

Give Attention to the Public Reading of Scripture: I Timothy 4:13: Lectors, Pastoral Stewardship, and Gender Considerations

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St. Paul wrote to Pastor Timothy in I Timothy 4:13, “Until I come, devote yourself [singular] to the public reading of Scripture, to comforting, to the teaching activity.” Ἀναγνώσει [reading] means not simply to read quietly to one’s self (or study) but reading out loud, the public reading of Scripture. It bespeaks the oral delivery of Holy Scripture. David Scaer comments on the significance of the orality of Scripture:

When Paul spoke of faith coming from hearing the Word of God (Rom 10:14), he most likely was referring to the public reading of the Scriptures (see also 1 Tm 4:13), perhaps to Matthew and Luke and some of his own epistles. Most of our New Testament was first given orally as sermons, which were transcribed into what we know as the Scriptures. So distinguishing the oral from the written word may be a distinction without a real difference. A public reading of the Scriptures in the church or elsewhere is a proclamation of the gospel able to create faith and on that account should be done with reverence and clarity. Spoken aloud or read privately, the Scriptures and discourses based on them, that is, sermons, homilies, and devotional writings, are all means of grace.¹

Given the focus of what Scaer suggests above, this should not be taken to say that there is not a difference between the canonical Word of God and proclamation derived from, based upon, and normed by the canon of Scripture (*sola Scriptura*; cf. also Formula of Concord, Rule and Norm). The canon provides the “skin,” if you will, for the living (but unchanged) body of doctrine. Controversy may bring out refinement in the way doctrine is confessed in a precise way, but it does not change the doctrine (Jude 3). Brevard Childs notes in regard to the term “canon”:

The Greek word κανών with its Semitic cognate originally signified a reed, then a tool for measurement and linear rule. The term developed in two directions in subsequently acquiring a figurative sense. On the one hand, it signified a norm, standard, or rule within both a grammatical and religious context. Thus, one finds the term in church usage since the middle of the second century as the ‘rule of faith’ (κανών τῆς πίστεως). On the other hand, the term was used to describe a list, a register, or catalogue, and was used for mathematical and chronological tables. In this sense the term was used by Eusebius in his ‘canons’ of the Gospels which were tables establishing the Gospel parallels. As is well known, in the middle of the fourth century the term canon was applied to the collection of sacred scriptures for the first time.²

¹ David P. Scaer. *Law and Gospel and the Means of Grace: Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics Volume VIII* (Saint Louis: The Luther Academy, 2008); p.114

² Brevard S. Childs. *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Pres, 1985); pp.24-25

Scripture is the unnormed-norm in the church and source of teaching. It does not change. Exhortation and teaching, or preaching and catechesis, flow from Scripture since it is God's written, and canonical Word. The canonical word norms whatever is put forth in catechesis, worship, preaching, or alleged prophecy or revelation from those claiming charismatic status or leadership.

In this passage from I Timothy 4, "reading" is put in sequence prior to and yet with exhortation and teaching. St. Paul uses the word "πρόσεχε" which means "pay attention to" or "give heed to" or "to devote oneself to". The imperative, active, singular of this verb directs Timothy in particular to take care of what Paul is saying. It is incumbent upon Timothy as pastor to take up this matter.

At the very least one must conclude from this passage that the reading of Holy Scripture in the Divine Service must be done well with understanding given to communicating the meaning of the inspired text for the sake of the Church. Far from the I Timothy 4 text is the misguided notion of recruiting people to read in order to simply promote "participation" in the chancel. Biblically that motive is nowhere connected to the public reading of Scripture. The liturgical reading of Holy Scripture is not merely a matter of delegation, sharing duties, or simply getting the text read – a purely pragmatic point of view.

What also can be definitely concluded from the text of I Timothy 4 is that the liturgical reading of God's Word is an aspect of pastoral responsibility. The called and ordained servant of the Word is given oversight and stewardship of the mysteries of God (I Corinthians 4:1-2; Hebrews 13:17). In other words, he has much to say about how it is done, and by whom. This activity would also include the selection of texts (lectionary). One wonders why many parishes have "worship committees."

Now two key questions arise. Given the clear pastoral responsibility for the public liturgical reading of Scripture, may a designated layman, under pastoral oversight, read a selection from the lectionary for the day (for instance the Old Testament Reading and/or Epistle)? A secondary question also follows, IF the answer the first question is "yes" in some form, may a woman read such a text in the liturgical setting or are there additional considerations from Scripture in regard to gender?

PART I: IS THE READING OF SCRIPTURE A PUBLIC ACT OF AUTHORITATIVE TEACHING, AND THEREFORE AN EXCLUSIVELY PASTORAL DUTY, REQUIRING CALL AND ORDINATION TO THAT OFFICE?

Is the reading of assigned canonical Scriptures (from a lectionary) in itself a public act of teaching in its chief sense? If the answer is in the affirmative, then it would seem what we hold to from Scripture as summarized in Augsburg Confession XIV would rule lay readers out:

Of Ecclesiastical Order they teach that no one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called [*rite vocatus/ordentlicher beruf*].

The AC in Article XIV speaks of the pastoral office, the one Christ-instituted office of Word and Sacrament. Augsburg Confession, Article XIV does not directly deal with the reading of Scriptures as a direct issue. Since they are not exhaustive, the Lutheran Confessions may not answer every aspect of the question at hand. So, more discussion is needed beyond the 16th century.

In the early church finding someone who was skilled in reading a text is not as common as it is today. Early Greek manuscripts of the New Testament did not feature spacing or punctuation such as is found in modern presentations of the original biblical text. Readings of Scripture were lengthy by our standards. Also, with a lack of a public address system, there were some physical characteristics needed to project the voice understandably through the worship space, whether in a house church or basilica. But this speaks to skill sets and not to the theological question at hand.

Is the reading of Scripture *per se* distinguished from teaching as an authoritative act of exposition and proclamation? Our chief text at hand would seem to support this conclusion: “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to the teaching activity.” The general thrust of teaching in the New Testament would be the explanation and proclamation of a text to a hearer, rather than simply the reading of a text. Thus reading (ἀναγνώσει) is not in itself the same thing as teaching (διδασκαλία). While they cannot be disconnected, since the teaching comes from the text, they are neither synonymous.³ The liturgical use of Scripture deals with canon and lectionary; preaching and catechesis involves much more. Certainly inflection, pauses, volume dynamics, and such can help convey the meaning of the text or distract from its meaning. Yet this is not yet what is in mind in terms of teaching in the New Testament.⁴ As in the case of Phillip and the Ethiopian eunuch, teaching comes in the application, explanation, and proclamation of a text (both in catechesis and

³ The reading of Scripture does not require an emergency circumstance for its verbal delivery in , as Luther admonishes the head of the household (*hausvater*) to teach the Small Catechism in his home, which includes the use of Scripture. This is also evidenced in the well-known section of the *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope* (para 67) in the *Book of Concord*: “For wherever the Church is, there is the authority [command] to administer the Gospel. Therefore it is necessary for the Church to retain the authority to call, elect, and ordain ministers. And this authority is a gift which in reality is given to the Church, which no human power can wrest from the Church, as Paul also testifies to the Ephesians when he says, Eph 4:8: He ascended, He gave gifts to men. And he enumerates among the gifts specially belonging to the Church pastors and teachers, and adds that such are given for the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. Hence, wherever there is a true church, the right to elect and ordain ministers necessarily exists. Just as in a case of necessity even a layman absolves, and becomes the minister and pastor of another; as Augustine narrates the story of two Christians in a ship, one of whom baptized the catechumen, who after Baptism then absolved the baptizer.”

⁴ For discussion of synagogue use of Scripture reading and preaching see Alfred Edersheim. *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah – One Volume Edition* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1971, 1986); Part One, pages 443-450. Edersheim notes that seven readers were called upon to read from the appointed scrolls in Sabbath services, fewer at other times. “According to the Talmud, a descendant of Aaron was always called upon first to the reading, then followed by a Levite, and afterwards five ordinary Israelites. As this practice, as well as that of priestly benediction, has been continued in the Synagogue from father to son, it is possible still to know who are descendants of Aaron, and who Levites” [Part I, p.444]. The majority of readers were not likely to be the preacher as this was usually an ordained Rabbi or a Haggadist.

preaching). In the case of Phillip his teaching was evangelistic in nature and context and not an ordinary parish situation. One can see distinction between reading the Scriptures and teaching in Acts 13:13-15:

¹³ Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down. ¹⁵ And after the reading [ἀναγνώσιν] of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, “Men *and* brethren [άνδρες αδελφοί], if you have any word of exhortation [λόγος παρακλήσεως] for the people, say on.”

The Christocentric (Christ-centered) exegesis and catechesis of the Old Testament by our Lord on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24) is emblematic of teaching and preaching being more than simply the quotation or reading of Holy Scripture alone. Such is the case with the Bread of Life discourse in John 6 and the sermons on mountain and on the plain. The sermon of Peter at Pentecost (Acts 2) is illustrative of the distinctive marks of Christian preaching. The character of the New Testament Church is apostolic and canonical rather than relying upon ongoing prophetic utterances of a direct nature. The canon of Scripture marks the starting point of proclamation and the test of its faithfulness. This is important to note in light of early church Montanism, modern charismatic movements, or other forms of individual or corporate enthusiasm in modern Christianity. Yet with such recognized and done the faithful sermon is the Word of the Lord, just as holy absolution is also the pronounced Word of God, which is just as valid and certain in heaven also as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself. Scripture is of no private interpretation (2 Peter 1; Acts 2:42). In regard to the early church’s challenges in dealing with the relationship between a proper use of the canon of Scripture (and the rule of faith) in relation to preaching, Brevard Childs elaborates:

It soon became evident that much turned on the context from which one viewed the material. Irenaeus complained that the Gnostics took bits and pieces of the gospel which, when correctly ordered, depicted the king, but they made a picture of a fox or dog from the same pieces (*adv. haer.* 1.9.4). They operated from the wrong context. They had no true concept of the whole. He therefore appealed to the church’s rule-of-faith, the *regula fidei*.⁵

While the authority of the pastoral office is found in the Word of God, the nature of the office is not so much found in quotation or recitation, but in the proclamation, catechesis, and predication involved in the application, exposition, and oversight that flows from the Word of God. As Jesus says, “He who hears you hears Me. He who hears Me hears Him who sent Me.” They are ambassadors of Christ, His representatives who are sent by Jesus in similar manner as the Father sent His Son into the world.

⁵ Childs, p.28

Jesus is the Word who became flesh and made His dwelling among us. Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the express image of the person of the Father. And it is in the proclamation and teaching of the Word that children are begotten of that divine Word and in the washing of water with the Word. The office of the keys expresses this in direct fashion, as the goal is to give life in the divine forgiveness of sins, even as the binding key of the law is used penultimately when there is manifest impenitent sinner who is not yet contrite for the good news. Yet the preaching of the called and ordained servants of the Word is a dynamic (Romans 1:16) that flows from the canon of Scripture understood according to the rule of faith (Galatians 1; Acts 2:42; 2 Peter 1:21; Matthew 16). This is illustrated in the theological examinations, ordination vows, and installation vows.

While the reading of a text is not particularly teaching in the strict sense, there is an aspect of text selection (choosing pericopes or references) which is related to teaching. The use of a lectionary is a discipline for teaching the whole counsel of God in an orthodox way. The selection of texts is not to be done for riding hobby horses, promoting programs or movements, or to steer the church into a “personal vision.” It is the Lord’s church and the whole counsel of God is to be taught and proclaimed for the sake of the flock (Acts 20:27-28; Matthew 28:19-20). The selection of texts or a lectionary certainly comes under the domain of pastors as stewards of the mysteries of God (which includes but goes beyond the sacraments in the narrowest sense). This goes along with the call to the office and the requirement that such men be “apt to teach” and holding the apostolic faith with purity.

This brings up another consideration. Are the inspired Scriptures all considered the same? Are they simply to be regarded as a flat plain, or as a book with peaks and different uses. Even a basic examination of the Bible would give the impression that its books are not all of the same type and use. The book of Psalms, for one example, is certainly unique within Scripture in its intended prayerful liturgical use as evidenced in Temple, synagogue and church history. David Scaer (among others) contends that the Gospels are also unique in their design and early use as authoritative catechesis.⁶ This is why preaching has historically preferred to be based upon the Holy Gospel pericope for the day, while not being legalistically required to do so. The Gospels certainly are the focal point of Scripture in terms of the Christocentric fulfillment of the Old Testament and as witness to the salvific work of the incarnate Christ for the life of the world in the cross and the empty tomb. Hence among the various distinctions among the books of Scripture, the Gospels stand out as a mountain peak. Hence the historic liturgical ceremonial surrounding the reading of the Holy Gospel in the Divine Service of Holy Communion is without direct parallel except for the consecration of the Holy Supper itself in the second peak of the Divine Service order. Thomas M. Winger writes:

⁶ David P. Scaer. *Discourses in Matthew: Jesus Teaches the Church*. (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004); pp.9-84

Jesus is Himself the Father's act of communicating with us. In Him God speaks to us. That is what John means [in John 1:14, when he says that the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us]. He's referring to Jesus as the one who speaks to us from God. And that is very much in line with what we Lutherans primarily mean when we speak of the "Word of God" as a means of grace – we mean that Word of preaching and of Scripture which is proclaimed aloud to people in order to create faith.⁷

Charles J. Evanson also notes in regard to the relationship between the Holy Gospel selection of the day and the sermon within the liturgy:

The Gospel is the principal reading in each service, and will ordinarily serve as the foundation for the preaching when the congregation gathers on the Lord's Day. Traditionally, Sunday preaching in the Lutheran Church has been based upon the Sunday Gospel to a far greater degree than is the case in other churches using the pericopal system. This practice is based on the understanding that preaching in the chief service serves to interpret the Gospel and bring it into the present moment. The preacher "says what the Word says" to those whom the Word has gathered here and now, to hear it with open hearts and receive it into faithful hearts. The Old Testament serves as preparation and the Epistle for admonition and example.⁸

In regard to the usage of the Gospels, David Scaer describes the liturgical context:

Singing the alleluia before the Gospel and standing to hear the Gospel read affirm that all four Gospels are Jesus' teachings. Rather than speaking of four Gospels, it is better to speak of one Gospel in four versions, all of which preserve the words of Jesus. In the early church, the reading of the Gospel was the catechesis and the sermon, though there is good reason to believe that the one who read the Gospel provided additional commentary. Modern churches distinguish among Bible classes, sermons, and catechetical instruction. Each occurs at a different time and before a different audience. First Timothy 4:13 suggests that reading a Gospel, preaching, and instruction all belonged to the first part of the service in the early Christian church. Luther's Large Catechism is an example of how sermons that were originally delivered orally soon became "catechesis" for the priests and their congregations.⁹

In the early church the reading of the Gospel was often given to a deacon (who was not regarded as synonymous with the presbyter or bishop), whereas the Epistle would be assigned to a lector (reader)¹⁰ or subdeacon.¹¹ (Here some Lutherans would want to argue that a deacon is a pastor in the

⁷ Thomas M. Winger. "The Spoken Word: What's Up with Orality?" *Concordia Journal*. April 2003: Volume 29, Number 2 (Published by the Faculty of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO), pp.143-144

⁸ Charles J. Evanson. "The Service of the Word," in Fred Precht (ed.) *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993); p.416

⁹ Scaer, *Discourses in Matthew*, pp.12-13

¹⁰ According to the *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity (Second Edition)*, edited by Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999); p.973, "The earliest references to scripture reading give no indication of a special order assigned to

way Lutherans speak of pastors, others disagree. We will not engage the topic of the historic diaconate directly here.) In the Eastern Orthodox churches the reader is considered the second highest of the minor orders. There the reader is responsible for the Old Testament and Epistle lections and chanting Psalms. Here is where a lay-cantor could receive some consideration for liturgical responses.

It does appear when one examines the terminology for various orders and functions between the churches of east and west from the early church to the medieval era that there has been some flexibility in nomenclature as it is attached to certain duties, especially as one considers deacons on down into the minor orders.¹² But it would not seem that we should make the early church or any era a “golden era” in clarity in regard to the understanding of the major and minor orders of servants in the church. “Multiplication of ministry” is a problem not only seen among Church Growth gurus today, but it was also seen in the medieval Roman Church. In his *Examination of the Council of Trent*, after noting that Lutherans do not “outrightly reject or condemn the distribution of these ranks” of holy

this task (Justin, *1 Apol.* 67; Tertullian, *Apol.* 39). Tertullian makes the first use of the noun “reader” (*Praescr.* 41). Hippolytus prescribed that “the reader is appointed by the bishop giving him the book, for he is not ordained” (*Trad. Ap.* 12; cf. IV Carthage, can. 8) but *the Apostolic Constitutions* 8.22 provided for ordination by prayer and the laying on of hands. The fullest account of the reader as a distinct office in the church is found in *the Apostolic Church Order* 19: “For Reader, one should be appointed, after he has been carefully approved; ... of a plain utterance, and capable of clearly interpreting, mindful that he assumes the position of an evangelist.”

¹¹ According to *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, edited by Paul Bradshaw (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002); p.278, “There is no clear evidence for the existence of the office [of lector] before the third century. Justin Martyr speaks of ‘the one who reads’ (*First Apology* 67.4), as does the *Second Letter of Clement* (19.1), usually dated mid-second century; but neither may have had an appointed official in mind: the function could have been exercised by different members of the congregation in turn, as was the Jewish practice, where the individual was handed the scroll from which to read (see Luke 4.16, where Jesus reads in the synagogue). However, in the third century Tertullian implies that he did know of a formal office of this kind, Cyprian makes frequent reference to lectors in his correspondence, and they are also mentioned in Rome. In Eastern traditions, a lector was appointed by being handed the book from which he was to read, a custom later copied in parts of the West...”

¹² One difficulty in grappling with major and minor orders of “clergy” is the usage of the word “clergy” in the context of the various orders and offices. There is the one Christ-instituted office of bishop-presbyter, which later was differentiated by one term being used as supervisory over another in polity. The problem of the diaconate in the early church is also much debated. Is a deacon in the early church an “assistant pastor” or an “assistant to the pastor?” For Lutherans this makes all the difference in the question. We will not propose within the context of this article to answer that question. However in dealing with orders of clergy, the difference could be one of the one-Chris instituted office (pastor) vs. other “religious vocations” (hence the use of the word “clergy” from “kleros” [call]). The episcopacy and presbyterate (parish priest or pastor) is quite a bit clearer. Bishops or presbyters are pastors in Lutheran terminology. In some instances deacons are pastors in post-reformation Lutheran terminology, but not always. This seems to be a contrast from the early church.

orders, Martin Chemnitz observes concerning the “downward delegation”(my term) and decay in the orders, especially in the medieval church of the West (as so much religious “button-pushing”):

But this we justly and deservedly rebuke in the papalist orders:

They retain and usurp titles without the reality, and the benefits of the titles without the duties; for when they had thrown the duties of the canonical ministry of the Word and sacraments out of their great churches into the small and lowly chapels in the parishes, where one or two were compelled to perform all duties of the ministry, they themselves retained the empty titles without the duties of the ministry. Nevertheless they did not retain them as empty titles, but retained the names of the orders on account of the fat allowances. Bishops no longer taught, presbyters did not administer sacraments to the people, offerings were no longer contributed since the churches were sufficiently endowed. What need was there then for either deacons or subdeacons? The custom of putting out the catechumens, the penitents, and the possessed had already long lapsed. What is the use, therefore, of doorkeepers? There is no need of a special sacrament of order for the shutting the doors of the church, chasing out dogs, and sweeping the floor. The readers do not read in order that people may understand; the cantors do not lead singing in order that people may sing along. Therefore they do not have the kind of readers or cantors which were in the ancient church. They do not have the gift of casting out demons; what therefore is the order of exorcists among them? The servants of the bishops and priests are horsemen and soldiers; nevertheless they argue much about the sacrament of the order of acolytes. Therefore not a single rank or order of the true ecclesiastical ministry is found in that office among the papalists, such as were in the apostolic and ancient church, but they have only the empty titles.¹³

We can see that the medieval era is not going to be particularly instructive for us, except in negative examples. The Lutheran Church of the 16th and 17th centuries had an up-hill battle in bringing sound theological order out of the decay of medieval Roman Catholicism and while avoiding the new chaos of the radical protestants (Anabaptists et al). In his classic study on the office of the holy ministry in the Lutheran Confessions, Arthur Carl Piepkorn writes of the diaconate and minor orders:

By the 16th century the diaconate had become a purely vestigial state in the “course of honors” (*cursus honorum*) without any real function in the church in the Holy Roman Empire. The term *diaconus/Diakon* in the Lutheran documents of the 16th century (for example, Ap 13, 11 German) must be understood as referring to ordained priests serving as curates or assistants to the rector of a parish. The Symbolical Books were even less under constraint to discuss the lower orders of the clergy. These too had by the 16th century become only nominal stages in the process of becoming a priest.¹⁴

¹³ Martin Chemnitz (trans. Fred Kramer). *Examination of the Council of Trent – Volume 2*. (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978); p.688

¹⁴ “The Sacred Ministry and Holy Ordination in the Symbolical Books of the Lutheran Church” in Michael P. Plekon and William S. Wiecher eds. *The Church: Selected Writings of Arthur Carl Piepkorn* (Delhi, New York: American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, 1993), p.59

In the early church the use of readers or lectors was such that not only pastors were reading Scripture in the liturgical assembly. In the earlier centuries of the church, before the implementation of a shorter selection of lectionary texts, longer sections of Scripture were read (for perhaps an hour or so) and so an argument for doing so in the name of good decorum, order, and saving the vocal chords of the presiding pastor could be made without too much trouble. This being said, the selection of lectors was not simply a matter of a sign-up sheet in the narthex or encouraging “participation” and “self-expression” among the baptized, and certainly not as a means of encouraging church growth or getting inactive parishioners to show up for Divine Service. The selection of readers is not to be done in such a merely utilitarian manner. One is in the presence of the living God among angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven. It is not a casual or trivial matter. Kenan B. Osborne points out the concern about this sort of thing in the early church:

In *De Praescriptione haereticorum* (41, 6), Tertullian mentions lectors: “Therefore, someone [among your heretical group] is an episkopos today and tomorrow another person is; today one is a deacon, and tomorrow he is a lector; today someone is a presbyter and tomorrow he is a lay person.” In this passage, Tertullian is not advocating a mix-up of duties; rather, he is taking to task the heretics for creating this kind of a ministerial situation. In all other places, Tertullian mentions only: episkopos, presbyter, and deacon. Consequently, it seems unlikely that Tertullian considers the lector part of the “clerical state.”¹⁵

PART ONE CONCLUSIONS

While it certainly is not necessary today for a variety of reasons, the implementations of an order of readers or lectors could be done within biblical and confessional understanding. Yet with this being said, it is not something to be done simply for the sake of “participation” or self-expression of piety or faith. The reading of Holy Scripture in itself in the context of Divine Service or other public worship of the congregation (including Matins, Vespers, weddings, funerals, seasonal services, etc) is distinct from but not separate from exhortation and teaching (i.e. authoritative preaching and catechesis). This is clear in St. Paul’s inspired instructions to Pastor Timothy in I Timothy 4. There is today a contextual difference between the liturgical gathering of the Church for Word and Sacrament vs. shared reading in a classroom context. The liturgical setting is a high expression of the marks of the church (see Augsburg Confession, Article VII, XXIV).

The use of a corps or order of lectors, while considered laity, is not simply a matter of having volunteers or a sign-up sheet. In an average-sized Lutheran congregation, certainly not many would be needed, if used at all. They must be those who are able to read well, project the voice, and have some

¹⁵ Kenan B. Osborne, O.F.M. *Priesthood: A History of the Ordained Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church*. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1988); p.195

essential understanding of the text being read. They most certainly ought to be baptized, communicant members of the congregation of that local fellowship and its larger fellowship (synod, etc.). Therefore, such factors as increasing congregational participation (getting people more active), nostalgia, family relations, are quite beside the point where churchly approval of lectors is concerned. In this regard, while we would not use the term “ordain” in regard to lectors, a public recognition or installation of such would not be inappropriate or wrong, given their public assisting status.

The lector/reader is under direct supervision of the pastor *loci* (local pastor). The pastor is to train and oversee this extension of his own work as steward of the mysteries of God (I Corinthians 4:1-2; Hebrews 13:17; Romans 10:14-17). The lector/reader is to be expected to be thoroughly catechized and a regular student of Scripture and engaged in an ordered prayer life of piety and repentance and not an inactive church member by any means. Summarily to quote a theological observer from the Lutheran Church-Canada seminaries’ theological journal addressing I Timothy 4:13:

This bit of apostolic instruction serves, then, to remind us that the public reading of the Sacred Scriptures is a pastoral responsibility, possibly delegated, but not light to be undertaken. The “how” and the “by whom” deserve serious consideration.¹⁶

PART II – Gender Considered With Regard to Lectors/Readers in the Divine Services

It is not true that whatever is given to a male layman may also be given as a task to a female member of the laity. The oft-repeated assertion that whatever is given a male layman may be also given to a female member of the laity is unfounded in Scripture and ignores both the “order of creation” as it is called and the inspired apostolic prohibitions against women speaking in the ecclesiastical assembly (especially in the liturgical context). Whether something is a pastoral duty or not a pastoral duty is not the only consideration in who is or may be given a particular task, especially in the liturgical context or in church oversight.

At least two key texts are to be considered in regard to the question of whether women may serve in a parish order of lectors/readers:

I Timothy 2:11-14 - 11 Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve; 14 and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. [ESV]

¹⁶ Roger J. Humann. “Give Attendance to Reading.” *Lutheran Theological Review* (Spring/Summer 1989: Volume I, Number 2); pp.3,4

I Corinthians 14:33-38 - 33 For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints, 34 the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. 35 If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. 36 Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? 37 If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. 38 If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. [ESV]

The text from I Timothy 2 we learn that St. Paul is speaking of a churchly context, especially the context of a liturgical assembly. We are not simply here talking about being in a “church building” since that would have been an anachronistic notion to read back into the time of St. Paul and St. Timothy. In I Timothy 2, the men (males) are specifically instructed to pray and make intercession with uplifted hands. And following this are the instructions given in regard to women of the church (modesty, good works, chastity, motherhood).

Notable in the I Timothy 2 text is the fact that the reasons for Paul’s inspired prohibition against women teaching the church publicly are twofold: a reason before the fall into sin (order of creation); and one illustrated in the fall (the woman being deceived by the serpent). Yet even the second answer is rooted in the creation of man and woman. Adam was formed first and then Eve. That is a simple biblical fact. Eve was formed from the rib of Adam. She is analog to the Church as Adam is to Christ (see Ephesians 5). That is a great mystery – especially in the fact that the two become one flesh - a union of two which are complementary. Eve’s existence is derived from Adam. Of course, all individual men henceforth now come from their mothers, but in the Church the relationship being set forth corporately is Christ and His Bride, the Church (and the beginning of the new creation).

The second reason given by St. Paul is that, “Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.” To Adam was given the Word of God directly concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the prohibition of eating its fruit. It was Adam’s oversight and proclamation of that word from God which entailed part of his vocation as husband and preacher. The serpent went to the woman, to Eve, to bring the wedge of doubt, the deception of the lie, and to feed the sinful desire. The rebel fallen angel, Satan, enticed the woman to turn from God.¹⁷ (Therefore God’s holy angels are not indifferent about a woman speaking in the liturgical assembly of the church,

¹⁷ In regard to I Corinthians 11:10 (“For this reason the woman ought to have *a symbol of authority on her head*, because of the angels.”) Gregory Lockwood writes: The best suggestion is that Paul refers to the holy angels, who are present in Christian worship. The Corinthians knew from the Greek Bibles that it was “before angels” that they sang their psalms (LXX Ps 137:1 [MT/ET 138:1]). The church father Chrysostom challenged his congregation: “Don’t you know that you are standing in the midst of the angels? With them you are singing, with them you are chanting, and do you stand there laughing?” Likewise, Christians today confess in the liturgy that it is “with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven” that “we laud and magnify your [God’s] glorious name. ...” If the women of Corinth thought little of causing offense to the men, they should consider that their departure from the created order was also an offense to the angels, who never fail to carry out the role God assigns them for the benefit of his saints (Heb 1:14). [*Concordia Commentary I Corinthians*. (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000); pp.374-375]

since this intimately involves the ongoing battle between the holy angels of God and their arrogant, murdering and lying enemies, the fallen rebellious angels, led by Satan, whom we call 'demons' or evil spirits [see I Corinthians 11:10; Hebrews 12:18-29; Revelation 12; Isaiah 14:12-21].)

The nature of the temptation was to question the Word of God, and Eve doubted, added to the Word of God, and disobeyed the commandment of God and then gave the fruit forbidden to be eaten to her husband who was with her. He said nothing, she said too much. The one thing needful is to listen to God's Word in His presence, as the account of Mary and Martha reminds us. Faith is receiving from God in His means of grace and trusting His promises and the all-sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice.

The point here is not that women are somehow more susceptible to temptation or deception than men, but rather than Eve should have deferred to her husband rather than engaging in a dialogue with Satan. The issue should have been submitted to Adam, the one to whom God gave headship and responsibility as his vocation. So the point here is not that Eve was "bad" but that her failure to submit the trouble to Adam is the issue. In other words, both points Paul makes have to do with the order of creation. Both points are indicative of the reality of both genders in God's good creation. Paul is admonishing them to order church life accordingly because of God's design in creating man and woman. Even at this not all men are qualified to teach or exercise authority in the church, as the qualifications for office indicate in the pastoral epistles of St. Paul. Distinctions between men and women in the Divine Service are observed primarily because of the order of creation. Distinctions between males in the liturgical context are observed primarily in terms of whether or not one holds the office of pastor. The appeal to the order of creation for man and woman makes clear that Paul is not simply addressing an episode of pastoral concern in the church of his time, but is applying a universal principle rooted in God's design of His creation.

The text from I Corinthians 14 is also grounded largely in the context of public worship (liturgical) gatherings, as chapter 14 and much of I Corinthians is addressing that context of church order, theology, and practice. In the context of charismatic assertions of prophecy and expressions of using apparent gifts, Paul reminds them of his apostolic authority and the Spirit's clear testimony regarding order in the church and the order of creation. Again the context of "church" here is chiefly the liturgical assembly as any such buildings would be house-churches at this early point in church history. So we are not talking about what we would call today "church buildings" but rather the liturgical assembly for worship, and secondarily general oversight of the congregation. It is also clear from St. Paul's words in I Corinthians 14 that appeals to an internal call by God (feeling or desire) or the desire to exercise one's "spiritual gifts" is not sufficient to overturn the order God Himself has established:

Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? 37 If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. 38 If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.

The Holy Spirit does not contradict Himself, for He is the Spirit of Truth, who spoke by the prophets. The speaking that the Apostle disallows here is authoritative speaking, which extends to but is not limited to preaching a sermon. The Greek term here may be used as a synonym for the giving of a

sermon (see Matthew 9:18; Acts 18:25; 2 Corinthians 2:17).¹⁸ Authoritative teaching is an exercise of divinely given authority, which includes but is not limited to preaching for the benefit of the church. As Kriewaldt notes regarding v.36-38:

...women are to be silent and not speak because anyone filled with the Spirit would have to admit that what Paul is saying is really a command of the Lord! Paul had access to Christ's commands outside of Scripture (see, Acts 20:35; 1 Thess. 4:5; cf. John 20:30; 21:25). One of these commands prohibited women from teaching in the churches. This interpretation of the text, as already mentioned, has been consistently applied for sixty generations by the Church. It is presumptuous for us living in the twentieth century to change or disobey the command of Christ. According to many of the Church Fathers, it is heretical and sectarian to do so.¹⁹

The Church, like the Virgin Mary, says in reply to the Word of God, "Let it be unto me according to Thy Word" as she said in reply to the holy angel Gabriel who announced that she would bear Jesus, the promised Messiah. Often the Mother of our Lord is described as treasuring the words and events of the Gospel and pondering them in her heart. And again, like Mary, the Church simply says, as she said deferentially at the wedding in Cana, "Do whatever He [Jesus] tells you." The one thing needful for all is to sit at Jesus' feet and hear His saving Word, which is Spirit and Life. It is about receiving rather than doing. Properly speaking the Church is not the Bride of Christ talking to herself, but rather the Bride listening and receiving from her Bridegroom, Jesus Christ the Lord, the savior of the Body. This understanding is also found in continuity with the early church. William Weinrich notes with regard to proto-charismatic heretical movements of earlier centuries a concern relevant to today:

Fourth-century Latin opposition to women teaching in the church was probably occasioned by a Montanist-like revival named "Priscillianism." The sect was popular with women, and to give them an official function it seems to have imported from the East the title of "deaconess," which until then was not known in the West. In their commentaries on Paul, "Ambrosiaster" and Pelagius both express the view that it is contrary to the order of nature and against apostolic injunction for women to speak in an assembly of men. Ambrosiaster is especially harsh in his attitude. In view of Priscillianism church councils also condemned the public teaching by women and reiterated the apostolic prohibition against women speaking in the church. The Council of Saragossa (380 A.D.) warned Catholic women not to attend Priscillian meetings where women might give readings and teach. The Council of Nimes (396 A.D.), reacting to reports that certain ones were admitting women to the "Levitical ministry," rejects

¹⁸ Peter Kriewaldt. "I Corinthians 14:33b-38, I Timothy 2:11-14, and the Ordination of Women" in Matthew C. Harrison and John T. Pless. *Women Pastors? The Ordination of Women in Biblical Lutheran Perspective*. [1st Edition] (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2008); p.47

¹⁹ Kriewaldt, p.49

such a practice as an innovation "contrary to apostolic discipline" and not permitted by the ecclesiastical rule.²⁰

What is offered in the gifts of Word and Sacrament in the Church is done from the Lord to His Bride. The sacrificial acts of offering, praise, confession, prayer are of the royal priesthood of the baptized done together as the body, the people of God, rather than chiefly as individual free agents (a priesthood – ἐράτευμα). This implies access into the divine presence and the privilege of calling upon His holy name, now understood in terms of Holy Baptism. But "priest" is not a term applied to a clerical office in the New Testament (pastors). It does not imply any Christian does any of the pastoral duties.²¹ David Scaer writes concerning the assertion of a right to liturgical duties simply because of faith or Baptism:

The fundamental fault in any argument that sees every Christian entitled to become a minister is the fusion of the doctrines of justification, sanctification, and ministry. Where ministry is seen only as an exercise of faith, any obstacle to ordaining women is removed. Without in any way diminishing the foundational importance of Baptism as "the first and most important sacrament, without which the others are all nothing," it does not take the place of any other sacrament or rite, including ordination. Arguments for the ordination of women pastors based on the universality of Baptism are at best contrived, a conclusion which some of them may have reached.²²

CONCLUSIONS FOR SECTION II

The conclusion of the crucial New Testament texts for the question at hand of whether women may serve in an order of readers/lectors in the Divine Services of the Church must be answered in the negative. Women may not serve as readers/lectors publicly in the liturgical context of the Church. The order of creation, the Scriptural apostolic directive to remaining silent, and not exercising authority over a man in the church hold. Public teaching, exhortation, and reading of Scripture are excluded from the duties that women may undertake in the church, especially in the liturgical context. The contribution of women in the liturgical context is with the congregation primarily, as it is with most men who are not holders of the office of the holy ministry. The quiet, godly service is supportive of the Lord's work for the sake of the Church in that place. Prayer, praise, the life of repentance, bringing and offering of thanksgiving, lending one's talents to the care of God's house and its arts, music, and other gifts certainly also serve as priestly sacrifices of a member of the royal priesthood of the

²⁰ William Weinrich. "Women in the History of the Church: Learned and Holy, but Not Pastors" in John Piper & Wayne Grudem (eds.) *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991, 2006); p.275

²¹ See Thomas M. Winger. "The Role of Assisting Minister in *Lutheran Worship*" in Paul. J. Grime, D. Richard Stuckwisch, and Jon D. Vieker (eds.) *Through the Church the Song Goes On: Preparing a Lutheran Hymnal for the 21st Century*. (Saint Louis: Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, 1999); pp.177-181

²² David P. Scaer. *Baptism: Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics Volume XI*. (Saint Louis: The Luther Academy, 1999); p.73

baptized. But as our Lutheran Confessions remind us, faith itself, to believe God's Word is the highest worship of the Triune God. The liturgy is first and foremost God's service to us, our response is second, in God's order.

CONCLUSIONS OVERALL

In summary, what we here suggest is that if there are to be readers/lectors in a Lutheran congregation is that they be well-instructed males (exclusively), active in the congregation, who are continuing prayerful students of the Scriptures and sound teaching, reverent in the liturgy, with a good speaking voice, of good reputation, and who receive thorough training from the local pastor, and are recognized by the congregation as an order or corps of lectors set apart. Some might even suggest a public installation rite before the congregation in the Divine Service. It may be advisable that such men wear a plain alb with no other insignia. This is in keeping with the fact that the Lutheran Church does not consider herself to be a new church but the old, apostolic church cleansed from accretions that are neither evangelical nor catholic.

If lectors are to be used it is fitting, orthodox, and strongly urged that pastors retain reading the Holy Gospel pericope in the Divine Service. Any laymen or ordered readers/lectors should only be given an Old Testament and/or Epistle text for reading in the liturgy. It is not within the limitations of this paper to address techniques and liturgical ceremonial in detail. That will be left to other essays or authors.

Lectors certainly are not necessary today on a regular basis, but in many cases they might be utilized seasonally or for other occasions (or emergencies). This might also suggest their use in liturgical processions, including holding the Bible, lectionary, or book of the Gospels for a Gospel Procession in the midst of the congregation. If a pastor and congregation elects to use them, such men should take the task very seriously with all due churchly training and attitude. As with all things in the house of God, lectors should serve with dignity, decorum, and good order for reverence in the presence of the Holy God and His Bride, the Church.

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