

WOMEN PASTORS?



**The Ordination of Women
in Biblical Lutheran Perspective**

A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS

Edited by Matthew C. Harrison
and John T. Pless



Published in 2008 by Concordia Publishing House
3558 S. Jefferson Ave.
St. Louis, MO 63118-3968
1-800-325-3040 • www.cph.org

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Manufactured in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Women pastors : the ordination of women in biblical Lutheran perspective : a collection of essays / edited by Matthew C. Harrison and John T. Pless.

p. cm.

ISBN-978-0-7586-0615-0

1. Ordination of women—Lutheran Church. 2. Ordination of women—Biblical teaching.
3. Pastoral theology—Lutheran Church. 4. Lutheran Church—Clergy.
I. Harrison, Matthew C. II. Pless, John T., 1953–
BX8071.2.W66 2008
262'.1441082—dc22

2007039704

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 09 08

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PREFACE

The question of the ordination of women to the pastoral office is not likely to go away. Given our culture's preferential option for inclusiveness and egalitarianism that is unwilling to make any distinctions based on gender, the pressure to ordain women to the pastoral office will only increase. Large ecumenical organizations such as the Lutheran World Federation assume that the ordination of women is the norm, and they will bring their weighty wealth to pressure member churches to forsake a male-only pastorate as a relic of a patriarchal era that is best forgotten. Lutheran churches that have opted to ordain women have become increasingly intolerant of those who reject the practice. Church bodies such as the Church of Sweden that for a time allowed a "conscience clause" for pastors who could not support the ordination of women, now refuse to ordain men who will not acknowledge the legitimacy of women's ordination. Thus a brave African bishop, Walter Obare of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya, had no choice but to journey to Sweden in the winter of 2005 to officiate at the consecration of a bishop for the Mission Province, an ecclesial organization of Swedish Lutherans who are determined to remain faithful.

The essays in this volume will strengthen Lutheran pastors and laity worldwide in their confession of the truth of the Holy Scriptures as it speaks to this issue. It has been thirty-five years since the first woman was ordained in a Lutheran Church in the United States. With more than 3,000 women (roughly 25 percent) on the clergy roster of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, it is no longer rare to see a woman functioning as a pastor. As the ordination of women has become commonplace in North American and European Protestant communions, it is becoming increasingly important for faithful Lutherans to be able to articulate why authentic, genuine, historical Lutheranism, because of the teachings of Holy Scripture, does not ordain women to serve as pastors.

This book provides a witness of encouragement to struggling brothers and sisters in Christ in Lutheran churches around the world. From our contacts with Lutherans overseas, we know of ridicule that faithful pastors

and people endure in Sweden for their refusal to compromise biblical truth. We have observed the coercive tactics of the Lutheran World Federation in Africa and Eastern Europe as attempts are made to push women's ordination on churches by threatening the withdrawal of financial support. We have witnessed the bold leadership of Archbishop Janis Vanags who brought an end to the ordination of women in the Lutheran Church of Latvia, though he was severely criticized by church leaders in North America and Europe. Several of the essays in this volume come from pastors and theologians in the Lutheran Church of Australia as it is at the present time deeply divided on this issue. We want to support and assist Lutherans both in our sister churches and in the global Lutheran community to maintain a God-pleasing confession and practice.

A variety of issues emerge surrounding women's ordination. While not every conceivable dimension of the problem of women's ordination is covered in the essays assembled herein, the wide variety of authors do address many of them. Biblical mandates (1 Cor. 14:33b–38 and 1 Tim. 2:11–14) certainly prohibit women from serving in the pastoral office. Ordaining women to serve in the pastoral office is a denial of biblical authority. It should come as no surprise that a leading and early proponent was Krister Stendahl,¹ one of the most notorious advocates of the higher critical approach to the Holy Scripture in the twentieth century. The method of interpreting the Bible that was used forty years ago to bring women into the pastoral office is now being employed to bring homosexuals into the ministry. In both the case of women's ordination and the endorsement of homosexuality there is a "flight from creation."² There are other problems as well. Such as how does the admission of a woman to the pastoral office transform the dominically established office? What is the relation of the practice of women's ordination to ancient and contemporary forms of Gnosticism? Is the doctrine of the Trinity distorted by the ordination of women? What does the catholicity of the church have to do with women's ordination? These and other questions are engaged by our essayists.

While we contend that all the essays in this collection fall within the pale of opinion governed by the Sacred Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, we grant that not all of the arguments offered by individual authors are equally weighty or ultimately acceptable. Some of the essays are by nature more probing and exploratory as the author seeks to uncover the

¹ See Krister Stendahl, *The Bible and the Role of Women* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966).

² For an examination of how a hermeneutic that denies the orders of creation leads from the ordination of women to endorsement of homosexuality, see John T. Pless, "Using and Misusing Luther on Homosexuality," *Lutheran Forum* (Summer 2005).

biblical foundation upon which the apostolic prohibition of placing women in the pastoral office rests. We are firmly convinced that the Gospel is ultimately at stake and that is no small matter. When the Church of Sweden made the decision to ordain women, the renowned theologian and bishop Anders Nygren spoke prophetically: “As this current decision not only means a determination of the specific issue concerning female pastors, but, I am convinced, also means that our church has now shifted onto a previously unknown track heading in the direction of Gnosticism and the *Schwaererei* . . . I must declare my deep sorrow regarding the decision and give notice of my reservation of the same.”³ How far this direction of Gnosticism and Enthusiasm has progressed is now quite apparent in the Swedish church’s blessing of same-sex unions and the ordination of practicing homosexuals.

The editors wish to thank all those who allowed their essays to be included in *The Ordination of Women in Biblical Lutheran Perspective*. Although he did not live to see this book come to fruition, we gratefully acknowledge the encouragement given us in this undertaking from the sainted Rev. Dr. Louis Smith, a clergyman of the ELCA who himself came to a change of mind in regard to women’s ordination. His essay “How I Changed My Mind” is included here with the kind permission of the editor of *Lutheran Forum* where it first appeared. We also acknowledge with appreciation the assistance of Seminarian Jason Lane of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana, in preparing this volume. We offer it now with the prayer that Christ Jesus would have good use of it to strengthen His people in the confession of His name, edify His church, and extend His kingdom to all nations.

The Editors
 Matthew C. Harrison
 John T. Pless
 Pentecost 2005

³ *Kyrkomoetets protokoll*, nr. 4, 158, p. 154. Our thanks to Pastor Eric R. Andrae for his translation from the Swedish into English.