Frage," *Lutherische Theologie und Kirche* 21 (1997): 99-113, and John W. Kleinig, "Die Heilige Schrift und der Ausschluß der Frauen vom Hirtenamt," *Lutherische Beiträge* 2 (1997): 5-20.

³⁰ Gert Kelter, "Das apostolische Hirtenamt der Kirche als institutionalisierte Zuspitzung der potestas clavium: Entwurf einer Zuordnung von Amt, Ämtern und Diensten in der Kirche vor dem Hintergrund von CA XXVIII," *Lutherische Beiträge* 10 (2005): 21-34, and "Parochiales oder diözesanes Bischofsamt? Versuch einer Auseinandersetzung mit neuen Ergebnissen ökumenischer Forschung," *Lutherische Beiträge* 11 (2006): 71-91. See also Armin Wenz: "'Vom Amt der Schlüssel'—ein Katechismusstück und seine Bedeutung," in *Einträchtig Lehren: Festschrift für Bischof Dr. Jobst Schöne*, ed. Jürgen Diestelmann and Wolfgang Schillhahn (Groß Oesingen: Lutherische Buchhandlung Harms, 1997), 542-558.

³¹ Armin Wenz, "Die Lehre von den Schöpfungsordnungen—ein überholtes Theologumenon?" in *Sana Doctrina*, 146-181.

³² Armin Wenz, "Ministry and Pastoral Theology of Löhe and Vilmar," *Logia* 16, no. 3 (2007): 15-23.

³³ Gottfried Martens offers an important summary: "FC X shows clearly that viewing churchly practices as adiaphora . . . , where this view is taken seriously, must in the long run lead to a separation from those who contradict this view; and it admonishes us to use this terminology carefully and in a theologically responsible way." Martens, "Die Adiaphora als theologisches Problem: Ansätze zu einer Hermeneutik von FC X," *Lutherische Beiträge* 5 (2000): 127.

Taking up the approach of Peter Brunner, the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the LCMS in 1985 addressed women's ordination.³⁴ This discussion within the LCMS was deepened in an unmatched study by William Weinrich,³⁵ based especially on 1 Corinthians 11 and Ephesians 5, that went to the heart of the question as to why the specific correlation of man and woman in creation is reflected in the relation of Christ and his church. According to Weinrich, the apostolic instructions for the office can be seen as results of the divine economy of salvation, which is why they can by no means be qualified as time-bound, but bind the church permanently.³⁶ All these studies are by no means the private teachings of fanatic confessionalists; they rather bear witness to a broad doctrinal consensus with Lutheran theologians who discussed the question of women's ordination already earlier in the twentieth century on an exegetical and dogmatic level.³⁷ I mention in addition to Peter Brunner the names of the German theologians Hermann Sasse, Joachim Heubach, and Hermann Dietzfelbinger, as well as the Scandinavians Regin Prenter, Bertil Gärtner,³⁸ and Bo Giertz. Thus, a consensus spanning generations, countries, and confessions³⁹ in these questions pertaining to women's

³⁴ A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Women in the Church: Scriptural Principles and Ecclesial Practice* ([St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House], 1985).

³⁵ Weinrich, "It Is not Given to Women to Teach," 173-215.

³⁶ Weinrich, "It Is not Given to Women to Teach," 210-211. On the commandments indissolubly connected to the gospel, see pages 212-213.

³⁷ See the forthcoming volume of essays edited by Matthew C. Harrison and John T. Pless, *Women Pastors? The Ordination of Women in Biblical Lutheran Perspective* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2008).

³⁸ Bertil E. Gärtner, *Das Amt, der Mann und die Frau im Neuen Testament*, ed. Ernst Seybold, trans. Georg Stoll (Bad Windsheim: H. Delp, 1963).

³⁹ From the Anglican perspective, see Günther Thomann, "Die Frauenordination und ihre Folgen für die Anglikanische Gemeinschaft—Eine kurze Übersicht," *Lutherische Beiträge* 4 (1999): 106-124. From the Evangelical camp, see Werner Neuer, *Man and Woman in Christian Perspective*, trans. Gordon J. Wenham (London et al.: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990; Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991); Markus Liebelt, *Frauenordination: Ein Beitrag zur gegenwärtigen Diskussion im evangelikalen Kontext* (Nürnberg: VTR, [2003]); and Heinzpeter Hempelmann, *Gottes Ordnungen zum Leben: Die Stellung der Frau in der Gemeinde* (Bad Liebenzell: VLM, Verlag der Liebenzeller Mission, 1997). On the Orthodox position, see Peter Hauptmann, "Protestantische Frauenordination in russisch-orthodoxer Sicht," *Lutherische Beiträge* 1 (1997): 21-30. A historically far-reaching and ecumenically significant standard work has been presented by the Roman Catholic theologian Manfred Hauke, *Women in the Priesthood? A Systematic Analysis in the Light of the Order of Creation and Redemption*, trans. David Kipp (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988).

ordination cannot only be attested on the side of the proponents of women's ordination.

Yet since both sides arrive at opposing doctrinal results when it comes to evaluating the relationship between man and woman, between order of creation and order of salvation, between shepherding office and image of God, between gospel and apostolic instructions, while equally invoking Scripture and Confessions and, respectively, the Lutheran doctrinal tradition, we have to turn to the fundamental theological opposition in dealing with Scripture and Confessions that lies behind these opposing material dogmatic results.

III. The Fundamental Theological Disagreement

The historical-theological accusation of being "retarded" – that is, behind the times and slow to change – directed by Appold and others at opponents of women's ordination is repeated on a fundamental theological level both in the struggle for the correct use of Scripture and in the question regarding the catholicity of women's ordination, that is, its conformity to tradition or confession.

The Disagreement in the Evaluation of the Scripturalness of Women's Ordination

The opponents thus are accused of espousing a fundamentalist understanding of Scripture⁴⁰ and, respectively, of arguing based on the Baroque "proof-text" method,⁴¹ a practice that today, in the age of the historical-critical method, cannot be regarded as an adequate way of

⁴⁰ This is the basic tenor of the Internet portal www.frauenordination.de. It is interesting how this argument affects the so-called culture of discussion or arguing. For there is no need to listen to serious material arguments made by theologians whom one already knows to be fundamentalists or fanatical doctrinaires. On the peculiar experiences one can then make in the discourse within the church, see the striking gloss by Gert Kelter, "Theologie und Wirklichkeit: Eine sehr populärphilosophische Glosse," *Lutherische Beiträge* 11 (2006): 253–255. What is really behind the accusation of fundamentalism is an ignoring of the Spirit-wrought reality of theology and church. Thus postmodern, constructivist hermeneutics totally changes communication. When one no longer can agree on objective realities, including biblical statements and contents, because they are viewed only as time-conditioned constructions and because every understanding is seen as relative, then communication becomes a struggle for power, in which the strongest ("most plausible," most powerful, etc.) constructor prevails.

⁴¹ *Frauenordination und Bischofsamt*, 5: "Obedience to the Scripture cannot mean that individual biblical verses are isolated as 'proof texts' (*dicta probantia*) and their narrower and wider context is ignored."

dealing with Scripture. To counter dogmatic definitions, one points to the basic diversity of biblical "traditions" "that want to be read in their differences and in their being tied to the times"; this is why, accordingly, it is to be said: "In the bible, there is neither a comprehensive doctrine of the office nor a dogma on the role of the woman that transcends time. Rather, the history of primitive Christianity points us to different regulations in different congregational situations and resists a premature systematization."⁴² Accordingly, Stolle speaks programmatically of a "New Testament conceptualization of ecclesiastical offices."⁴³ Yet such time-conditioned conceptualizations are, both according to Stolle and the Theological Commission of the EKD, to be measured by the "center of the gospel." Based on this center, one can and must materially criticize misleading Scripture passages which therefore also may not claim apostolic authority that would bind the church today.⁴⁴ In Stolle one can read: "Biblical-theological contributions, which could help in the process of arriving at a decision, can, according to Lutheran hermeneutics, not consist in remembering apostolic orders as permanently binding decisions. Rather, they will, from the center of the gospel, take into account especially also the formative powers of the word of God"⁴⁵

⁴² *Frauenordination und Bischofsamt*, 5.

⁴³ Stolle, "Im Dienst Christi und der Kirche," passim.

⁴⁴ See *Frauenordination und Bischofsamt*, 5: "When later texts and traditions mention women as causing sin in the world and demand their subordination under men (so esp. 1 Tim. 2:8-15), then this is the result of a reader response that moves away from the original meaning, but that always has to be measured anew against the liberating message of the gospel of Jesus Christ and its understanding of creation"; and Stolle, "Neutestamentliche Aspekte zur Frage der Ordination von Frauen," 77: "The limiting directives, on the other hand, take up legendary elaborations which in the texts' tradition of interpretation attached themselves to the texts and represent their timely actualization and application (1 Cor. 11:7-10; 1 Tim. 2:13-15). Under different cultural and societal conditions they, with their actual presuppositions, lose their plausibility and become meaningless." Furthermore Stolle's review of Ulrike Wagener, *Die Ordnung des "Hauses Gottes": Der Ort von Frauen in der Ekklesiologie und Ethik der Pastoralbriefe* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1994): "In a good and insightful manner, the study at hand leads into the hermeneutical problematic that First Timothy, in the texts discussed, deviates from the theological line of Paul and seeks to shape the congregational life based on extra-Christian societal premises. If this is perceived correctly, then the church cannot avoid the decision whether it wants to follow uncritically the ancient order of society or give room to the evangelical freedom given as a gift in Christ." Review in *Lutherische Theologie und Kirche* 19 (1995): 159.

⁴⁵ Volker Stolle, "1 Kor 14,26-40 und die Gottesdienstreform der lutherischen Reformation: Die biblische Grundlegung des Gottesdienstes als hermeneutische Frage," *Lutherische Theologie und Kirche* 19 (1995): 135.

If one does not allow the fundamentalism charge to turn one off from independently looking into the biblical-theological elaborations of the Lutheran theologians rejecting women's ordination, one finds that they do not contain any undifferentiated use of contextually isolated "proof texts." This is true especially for the careful elaboration of Peter Brunner, which was probably not accidentally first caricatured and then rejected by the Theological Commission of the EKD.⁴⁶ Brunner himself, just like the many theologians following up on his work or arriving at similar results on a different path, explicitly distances himself from a fundamentalist and, respectively, biblicist-legalistic understanding of Scripture.⁴⁷ The point of departure for his exegetical observations, however, is the differentiating perception that there are in Scripture solemn divine institutions or orders that are by no means time-conditioned, which also are not only manifestations of God's will but that out of themselves—that is, by virtue of divine omnipotence—establish a universal and therefore also current reality that wants to be perceived by us. Such divine orders Brunner finds, on the one hand, in the institution of the office by Christ himself and, on the other hand, in the primeval creation of man as male and female in their specific coordination to each other. All of Scripture is permeated by the witness to the interdependence and the inexchangeability of man and woman, to the equality of rights, and to the difference in vocations of man and woman in marriage and congregation. The institution of the worldwide-missionary proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments by Jesus himself in the New Testament never takes place in an abstract way, but is always tied to persons. The two classic proof texts on the question of a preaching office of women (1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2) thus by no means represent cultural adaptations within the context of the entire Bible⁴⁸ but the point where the creation-theological and the office-theological lines converge.

⁴⁶ *Frauenordination und Bischofsamt*, 4–5. On this, see Reinhard Slenczka, "Ist die Kritik an der Frauenordination eine kirchentrennende Irrlehre? Dogmatische Erwägungen zu einer Erklärung des Rates der EKD vom 20. Juli 1992," in *Neues und Altes*, 3:201. Martens calls Brunner's treatise "Hirtenamt und die Frau" "probably the most profound negative contribution on this question." *Stellungnahme zu Volker Stolle*, 4.

⁴⁷ Brunner, "Hirtenamt und die Frau," 317. See Prenter, *Ordination der Frauen*, 6–8; Gärtner, *Das Amt, der Mann und die Frau im Neuen Testament*, 8.

⁴⁸ Weinrich, "It Is not Given to Women to Teach," 189: Paul argues "not on the basis . . . of the culture and society," but "on the basis of the story of creation."

By observing the Lutheran hermeneutical premise that the Holy Spirit does not contradict himself,⁴⁹ a number of inner-canonical tensions can be made plausible. There is, for example, the observation that Jesus, on the one hand, could gather many female disciples around him, but, on the other hand, only called men by name in order to entrust them with the sacraments as well as the Great Commission. In this way, one can understand why Jesus revealed himself as the risen one to the women who had come to perform the last service of love and then sent them with a limited charge to his disciples before he then meets the disciples himself to awaken their faith and to send them out into the world. One can then understand why it is a matter of course for Paul that women are present in the divine service and involved in prayer and praise, while he at the same time prohibits them to teach in the congregational assembly.

It may be that the respective exegetes cannot answer every question to the last detail. Yet the unbiased observer will notice that the interpretations of Brunner, Prenter, Weinrich, and others, which are different and yet in agreement in their basic decisions, correspond to the hermeneutical bases of the Lutheran Reformation. This is especially true of the perception that God works what he says through his solemn ordinations, a truth of faith that is frequently attested in Scripture and that is true for all the works of the Trinity: creation, redemption, and the work of the Holy Spirit. It furthermore has to do with the principle that the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments is a spiritual, God-wrought unity.

Contrariwise, if one considers how Scripture is used by proponents of women's ordination, one, to be sure, also finds here the affirmation of viewing Scripture as God's word. This, however, is understood in a way that is quite different than in the Lutheran tradition, which becomes apparent when in the actual use of Scripture one observes again and again a characteristic "change in subject."⁵⁰ One no longer talks about divine institutions, but about "structures of order" conditioned by each period of time. The office of shepherd is not viewed as an institution of Christ which his apostles "hand down," as it were, for the post-apostolic period to the bishops and presbyters, but one talks instead about conceptualizations of churchly offices. The vis-à-vis of Lord and church, head and body, command and obedience is thus replaced by the concept of a tradition-

⁴⁹ Hans Kirsten points to this premise and its application by Luther in "Luther und die Frauenordination," in *Die Kirche in der Welt: Aufsätze zur praktischen Theologie aus drei Jahrzehnten* (Groß Oesingen: Lutherische Buchhandlung Harms, 1983), 192-193.

⁵⁰ Martens emphasizes this in *Stellungnahme zu Volker Stolle*, 31-33.

historical development that can view the levels of development reached in the New Testament as time-conditioned variations but by no means as sign posts that are binding for later Christianity.⁵¹ In fact, one can obviously ask whether the polemic against the "proof-text" method does not really fall back on the advocates of women's ordination. Texts like Galatians 3:28 are often torn out of their context (which is certainly not about teaching in the worship service or a public exercise of the office of shepherd) and leveled against perceived illegitimate inner-canonical misjudgments regarding the relation of man and woman in the question of the office.

The Disagreement Regarding the Evaluation of Women's Ordination's Conformity to the Confessions or Tradition

It is precisely the tradition-historical concept that is behind the motif of a process-like path to women's ordination and that shapes the way in which its proponents deal with the tradition of the church. It is claimed that, on the one hand, the Lutheran Confessions are silent on the question of women's ordination; but on the other hand, the concept of the priesthood of all believers actually suggests the ordination of women, even if it could not yet be realized at the time of the Reformation because one had to respect the societal circumstances that have since changed. Accordingly, tradition—especially the Lutheran tradition—has cleared the path to women's ordination in increasing clarity.

Here, too, one discovers time and again—especially in the use of Luther quotes—the totally naïve use of a "proof-text" method that ignores the context.⁵² It is extremely strange in this context how, for example, Volker Stolle deals with Luther's statements. "Luther apparently had great difficulties to get a theologically accurate and definitive grasp of the reality of the churchly office."⁵³ Luther's understanding of the office is destroyed

⁵¹ For a critical view of this, see Martens, *Stellungnahme zu Volker Stolle*, 49

⁵² This applies especially to the "proofs" for Luther's alleged derivation of the churchly office from the general priesthood. For example, see *Frauenordination und Bischofsamt*, 3. The fact that the Lutheran Confessions do not mention the "general priesthood" even once when they discuss the foundation of the churchly office is, for its part, not worth mentioning.

⁵³ Volker Stolle, "Luther, das 'Amt' und die Frauen," *Lutherische Theologie und Kirche* 19 (1995): 20. Also, on page 8: "In this way, one attempts to undergird one's own culture-historical limitations in a biological and biblicist way"; and page 21: "Contrary to the word from Scripture, 1 Peter 2:9, that clearly unfolds its independent power, in fact, its critically explosive power, the commandment of silence and, respectively, the prohibition to teach, does not have any effect out of itself, but serves as the supplementary biblical foundation of convictions that appear evident based on other presuppositions."

by repeated caricatures, before it then is said, in summary: "The exclusion of women from the office of the church, as Luther proves it, turns out to be an element in his understanding of the office that is relative to time and that is therefore also time-bound. Accordingly, the ordination of women does not represent a break with the doctrinal tradition of the Lutheran church, insofar as Luther can be taken to be normative for it."⁵⁴

Appold, in his overview on "women in early-modern Lutheranism" mentioned above, argues in a similar way. At first, Appold rightly points out that orthodox Lutheranism highly appreciated woman and also female offices such as that of a midwife.⁵⁵ It is an equally important reminder that women as midwives and teachers could work in close contact with the office of pastor. Furthermore, Appold's hints at the beginnings of reestablishing the early church's office of deaconess are interesting. Caspar Ziegler also suggested for this a specific solemn rite of consecration.⁵⁶ Although Appold cannot adduce a single proof for an ordination of women to the preaching office,⁵⁷ he draws the conclusion: "All the

⁵⁴ Stolle, "Luther, das 'Amt' und die Frauen," 22. In "I Kor 14,26-40 und die Gottesdienstreform der lutherischen Reformation," 134, Stolle summarizes: "The exclusion of women from the churchly office was not derived from the commission of the gospel and the call by Christ, but attributed to human orders." On page 134, note 132, Stolle calls it an "exception" that Luther himself could prove the exclusion of women from the churchly office based on the commandment of Christ. The way he deals with the quotation by Theodosius Harnack on the same page shows that Stolle can arrive at his conclusions only because, for him, the order of creation always implies "human order," but not, as for Harnack, "divine" order.

⁵⁵ See also Eckhard Struckmeier, "Vom Glauben der Kinder im Mutter-Leibe": Eine historisch-anthropologische Untersuchung frühneuzeitlicher lutherischer Seelsorge und Frömmigkeit im Zusammenhang mit der Geburt (Frankfurt am Main; New York: P. Lang, 2000).

⁵⁶ Appold, "Frauen im frühneuzeitlichen Luthertum," 275-276.

⁵⁷ Appold, "Frauen im frühneuzeitlichen Luthertum," 277: "There is no proof for women being ordained in early modern Lutheranism for the preaching office." All that Appold's observations show (and that is certainly noteworthy) is that the orthodox Lutherans were so "pro-women" that indeed numerous churchly offices existing alongside the pastoral office were open for them. Yet this is also exactly the proposal of numerous important Lutheran theologians who rejected women's ordination for theological reasons and therefore demand to create specifically churchly offices for theologically qualified women. See Prenter, *Ordination der Frauen*, 17; Brunner, "Hirtenamt und die Frau," 337-338; Slenczka, "Ordination von Frauen zum Amt der Kirche," 195; and Schöne, "Hirtenbrief zur Frage der Ordination von Frauen zum Amt der Kirche," 81. One can also point to the fact that, in the United States, it is precisely the LCMS and the Roman Catholic Church that have by far the most women employed in qualified churchly offices—with the exception of the pastoral office.

presuppositions for women's ordination can be found in the 16th and 17th centuries."⁵⁸ Among these presuppositions are, according to Appold, "a clear relativizing . . . of the bible passages used against women's ordination" already in Luther and "in almost all exegetes of orthodoxy."⁵⁹ Appold also claims that Luther and the Lutheran theologians did not understand the "subordination" of woman as based on creation, but exclusively as a result of the fall according to Genesis 3:16, which is why they repeatedly relativized it.⁶⁰ Accordingly, only the social-historically conditioned view of the lacking aptitude of woman for the preaching ministry prevented women's ordination.⁶¹ Appold concludes, quite in agreement with Stolle: "Returning now to the initial thought and again asking the question whether women's ordination represents a break with the confessional-Lutheran heritage, one can unequivocally answer this question in the negative." In fact, that theological line is to be identified as "Lutheran tradition," "which stretches from Luther's view of the general priesthood and office via the many women of early modernity working in the church . . . a line which increasingly destroys the obstacles for women's ordination and prepares the path all the way to the total opening of all offices for women."⁶²

Rudolf Eles, Tom Hardt, and David P. Scaer have critically discussed Stolle's "proof from tradition."⁶³ Their critique of Stolle can, by and large, be applied to the way Appold handles tradition. First of all, one needs to ask how Appold himself understands the repeatedly invoked connection between office and general priesthood in Luther and in the Lutheran tradition. The Lutheran Confessions, at any rate, do not speak about the general priesthood in the context of their elaborations on the theological foundation of the preaching office. According to the Lutheran view, the

⁵⁸ Appold, "Frauen im frühneuzeitlichen Luthertum," 276.

⁵⁹ Appold, "Frauen im frühneuzeitlichen Luthertum," 276.

⁶⁰ Appold, "Frauen im frühneuzeitlichen Luthertum," 277.

⁶¹ Appold, "Frauen im frühneuzeitlichen Luthertum," 277.

⁶² Appold, "Frauen im frühneuzeitlichen Luthertum," 278–279.

⁶³ Rudolf Eles, *Martin Luther und das Frauenpfarramt. Bemerkungen zu Prof. Dr. Volker Stollers Aufsatz: "Luther, das 'Amt' und die Frauen"* (Groß Oesingen: Lutherische Buchhandlung Harms, 1995); Tom Hardt, "Die Lehre Martin Luthers von der Frauenordination: Eine kritische Auseinandersetzung," in *Ich will hintreten zum Altar Gottes: Festschrift für Propst em. Hans-Heinrich Salzmann*, ed. Michael Salzmann and Johannes Junker (Neuendettelsau: Freimund-Verlag, 2003), 213–229; and David P. Scaer, "Ordaining Women: Has the Time Come?" *Logia* 4, no. 2 (1995): 83–85, an introduction into the debate in the SELK in the English language. Martens, *Stellungnahme zu Volker Stolle*, 52, therefore rightly rejects the attempt of "making the Reformer himself into the chief witness for the legitimacy of women's ordination."

preaching office is founded on the mandate of Christ, not on the general priesthood. Also, the claim that the statements on women by the Lutheran theologians are exclusively founded on the fall, that is, based on Genesis 3:16, and on sociological considerations is, at least as far as Luther is concerned, not correct.⁶⁴ The reference to the office of deaconess and to an ordination to the same merely proves that some theologians could apply the term ordination to different ecclesial offices. If the statements of orthodox Lutheran exegetes really are to come into view, one would have to look especially into their commentaries on 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy. In his church-politically motivated study, Appold dispenses with this as well as with a survey of the locus *de ministerio* in the numerous dogmatic works of orthodoxy.⁶⁵

One can confidently question the claim that the Lutheran Confessions are silent on the issue of women's ordination. Karlmann Beyschlag writes in his history of dogma, pointing to Augsburg Confession XIV: "I venture to point out that the 'rite vocatus' of AC XIV is masculine. The Protestant 'women's ordination' to the spiritual office is thus not only contrary to Scripture but also contrary to the confessions."⁶⁶ Beyschlag has been ridiculed for this statement by those who do not want to see the reference to the male gender of the office holder in the context of the history of dogma, in which Beyschlag locates it by inner necessity.⁶⁷ In Beyschlag one finds not only the hint that the line of tradition, in which women's ordination is located, is not the one stretching from the New Testament to the Reformation, but the contrary one, namely, the Gnostic-sectarian one. Beyschlag writes on Augsburg Confession V: "What is right away significant in this formulation is that it restates the occidental conviction

⁶⁴ See Hardt, "Die Lehre Martin Luthers von der Frauenordination," *passim*, and Eles, *Martin Luther und das Frauenpfarramt*, 13 and *passim*.

⁶⁵ Appold has shown in his habilitation that he is well-acquainted with Lutheran orthodoxy; see my review in *Lutherische Beiträge* 10 (2005): 261-265. It gives one all the more pause that he now throws his theological weight into the discussion in such a church-political way.

⁶⁶ Karlmann Beyschlag, *Grundriß der Dogmengeschichte* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2000), 2.II:401 n. 181.

⁶⁷ Beyschlag, *Grundriß der Dogmengeschichte*, 2nd ed. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1988), 1:150-151: "Yet what is 'the Gnostic' par excellence? When one asks for the basic motif, then one time and again runs into the same, ultimately defective structure. It is, with a word, the ontological negativism of the Gnostic doctrine of God . . . , the refusal of order of creation and of theology of creation . . . in favor of a 'soteriology of self-preservation' and 'self-realization' . . . that made Gnosticism unbearable for the church."

that reaches all the way back to First Clement, according to which the institution of the churchly office . . . enjoys priority over the gift of the Holy Spirit who works the faith. Here the Augsburg Confession leans on the catholic pre-understanding and simultaneously destroys the basis for enthusiasm."⁶⁸ The delimitation over against Gnosis and enthusiasm involves the perception of the office as well as the creation-based coordination of male and female.⁶⁹ Yet Beyschlag's assertion, that the Lutheran Confessions contradict the ordination of women, will certainly only make sense to the person who is willing to perceive also the broad reception of divine institutions or ordinations in the Lutheran Confessions.⁷⁰ For, in the confessional writings, the preaching office as well as the specific coordination of male and female is viewed as anchored in salvation history as well as in the holy institutions of the creator and redeemer.

The Basic Hermeneutical Conflict

The disagreement in evaluating the conformity of women's ordination to Scripture and tradition reveals two contrary approaches to Scripture and tradition. It lies, therefore, in the area of hermeneutics.

On the one hand, we have the concept of a tradition-historical process that in its normativity by no means reached its end with the formation of the canon, but, at least in this question, reaches its end—its authoritative and irreversible conclusion—first when women's ordination is introduced. Beyond the "center of the gospel," Scripture offers any number of time-conditioned formations of tradition.⁷¹ This view leads to the observed

⁶⁸ Beyschlag, *Grundriß der Dogmengeschichte*, 2.II:401.

⁶⁹ Brunner, "Hirtenamt und die Frau," 310: "Due to the necessary quarrel with Gnostic and heretical groups in the early church, the question of the form of the official service of women in the church was still alive." Also William Weinrich, "Women in the History of the Church: Learned and Holy, but not Pastors," in: *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 1991), 274: "Against the Gnostic, to maintain a distinction of male and female function was to confess a creation theology that respected the concrete, fleshly differences between man and woman."

⁷⁰ See Armin Wenz, *Das Wort Gottes, Gericht und Rettung: Untersuchungen zur Autorität der Heiligen Schrift in Bekenntnis und Lehre der Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1996), 15–85.

⁷¹ On this idea of the "center of the gospel" as "an organizing principle in the plurality of theological conceptions that can be discerned in the tradition, especially also in the New Testament," that is at work also in the ecumenical dialogue, see the critique in Gottfried Martens, *Die Rechtfertigung des Sünders: Rettungshandeln Gottes oder historisches Interpretament?* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1992), 195. Martens

ongoing change in subject when it comes to perceiving the biblical contents. The evolution of the office is a human conceptualization, not the command and effect of Christ or his Spirit. The "center of the gospel," for its part, gives liberty to the church today to find contemporary solutions to questions of the church's life. This is by no means about material ("dogmatic") recognizability or even identity with earlier stages of the process. Rather, it is enough to make one's own transformations plausible as *effects of the gospel*. This effect consists, above all, in adapting the external forms and signs of the church's life to today's times.

In back of the approach is a binary and, respectively, dualistic understanding of reality. The gospel comes close to an ultimately trans-historical idea that can be separated from its canonically attested historical forms. Since, however, the historicity is a constitutive factor for the gospel of Christ, because divine content (or divine Person) and earthly-historical form cannot be separated anymore by virtue of the incarnation, the explicit criticism of its New Testament forms also affects the gospel itself. The latter becomes, as Regin Preter rightly writes, "a timeless idea," that runs the risk of losing "its historical foundation."⁷²

Yet this has immediate consequences for the doctrine of justification that equally have a major impact on the gospel. For if a "center of the gospel," however that is defined, is isolated from the mandates of Christ and his apostles connected to the gospel, then the work of the Lord is ultimately replaced by the work of the church. The result is the kind of constructivism that is wide-spread in the postmodern philosophy of language. About this constructivism, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, a scholar of Romance languages, writes that its adherents live convinced that "man can reshape everything—from 'gender' via 'culture' to 'landscape'—according to his

also treats throughout on this topic and on the corresponding "change in subject" when dealing with Scripture.

⁷² Preter, *Ordination der Frauen*, 18. He continues: "There is probably a line from that modern disregard for the historically conditioned external sign of the continuity between the pastoral office and the apostolate to the existence-theological view of the kerygma" See also the elaborations of the philosopher Kurt Hübner, *Glaube und Denken: Dimensionen der Wirklichkeit* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 101–102 n. 22: ". . . a recapturing of the presence of Christ at the Last Supper, the officiating priest is his representative. This is why the demand to leave this role of his to women is nonsensical though wide-spread today. As seen, the Catholic Church's retaining of male priests does not have anything to do with misogyny. Such demands are, by the way, only an indicator of once again, as already many times in the history of Christendom, desiring to sacrifice the concreteness of the Eucharist as a matter of flesh and blood to an abstract and pale symbolism."

fancy without any further ado, because everything is allegedly 'only a human construct.'⁷³ As an aside, this constructivism is not only behind socio-politically dominating "gender mainstreaming,"⁷⁴ but also behind the churchly capitulation to the homosexual movement that is connected to the former, no matter how far the effects of this capitulation have developed.

Such a constructivism was combated full force by the Reformation in its struggle against enthusiasm in all its forms. Not surprisingly, the criteria of the Confessions for the shaping of the churchly life can by no means be reduced to some abstract gospel or even a "center of the gospel," but explicitly takes up the solemn ordinations of God that alone can establish divine right in the church. According to Reformation conviction, the salvation-historically anchored commandments of Jesus and his apostles attested to in New Testament create certainty regarding what is to take place in the church by divine right for the salvation of man and for the edification of the church.⁷⁵ This certainly is not some ahistorical bondage, but corresponds to perceiving the presence of the triune God who speaks and works through his commandments that are historically handed down in Scripture. "Historical account and commandment," Prenter says, "come together in the gospel as a whole."⁷⁶

What is at stake here is not only the authority of Scripture, which, just like the authority of Luther, is invoked on all sides, but above all its efficacy and sufficiency which by no means can be reduced to its exemplary nature in the time-conforming accommodation of the message. Rather, Scripture is effective and sufficient in that the triune God, in creation as well as in the order of redemption, works what he says by means of the words of institution handed down in Scripture. The conflict is therefore an ontological one. For if God works what he says, then we are dealing with present realities when it comes to the biblical coordination of male and female in the congregation as well as in questions of the office—realities which the living God, by means of his historically attested canonical word, establishes and defines here and now, as Dietzfelbinger put it, "not only 'time-bound,' but central and all the way to the last

⁷³ Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Diesseits der Hermeneutik: Die Produktion von Präsenz* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004), 80.

⁷⁴ See Volker Zastrow, "Politische Geschlechtsumwandlung," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 19, 2006, 8.

⁷⁵ See Prenter, *Ordination der Frauen*, 8, where he speaks of "commands of order" "which want to guard the right, appropriate handing down of the gospel."

⁷⁶ Prenter, *Ordination der Frauen*, 9.

foundations of human existence."⁷⁷ Based on the witness of Scripture and the Confessions, Prenter writes on the office: "It is thus part of the institution of the office . . . that it is not only an institution as the establishment of an institution which then can be administered by the congregation itself, but that it is an ongoing sending so that everybody who enters the office stands under the same divine mandate as the apostle. They thus act as representatives of Christ."⁷⁸ If one closes one's eyes to these realities, if one engages in their deconstruction to construct or conceptualize what is new and timely, then one loses the salutary things God speaks and works by his word.⁷⁹

IV. The Ecclesiological and Eschatological Consequences

A final confirmation for the truth of the assertion that women's ordination is indeed not about a marginal question, but about the foundations of the church, emerges when one perceives the consequences and continuation of the hermeneutical and material-dogmatic conflict on the ecclesiological and eschatological levels. This affects the determination of the doctrinal consensus that constitutes the unity of the church and the determination of the notion of heresy connected to it. This also touches on the last things, which is finally shown in the question regarding the certainty of salvation.

The Conflict Regarding Magnus Consensus and Heresy

Both parties to the conflict appeal to the *magnus consensus* and want to express their connection to the Lutheran Reformation also in this way. The Theological Commission of the EKD points out that the introduction of women's ordination took place by *magnus consensus*,⁸⁰ which is why

⁷⁷ Dietzfelbinger, *Veränderung und Beständigkeit*, 318. See Brunner, "Hirtenamt und die Frau," 328: "The order that governs the relationship between man and woman has been established by God in the beginning of all things; it did not come about in history but is given with creation. . . . Paul here looks at the account of the creation in Gen. 2." See also Brunner, "Hirtenamt und die Frau," 335-336.

⁷⁸ Prenter, *Ordination der Frauen*, 12, taking up Augsburg Confession XXVIII. On focusing this representation on the power of the keys, cf. Prenter, *Ordination der Frauen*, 13.

⁷⁹ See the conclusion by Weinrich, "It Is not Given to Women to Teach," 214-215: "A 'know-nothing' hermeneutic which finds itself satisfied when explicit and particular prohibitions are wanting in Scripture will not be competent to inquire after the inner and organic relation between word and act, between what the incarnate Word did and what the Church must do to be faithful to the Gospel."

⁸⁰ Note the contrary judgment by Dietzfelbinger, *Veränderung und Beständigkeit*, 319: "That the problem, on which, after all, hinged all the centuries of church history up till

objections to it cannot be tolerated. In this way, this decision, according to the Commission, even shares in the authority of Scripture and the Confessions and demands absolute obedience.⁸¹ The *casus confessionis* declared within the church also affects the *ecumene* between churches. "False ecumenical considerations" in this question are harshly rejected by the Theological Commission of the EKD; in fact, precisely "out of ecumenical commitment" "the evangelical church must" teach and practice "that there are no reasons based on Scripture and the Confessions to exclude . . . women from the ordination to the pastoral office."⁸² Dietzfelbinger still held the view that with the "step to women's ordination" the Lutheran church had "left the ecumenical center" "and allowed itself" "to be marginalized."⁸³

However, Reinhard Slenczka pointed out that, according to the Reformation view, there can be no majority decisions in questions of Scripture and the Confessions. The *magnus consensus* formulated in the Lutheran Confession came about by setting forth the teaching that agrees with Scripture and the catholic church and by publicizing it as an offer to all Christians in this church, connected with the invitation to join this consensus. *Magnus consensus* is thus first of all about the proof of the apostolicity and catholicity of one's own doctrine, about the diachronic doctrinal consensus that spans the ages which then sustains and defines the synchronic, contemporary consensus. Thus, the consensus must not refer to the present or the future only, as it is, according to Johannes Wirsching, typical for heretical phenomena.⁸⁴ Moreover, it certainly will

now and pretty sizable ecumenical problems, had been solved or led to a consensus—that could not be said by any means."

⁸¹ See *Frauenordination und Bischofsamt*, 8.

⁸² *Frauenordination und Bischofsamt*, 8.

⁸³ Dietzfelbinger, *Veränderung und Beständigkeit*, 319. Cf. for the debate in the SELK and the warning by Martens going in the same direction, *Stellungnahme zu Volker Stolle*, 48.

⁸⁴ Johannes Wirsching, *Kirche und Pseudokirche: Konturen der Häresie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1990), 176–177: The heretic "is unable to believe without supplementing the seeming poverty of his faith by additional evidences. . . . This is why the heretic also does not understand his confession of Christ as a witness to the truth of Jesus Christ in communion with the fathers and brethren (horizontal ecumene), but as a program of an elite or avant-garde congregation outdoing the fathers and brethren (vertical or futurist individualization). In this perspective, the heretic does not want to testify to something, but, above all, wants to accomplish something. . . . In all this, heresy proves to be revolutionary, not reforming. The Christian revolutionary always ends up establishing a party (meant to be church), although he wants to remain in the church and preserve it as a pure community of faith, if not even restore it as such."

not do, by disregarding the distinction of the two kingdoms, to place a consensus with society or politics above the consensus with earlier generations of the church.⁸⁵ Brunner, applying the two-kingdoms doctrine, writes in all clarity: "An argument, therefore, that thinks it possible to deduce the possibility of placing women into the shepherd's office from their changed position in civil society, has no place in the church . . ." ⁸⁶

One nonetheless can observe a reception of political consensus-finding mechanisms in the church; this holds for the introduction of women's ordination as well as for the debate on the blessing of homosexual partnerships. In the dialogical process, which is charged with quite superstitious salvific expectations,⁸⁷ there is first a stepwise change of opinion and finally a majority opinion favoring a "new consensus." However, it is quite interesting that, for example, in the EKD and in the Church of Sweden there is definitely not a "protection of minorities" that is customary in politics. This observation alone shows that a politicization of the church does not mesh with the gospel entrusted to it. The mingling of the two kingdoms that takes place leads to totalitarian results. The church authorities' radical calls for obedience directed at the opponents of women's ordination—calls which take place in a seemingly pluralistic and tolerant age—speak for themselves. One can certainly observe how there are already harbingers of impending totalitarianism in the phase of appeasement. Where Scripture and the Confessions become the objects of our de- and re-constructions, a polarization of the church takes place which theologially has to be called a hereticization in the sense

⁸⁵ Stolle, "Neutestamentliche Aspekte zur Frage der Ordination von Frauen," 79: "The church will have to decide the question of women's ordination today because it lives in an age that is on the way to the emancipation of women. I think the church has, based on the New Testament and today's place of man and woman in society, sufficient criteria for such a decision." In critique of this, see Martens, *Stellungnahme zu Volker Stolle*, 43. Furthermore, Stolle, "I Kor 14,26-40 und die Gottesdienstreform der lutherischen Reformation," 135; Dietzfelbinger, *Veränderung und Beständigkeit*, 317-318: "Yet the stronger emancipation movements became in the whole society, the more unequivocal, because the call of female theologians for the pastoral office and ordination like the men"; see also Sasse, "Ordination of Women?" 402-404.

⁸⁶ Brunner, "Hirtenamt und die Frau," 334. Martens points out that the Scripture principle is in danger when one introduces "Scripture and society as criteria": "The latter one would then, based on the Lutheran Confessions, certainly have to be called a heresy." *Stellungnahme zu Volker Stolle*, 43. See also Th. Junker, "Theologische Aspekte zu den Beiträgen 'Frauen im kirchlichen Amt?'" in *Oberurseler Heft* 28 (1995): passim.

⁸⁷ Sasse, especially in view of women's ordination, speaks of today as "an age which has a superstitious belief in dialogue as the infallible means of settling everything." "Ordination of Women?" 402.

formulated by Peter Brunner: "The subscription to the confessions is replaced by the subscription to the opinion of this or that theological school, which now necessarily has to assert itself with the exclusive authority of dogma. Where the authority of Scripture is lost, the *haeresis* of the school replaces the *confessio* of the church."⁸⁸ Whoever does not join the formation of schools is caricatured ("hierarchically aloof"), reviled, and met with suspicions;⁸⁹ he is declared to be unfit for dialogue or even ideologically blinkered and, respectively, stuck in traditional role-models. The confessional principle *sine vi, sed verbo* (CA XXVIII, 21) can evidently be abrogated in both phases, in the phase of appeasement as well as in phase of the final enforcement of the "school." The media are not infrequently instrumentalized,⁹⁰ or a seeming contradiction to secular laws is pointed out. The politicization affects even the material discussion. This is seen wherever the relation between man and woman, office and congregation, which is qualified by Scripture and the Confessions as a spiritual-theological reality, is reinterpreted as "role models."⁹¹ Criteria that are appropriate in the societal context but foreign to theology are brought to bear on the contents of Scripture; in fact, these criteria are to define the so-called agenda of the church more and more.⁹²

⁸⁸ Quoted in Slenczka, "*Magnus Consensus*," 36.

⁸⁹ An inquisitorial semantics of "suspicion" permeates especially Stolle's argumentation against those who do not want to share his line of argumentation on the subject, whose material arguments he thus avoids in a psychologizing manner. E.g., Stolle, "Neutestamentliche Aspekte zur Frage der Ordination von Frauen," 78; on this, see Martens, *Stellungnahme zu Volker Stolle*, 42, and Junker, "Theologische Aspekte zu den Beiträgen," 87.

⁹⁰ See Slenczka, "*Magnus Consensus*," 35, and Martens, *Stellungnahme zu Volker Stolle*, 47 (on the role television played in the processes of deliberation leading to the introduction of women's ordination in the Lutheran territorial Church of Schaumburg-Lippe and in the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Baden).

⁹¹ In a particularly striking manner, Stolle writes on Luther's understanding of the office: "Roles are assigned without equivocation. The office bearers are giving; the congregation is to be receptive. And this understanding of the office is now taken into the rule of man over woman as an integral component. The doctrine of the office thus is conceptualized in correspondence to social doctrine." Stolle, "Luther, das 'Amt' und die Frauen," 16.

⁹² Slenczka, "*Magnus Consensus*," 33: "However, to the extent that these bodies follow parliamentary precedent, consensus will become the goal that determines everything for the preservation of cohesion in the ecclesiastical polity, as well as for the pushing through of certain resolutions. Given this presupposition, it is not surprising that the spectrum of public opinion and political directions is reflected in the ecclesiastical bodies as far as the selection of topics as well as the respective attitudes is concerned."

The decisive criterion for defining and delimiting consensus and heresy is ultimately only social damage. Damaging or disturbing the harmonious community must not be tolerated even in cases of conscience and is therefore punished by disciplinary measures. Reinhard Slenczka rightly asks: "What has happened to a church of the Reformation when it declares majority decisions of churchly entities as necessary for salvation; when those who contradict based on Scripture are defamed; and when finally consciences bound to God's word are disciplined by coercive means?"⁹³ It should give pause that the churches acting in this way become more and more like a quasi-papist totalitarian rule—all the way to the claim of infallibility.⁹⁴

The Conflict Regarding the Certainty of Salvation

It is all the more remarkable that precisely in this situation the legitimacy of the female pastoral office appears implausible to individuals⁹⁵ or churches, so that they return to the original consensus in spite of all resistance and countermeasures. The Reformation consensus, however, knows as highest criterion, not "social damage," but "salvation damage" (Johannes Wirsching). Here one knows that the church does not create its boundaries by itself but discovers them when God's institutions are left behind. Here one at the same time lives out of the promise that it is not we who can sustain the church, who are able to secure it by being accommodating to society and its norms; this work of sustaining and securing is done only by the Lord himself by his word and sacrament. Where it is proclaimed in its truth and purity, one comes together with those who do likewise, no matter how that might look at first on an organizational level. When churches allow themselves to be led back to Scripture and the Confessions, as this has taken place in Latvia, then this is a reason for joy, just as when the brothers and sisters excluded from the Church of Sweden gather in the "Mission Province." Both events are concrete examples of the fact that, as Slenczka writes, also after the introduction of women's ordination, "the unchanging word of Holy Scripture continues to exercise its disquieting influence on consciences; even ecclesiastical decisions can never cancel its effect."⁹⁶

⁹³ Slenczka, "Ist die Kritik an der Frauenordination," 202–203.

⁹⁴ See Slenczka, "Ist die Kritik an der Frauenordination," 205.

⁹⁵ See Martti Vaahoranta, "Dies Geheimnis ist groß—der Sinn von 'des Herrn Gebot' (1. Kor. 14,37): Einige sehr persönliche Überlegungen," *Lutherische Beiträge* 10 (2005): 35–42, and Ulla Hindbeck, "Women and the Ministry," *Logia* 9, no. 1 (2000): 21–22.

⁹⁶ Slenczka, "Magnus Consensus," 35.

Comparing the discussions regarding the question of certainty in the two phases of the conflict described initially leads to a highly critical point and offers an ultimate proof for the deeply *eschatological* character of the conflict. While during the appeasement phase the rejection of women's ordination based on the argument of a lacking certainty of salvation in the case of the exercise of the pastoral office by women is caricatured or even psychologized and ridiculed by pointing to a dependence on role models,⁹⁷ exactly this argument reappears in the arsenal of arguments and disciplinary measures of its defenders after the introduction of women's ordination. Thus it says in a report by the former bishop of the Lutheran Church in Hanover, Horst Hirschler, quoted by Slenczka:

When one talks about contesting the right of the ordination of women, then a different level has been reached. This is no longer on the table in our church. Whoever has been called into the ministry of proclamation in our church does not have the right to question women's ordination. Why? Because on it hinges the question of certainty of salvation for the members of the congregation. When the ordination of women is not seen before God as an appropriate action of the church, when it is controversial, then congregants can no longer be certain that the worship service they celebrate under the leadership of their female pastor is the place of the promised presence of God. They cannot be certain that God's word is spoken to them in the proclamation; that communion is truly the Lord's Supper; that the forgiveness promised to them by the female pastor is God's forgiveness. Whoever participates in the worship service must be able to be certain that here one speaks and acts commissioned by God.⁹⁸

In this clear statement, which is consistent in itself, are fulfilled the admonishing and warning prophecies of those who already in the first phase of the conflict knew that women's ordination in the realm of the Lutheran church must lead to a division of the church.⁹⁹ This insight that

⁹⁷ On this, see Stolle, *Frauen im kirchlichen Amt?* passim, and the pertinent critical remarks by Martens: "Here too, the question of certainty, conscience being bound to the word of God, is only dealt with by way of caricature; not the side that changes the early church's practice, but that which retains it, is suddenly under pressure to justify itself for 'elevating' something 'as a criterion.' In this way, the problem is fully turned upside-down." *Stellungnahme zu Volker Stolle*, 28; see also 11-12, 50-51.

⁹⁸ Slenczka, "Ist die Kritik an der Frauenordination," 208 n. 16.

⁹⁹ Martens, *Stellungnahme zu Volker Stolle*, 12-13: "The anathema pronounced by the Commission for Theology makes clear that a coexistence of opponents and proponents of women's ordination in a church that has introduced women's ordination is, in principle, impossible."

last things are nonetheless at stake, in fact, salvation itself, forces a decision.¹⁰⁰ The theological process of clarification that can be observed on both sides has led to a deepening of the difference between paradigm shifts that go further and further and a broad and renewed reassurance concerning the traditional doctrinal consensus of the church. The claims made during the phase of appeasement—that by introducing women’s ordination the gospel is not affected and church fellowship is not at stake—must, in light of the most recent developments, be considered refuted. It is thus not surprising that we now are in the process of entering a third phase of the conflict that is characterized by increasingly harsh disciplining on a church-official level and by the kind of church-historical revisions we observed in Appold and Stolle which flank these measures, confirming them either in a supplementary or advance way.

Our overview has also shown, however, that it is by no means surprising that the argument over women’s ordination is *still* ongoing. It is grounded in the acting of the triune God in creation and redemption. We therefore affirm with Rudolf Eles:

Office and congregation cannot be disconnected from God’s designs for creation and redemption. As far as their substance is concerned, they will never be emancipated under the law of different societal concretions alien to faith which change more slowly here, more rapidly there. Only males can be called into the office that represents Christ; and the congregation, which understands itself as bride and wishes to hear the voice of the Bridegroom, resists the dissolution of this earthly symbol of its relationship to Christ.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Sasse, “Ordination of Women?” 410 (my translation): “All these considerations on the basis of the clear words of Scripture make it impossible for the Lutheran Church to recognize women’s ordination as valid and permissible. For this church does not cling to human traditions, but conscientiously abides by Holy Scripture as the word of God We also cannot have fellowship with pastors and bishops who carry out such ordinations that are against God’s word.”

¹⁰¹ Eles, *Martin Luther und das Frauenpfarramt*, 30.