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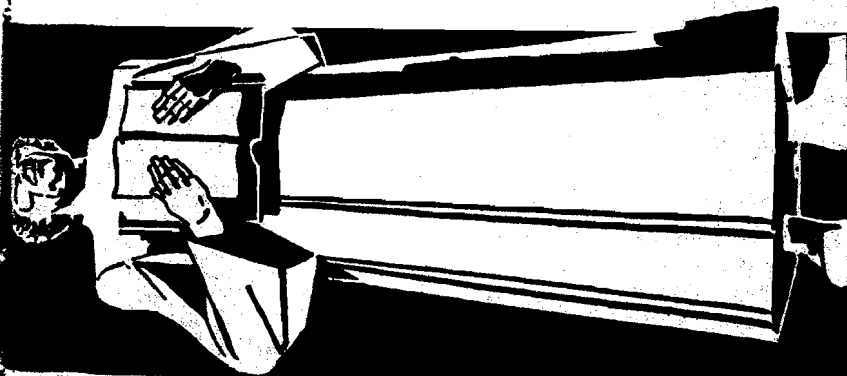
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# Falling From Faith In Christ, Of The Church, And Of The Lutheran Reformation:

AN ARTICLE ON THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN

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*Translated by Wilhelm Torgerson*

*"Sola Scriptura"—Is that Reformation Principle Still Heeded?*

"THE HOLY SCRIPTURES ALONE" is the standard of faith, doctrine and order in the Church of Jesus Christ. That is the basic principle in the Church of the Lutheran Reformation.

When in the 1950 the Roman Catholic Church proclaimed the dogma of the "bodily assumption of Mary into heaven", this was done out of the faith consciousness of the Roman Church (*sensus ecclesiae*). The majority of Roman Catholic bishops and laity believed this already before the dogma was proclaimed. The elevation of a faith wrought conviction of the majority into dogma added another source of revelation to the two already accepted in the Roman Church. The first two were the Holy Scriptures and the oral Apostolic Tradition; the third source of revelation was the "faith consciousness of the Church". This new Marian dogma was not founded on the revelation of the Holy Scriptures nor on an oral tradition that reached back to the time of the apostles. Rather this new dogma was founded on the faith consciousness of the church. It also made possible the dogma of infallibility proclaimed by the First Vatican Council in 1870. A convincing scriptural proof was possible neither for the dogma of papal infallibility nor for the new Marian dogma. There was not even a convincing proof from tradition.

All of Protestantism undergirded its rejection of the new Marian dogma chiefly by referring to the Holy Scriptures as sole standard for doctrine and order in the Church. And that was proper.

But is this standard valid only for Rome and the papacy? Is it not valid also and particularly for our own Lutheran Church?

If the *sola Scriptura* is still *today* the valid basic principle of the Churches of the Reformation (the scriptural principle), then no doctrine or church order not unequivocally founded in the Holy Scriptures can set up as an obligatory article of faith or as an obliga-

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*Pastor Buscher writes in protest of the church laws in the German Territorial (Lutheran) Churches allowing the ordination of women into the pastoral office. "Church laws" are interchangeable with what we know as "synodical resolutions." The March 1970 issue of THE SPRINGFIELDER took up the issue quite extensively with both American and European theologians contributing. Since the appearance of that issue, the Lutheran Council in the U.S.A. has issued a booklet on the subject in which THE SPRINGFIELDER was mentioned as resource material in the bibliography. In 1970 both the Lutheran Church in America and the American Lutheran Church have taken positive action on the matter and the first woman has been ordained. The issue will continue to be a live one in the Missouri Synod.*

tory order for the Church as a whole or for the Christian as an individual. Of course, not everything that the Scriptures do not expressly command is to be rejected; but within the Church nothing is to be permitted that stands in opposition to the Holy Scriptures!

A distinction is often made between questions pertaining to teachings and faith, i.e., to "confession" and questions pertaining to order in the Church. This distinction does not apply when some item of church order is founded on the institution through Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church Himself. Only *human* orders in the Church may be changed, but certainly not the *divine*!

Part of the divine order in the Church instituted by Christ Himself is the basic Great Commission to the eleven apostles, which is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you!

That is the basis for the last word of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew: "And lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."

The missionary command of Jesus summarizes the commission of the Church for all times. From this arise necessary orders which the Church may not change or omit if she is to remain the Church of Jesus Christ. Among these orders are administering Holy Baptism to those who desire it for themselves and for those entrusted to their care. Connected with Baptism is instructing all those baptized in the things Jesus commanded. A part of proclaiming the message of Jesus is Holy Baptism, the absolution from and retention of sin (Confession and the Office of the Keys), prayer and benediction, and the *Pastoral Office* (=the office of a shepherd), i.e., of the public proclamation of the Word and the responsible administration of the sacraments:

To obtain such faith (in the justifying grace through Jesus Christ—Art. IV) God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. *Through these, as through means*, He gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where He pleases, in those who hear the Gospel. (CA V)

The Preaching Office of the Shepherd stands in succession to the apostles of Jesus Christ. In addition to the self-evident public proclamation of the Word in the gathering of the congregation during the worship service, this office is above all entrusted with the responsible administration of the Lord's Supper (. . . *et porrigendi sacramenta*).

*The Lord's Supper is Instituted and its Administration Entrusted to the Apostles—Only to Men!*

The Sacrament of the Altar or the Lord's Supper was entrusted

to the Twelve Apostles "in the night in which He was betrayed." They were to celebrate this sacrament in the community of the New Covenant and to pass it on to the shepherds succeeding them in this community, so that this meal of the people of the New Covenant might be held in accordance with Jesus' instruction until the Last Day.

Contrary to the order in Israel and of the Judaism then and now, Jesus had invited to this last Passover Meal before His death the restricted circle of the Twelve, no other disciples, no children, *no women!* And there were women among Jesus' group of followers! The women belonged to those who in their loyalty to Jesus surpassed most of the Twelve! And yet despite that fact, Jesus acted contrary to Jewish custom and ritual according to which women participated in the Passover Meal quite as a matter of course. Women, like the small children, were excluded from complete participation in the Jewish services of the synagogue. They were separated from the men, and were allowed at most to be spectators of the synagogue service. Any active participation on their part was prohibited. Jewish rabbis therefore never had women among their students (disciples)! And that Jesus the Rabbi accepted women disciples and even said of children, "of such is the Kingdom of God", was for the Jewish view of the day downright revolutionary. Even the disciples Jesus had called could at first not understand this at all (cf. Mark 10:13-16: "And the disciples rebuked them" who carried the children! etc.). And yet we should note the fact that in the Gospels we find *no direct calling of a woman by Jesus*. Only men are named in the pericopes of the calling of the apostles. Jesus' action does *not* conform to Jewish custom. He acts independently of custom, as His conduct at the last Passover Meal shows. He alone, and no time or culture-bound custom(!) establishes the standard. Jesus celebrates the last Passover Meal before His death only with men, i.e., the Twelve, although faithful women belonged to His group of followers. Now this break with Jewish custom immediately becomes understandable, because we know that Jesus at this last Passover Meal instituted the Meal of the New Covenant. He wishes to entrust it only to those men He has appointed as His apostles. They are to administer and dispense it as He "in the night in which He was betrayed" passed it on to them.

*For the Orders Established by Christ the "Sola Scriptura"  
is the Governing Principle.*

The Church of Jesus Christ can at no time in this aeon cease to proclaim the message about Jesus Christ to all nations, to make disciples of them by means of baptism and within the fellowship of these disciples to celebrate the Holy Supper in accordance with Jesus' institution and direction. Within some Territorial Churches of Germany the demand is made by some to cease administering baptism. "Faith" is said to be sufficient. What kind of faith in Jesus can this be which—because it trusts Jesus—lightly passes

over His established orders and directions! Even the Lord's Supper is today widely understood merely as a memorial meal or as a fellowship meal of the Christians, to which even—as some insist—non-Christians must be admitted. Christianity supposedly exists for the "world"! Nothing remains of the old church's call before communion: "Holy things to holy people!"

All this is done *against* the witness of the New Testament concerning the Lord's Supper and *against* Martin Luther's interpretation in the Small Catechism: "It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, for us Christians to eat and drink, instituted by Christ Himself." The things instituted by Christ are valid and unchangeable until the Last Day, even though the actions which Christ demands of His community have no parallels or comparable actions in our time and environment.

Baptism, confession and Office of the Keys, Lord's Supper, prayer and benediction, and the pastoral office are part of the immutable divine order of the Church, as is the unadulterated preaching of the Word of God in Law and Gospel on which these orders are founded! *Whatever Jesus has instituted can never be annulled through ecclesiastical legislation.* This is the Reformation principle of "*sola scriptura*"! Therefore for Luther, the consequence on this Reformation and also ancient church principle "The Holy Scriptures Alone" was still valid. See Luther's remarks on this point in *The Smalcald Articles*, in his *Sermons on Deuteronomy*, in his *Letter on Translating*, etc.

#### *The Infringement of the Reformation Principle "Sola Scriptura"*

Within the realm of Protestantism today there has very clearly been an infringement on this principle of the Reformation. Even the Lutheran Territorial Churches have broken the *Sola Scriptura* principle as they ordain women to be "women shepherds." Church law is used to make it possible for women to be responsible for the public proclamation of doctrine and the administration of the sacraments. Thus women have taken up the responsibility of leadership in the congregation. This responsibility of leadership is carried out, according to the basic Confession of the Lutheran Reformation, as follows:

It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church (Latin: *ecclesia*, that is the Church as a congregation and the Church as a whole) without a regular call. (CA XIV)

But such a call to this office and service is denied to women by a "command of the Lord" (cf. I Cor. 14:34-40, and also I Tim. 2:11 f.). Therefore women never have the "regular call" to the pastoral office. They are not called to this office by the Lord of the Church, even though bishops have "ordained" these women. For even bishops and synods are unable to alter God's order of things. Where they do so nevertheless, their actions are invalid. Even an "ordained woman" is never in the pastoral office, even though she

be called "Pastoress"! (Just as not everyone with the surname "Miller" is by occupation a miller.) In the case of women, however, not even the possibility exists that they can have a call to the pastoral office! Women are not in the pastoral office of leadership in the congregation, because God wants this office entrusted only to men. He not only does not ask or demand of women to be pastors, but He expressly denies the office to them. Because women are ordained as pastors we ask whether the principle of "*sola scriptura*" is really still valid in our Lutheran Territorial Churches?

### *Church Laws Demand the Transgression of Our Lord's Commands*

The "Women Pastors Laws" passed in most Territorial Churches of Germany institute directions for breaking our Lord's command. This is worse than if the Territorial Churches, with a strictly unaltered Lutheran confessional basis, tolerated un-Biblical preaching on the part of individual pastors, although that, too, would be, according to the Augsburg Confession, a gross neglect of the episcopal duty of supervision. Yet false preaching on the part of an individual pastor does not mean official recognition of his preaching by the Territorial Church! Of course, too great a leniency on the part of the ecclesiastical agencies of supervision has considerably promoted the development of institutionally recognized false doctrine. Thus the "Women Pastors Laws" are a clear injunction to transgress the command of the Lord in I Cor. 14:34-40, which the Apostle Paul had especially impressed upon the congregation. Is Dr. Luther's statement in the Small Catechism, in the Explanation to the Second Article, no longer valid for the Lutheran Church: "I believe that Jesus Christ . . . is my Lord"? This would mean that the second principle, too, which derives from the first, is no longer valid: "Jesus Christ Alone" (*solus Christus*). But if Jesus is the Lord (*Kyrios*) in whom I put my trust, who has done everything for me and of whom Luther speaks in his Explanation to the Second Article, then surely I will also trust the Lord also in His commands and instructions for me and for His community. Why should we suddenly no longer trust Jesus in His command regarding the conduct of the woman in the worship service of the congregation?! If the Lord has thus commanded (and the Apostle of Jesus Christ is claiming no less), we should be aware that Jesus is concerned for the welfare of both His congregation and women, to whom He does not wish the minister's office entrusted. If Jesus had wanted women for this service and office, then He would not have permitted His apostle speak such clear words to the contrary! Or are we to think that Paul, the commissioned apostle of Jesus Christ, here gave a command contrary to the will of his Lord and still he called it a command of the Lord? No! Paul is quite precise in distinguishing between his opinion (which has its orientation in his commission from the Lord), common custom (which also is not without some relation to the unalterable order of God), and the "word from the Lord", which for him is an inviolable standard (cf. I Cor. 7:1 f; particularly v. 10-12; I Cor. 11-16—such a "custom." I Cor. 11:23

—I have received from the Lord what I passed on to you; I Cor. 14:37).

No interpreter of the New Testament denies that in making reference to a command of the Lord, Paul prohibits women from a certain type of speaking in the congregational service. According to I Cor. 11:15, however, not every kind of speaking by women is prohibited in the service. Women even participated in the instruction of preachers. For example, Priscilla, with her husband, instructed Apollos in the more exact doctrine of Jesus (Acts 18:26). But the public service of proclamation was carried out by Apollos, not Priscilla, even though she had instructed him!

I Cor. 14:34 then is concerned with a very definite kind of speaking, namely the responsible public proclamation of doctrine. Who then bestows the right through ecclesiastical laws simply to do away with this command of Jesus by declaring it to be applicable only to its own times?! Nowhere do we find evidence that this command was to be valid only for the first centuries of Christendom or limited to a certain cultural realm. Compare here the Apostle's express statement: "As in *all* congregations of God's people . . . ." (I Cor. 14:34; also v. 36). This statement goes against any particularism and provincialism that is at work in the arbitrary actions of the congregation at Corinth as well as in the Protestant Territorial Churches. V. 37 makes clear that any deviation from this command of the Lord can never be effected by the Holy Spirit. Paul adds to this command of the Lord the severe statement: "If anyone does not recognize this, he himself should not be recognized" (v. 38). Most interpreters take this "recognition" to refer not only to a recognition by the Apostle Paul and the other congregations but also to the recognition by God! The matter is that serious! Then who can bestow the power and the right to break Jesus' command?

If anyone should say that this interpretation of the passage is wrong and that there are at least several other interpretations, then we must ask him this question: Are you quite sure that those interpretations are correct, even though they conform neither to the text nor to the context of the passages cited? Should God really have spoken so unclearly in a matter of such importance? This section itself clearly indicates how important this matter is. Why should we understand here something other than what the text says? The section of scripture is very clear indeed!

Yet there are some attempts to interpret the text in such a way that it does not prohibit women from the public instructional proclamation (*Lehrverkündigung*) in the worship service. The claim is made that "command of the Lord" (or, as some variants have it, "commands of the Lord") merely refers to the command that everything be done decently and in order in the congregational services. To this we say that the prohibition of instructional proclamation by women is part of that order. One can hardly deny that because the text says it. Or the other interpretation, that the prohibition of women speaking merely deals with undisciplined interruption of

others, does not make sense, because *every* member of the congregation is forbidden to engage in undisciplined behaviour, the men as well! (Chs. 11, 12 and particularly ch. 14 of I Corinthians say this with utmost clarity! Why is there a special admonition to the women?) Any unprejudiced reader will take note in all these interpretations, as well as in some other attempts, that violence is done to the scriptural passage in accordance with the motto: If not exegesis then eisegesis.

In the type of speaking prohibited to women, we are in fact dealing with the responsible instructional proclamation in the congregation. This becomes clear also from that other passage in the New Testament, I Tim. 2:11 f.: "I do not permit a woman to be a teacher!" This is the clear and unequivocal interpretation of the passage from the Letter to the Corinthians. Whether the Letter to Timothy was written by Paul or not—and this author does not doubt it—can here even be left open for discussion. But this scripture passage stands unquestionable and sure: Earliest Christendom understood the Corinthian passage in this way! The Apostolic fathers and the church fathers of the first centuries did too. Only in the Montanist sect of the second century, which at times was quite strong, do we find the most obvious difference in comparison to the worship services of the Church. Among this enthusiastic (*schwärm-erisch*) group, the clerical office was commonly held by women! (This group at that time represented what was "modern"! Therefore the ordination of women to the pastoral office is merely an age-old aberration that is once again entering into the Church. Today, too, like among the Montanists, many confuse those manifestations born out of the "spirit of the times" for the operation of the Holy Spirit!)

Luther did not hesitate in the interpretation of these passages. In *Von Schleichern und Winckelpredigern* 1532, he takes a definite position in regard to this question.

Thus we ask once more: Where do we get the right to ordain a woman as "pastoress"? The Holy Scriptures speak their NO to this question through the Lord's command. Thus we are confronted with the unequivocal situation where the "Women Pastors Laws" of the Territorial Churches are directed *against* God's command. From where do the Territorial Churches take their power to disregard God's command? In view of this situation within the Lutheran Territorial Churches a Bavarian pastor wrote:

It is simple: Through Jesus' behaviour and through Paul's speech God said NO to women pastors. I believe that this NO has validity until the Last Day. I can be persuaded to change my mind only if someone shows me that God's Word today repeals the NO spoken then to the problem of women pastors. But how would God's unequivocal Word come to us today in post-Biblical times? Academically trained women theologians, so I was told recently, speak of their calling with deep emotion. Well and good. Protestants believe them—and their own word



is taken to be proof that God, who until now wanted only men as pastors, today also wants women to serve in the ministry. But this should be clear: Roman Catholic Mariology has evidence at least equally as good as the question of women pastors! Why should I believe the private revelation of an academically trained women theologian (whose call experience could also have a different meaning and is therefore in all probability quite genuine—some think that is proven by the excellent work done by many women theologians) but not believe the girls of Lourdes and Fatima? That these women theologians pay their church tax into a Lutheran Church exchequer is certainly not sufficient reason! Rome did not establish any dogma on the basis of private revelation. We should not do so either. Even in 1950 Rome sought a scriptural basis for its dogmas, and in the interplay of scriptural basis and faith consciousness the Romans saw the possibility by means of a formal process of dogmatization to raise a theological statement from the realm of questionability to certainty! Is Protestantism, which began with the *sola scriptura*, really to end up with a doctrine of the “present faith consciousness of Protestants” that would surpass even Rome? It would surely be an ironic turn of world history if those, who were convinced of the Church’s capability of error, were to uphold the infallibility of their—pardon the term—little territorial churches (*Landeskirchen*).

### *The Question of Confession*

Let us not be fooled! The question of theological legitimization of the “Office of the Woman Pastor” is confessionally decisive. It touches upon the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures and their binding force for the faith of Christians, as well as upon the question of the proper forms of the office of proclaiming the Word and administering the sacraments and therefore the office of leadership in the congregation. Above all we are confronted with a new form of this question: Is *sola scriptura* still valid as the regulating norm for teaching and confession and order within the Church? Is the Reformation’s *sola scriptura* principle still valid when in the Holy Scriptures instructions are given that are expressly referred to as “the Lord’s word” or “the Lord’s command”? Or are other standards and norms valid for deciding about God’s Word and command?

A church divorced from the *sola scriptura* is no longer a church of the Lutheran Reformation or of the Augsburg Confession. And what is much worse, such a church is in the final analysis no longer the Church of Jesus Christ. The Reformation principle *solus Christus* is set aside by a more or less absolute human reason. In such a context Luther spoke of reason as the prostitute. For reason, not being illuminated by the Holy Ghost through the means of the Word of God, is human capability gone astray from its actual purpose. For this reason Luther says:

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe

in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him, but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith . . . .

Reason, without the illumination through the Spirit, is only human. But for Jesus and for the Church, the divine is decisive and has validity—not the human (cf. Matt. 16:23!). In this we should not forget the well-known adage: Humanity without divinity turns into bestiality.

Thus a church which in such a way has divorced herself from her head, Jesus Christ, has become a twitching corpse. There are still a few movements, but basically it is already dead.

Our answer to the question about the legitimization for the ordination of women to the office of pastor in the Church has far-reaching consequences. The damage arising out of a decision made contrary to the Biblical witness may not be immediately visible, but it will be clear someday. Then it could be too late. The Biblical heritage of the Reformation and, connected with that, the ecumenical mission of the Lutheran Church, would be squandered to the detriment of all Christendom.

The real point at issue here is not simply that individual pastors are proclaiming “another gospel” (which is bad enough!), but rather that entire territorial churches elevate false doctrine and order to the status of church law. By doing this they are declaring what the Lord forbids to be “right doctrine and order.”

### *We Must Obey God More than Men*

What else will still have to take place in the alteration of Biblical teaching and the commands of the Lord for His Church, before the sleeping Church awakes and she arises with a protest against the falsification of Biblical doctrine and order that cannot be ignored? When will she witness to the divine truth? Does Protestant Christendom actually fear opposition from the “public” and “public opinion?” Does she fear being decried as “old-fashioned” or “backward and reactionary?” Does she fear the complaint that she is hindering *progress*? Only, if Protestant Christendom were only less affected by *digression* from God and His Word! Luther was not at all “progressive”, rather he was regressive. He went back to God’s Word as it speaks to us in the Holy Scriptures. Through this the Church was wakened to new life. In this Luther feared neither the power of the pope nor of councils, neither of the emperor nor of princes. For one man with God on his side is always a majority! Does Protestant Christendom today fear territorial bishops and synods more than God, the Father of Jesus Christ? That would be the end of the faith of the Reformation in our congregations which are still calling themselves evangelical and Lutheran!

Everything is at Stake!

Of faith and its content Luther wrote:

Faith ought to and must be whole and complete. Even though it might be weak and subject to temptation, it never-

theless ought to and must be whole and not false. To be weak does not do ultimate damage, but to be false, that is eternal death.

(*Die drei Symbole . . . 1538*)

At stake is eternal life or eternal death, salvation or destruction, eternal blessedness or damnation, when we ask the question: Will we trust the words of the Lord or will we subject ourselves to changing human opinions in which unilluminated reason rises to subvert the words of the Lord?

The only one authority in the Church of Jesus Christ is the Triune God and His infallible Word. They cannot be separated. Authorities who do not commit themselves to this Word of God lose the authority which the Word of God bestowed on them and must not be allowed to hold sway in the Church of Jesus Christ, even though territorial bishops, synods or the "faith consciousness of the majority of Christendom" are involved! Even the "spirit of the times" is no authority. The spirit of the times (*Zeitgeist*) and the Holy Spirit (*Heiliger Geist*) are not the same! God's rule—and therefore His Church, too—is not a democracy but rather a theocracy: Not from the people nor from the majority of the church members does power derive, but all derives from God alone. Therefore:

One should not obey even regularly elected bishops if they err or if they teach or command something contrary to the divine Holy Scriptures.

(CA XXVIII)

### *Women are not in the Pastor's Office*

Our conclusion is: Women can never be in the "ecclesiastical office of the public proclamation of the Word and the responsible administration of the sacraments," not even when regularly elected bishops have "ordained" them. For whatever is done contrary to the Lord's command is sin, is a falling away from God, from faith in Jesus Christ, and from the faith of the Church and of the Lutheran Reformation! Thus in the Church of Jesus Christ it will not only be invalid and fruitless, but it is destructive of the Church in her very nature as Church of Jesus Christ!

Therefore the "Women Pastors Laws" must be repealed and be replaced by laws allowing women to be theologians. These laws will not be contrary to the commands of the Lord. Territorial Churches which up until now did not have "Women Pastors Laws" may in no case create such laws.

Will the time come when congregations mature through God's Word and demand the repeal of laws allowing women in the pastor's office in such a way that these demands cannot be ignored?

After all: "We must obey God more than men." (Acts 5:29)