

practice (1 Tim 2:12) and on the orders of creation (2:13,14). Paul offers no evidence that he is deferring to the sensibilities of the Jewish Christians here either.

In fact, Paul's teaching may well have 'hindered' mission to the wider Ephesian and Corinthian gentile society. *Priestesses were a common part of ancient religious life. The Christian church in Paul's day would probably have made herself much more attractive, relevant, and 'user-friendly' if it had allowed women to be priests and pastors.* Two second-century heretical Christian movements, the Montanists and the Marcionites both ordained women and both drew large followings.

## The True Basis for the Church's Mission

The mission imperative argument really comes down to this: What drives the mission and ministry agenda of the church? If she determines her mission and ministry according to what the world will accept, she may very well 'flourish' and 'grow'. If she determines her mission and ministry according to what is acceptable to God, she may well 'wilt' and 'decline'.

The church always struggles with how to discern the contemporary context she finds herself in, and what is God-pleasing in that context. The only true rule and norm by which she discerns herself, the world, and God's will is Holy Scripture: the 'pure and clear fountain of Israel'. The mission imperative argument does not rely on the clear words of Scripture. It speculates on a dubious historical reconstruction of what the apostle Paul and the Corinthian and Ephesian churches may or may not have wanted to achieve through the prohibition of the ordination of women.

A renewed missionary fervour has emerged in many churches in our day, funded by a wide variety of motives and resulting in a number of innovations, some good, some bad.

Some have discovered that by using certain methodologies, following certain practices, or by adopting certain stances, society may indeed regard the modern church as 'relevant'. But a church that is faithful in the things of God will *always* be 'relevant', even though dismissed by some. A church will never be relevant if she gives up on the things of God. Cultural acceptance

and approval is a most ethereal thing. *A church that marries society's worldview in one generation is destined to be a widow in the next.*

It has been almost 50 years since the Western church embarked on ordaining women. As far as I know, there has been little or no research that establishes whether or not the innovation has added to the 'relevance' or 'effectiveness' of the church's mission. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many churches that ordain women show no positive result in their mission endeavours. Some actually experience a negative result. But in the end, regardless of research results, the church must scrutinise her theology and practice of mission as St Paul did. Is the male-only pastorate in accordance with universal apostolic teaching - '*as in all the congregations of the saints*' (1 Cor 14:33b) - and is it in accordance with the *Lord's command* (1 Cor 14:37)?

In order for the church to properly answer these challenges and make her good confession, she must submit herself to the clear witness of Holy Scripture, whether that results in the world knocking at her door or walking past without a second glance.

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# Keeping Mission Integrity





# Keeping Mission Integrity

*For those concerned about the mission of the church in relation to the ordination of women.*

As the Coordinator for Mission and Ministry of the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA), Victorian District, it is my task to encourage the church to engage faithfully in God's mission to the world in every facet of her ministry.

When it comes to the church's mission to Australians today, some people argue that the scriptural prohibition against women being ordained is no more than an historical response to an old missionary context and so no longer applies to the church.

According to this view, St Paul didn't write to advocate a male-only pastorate (1 Cor 14:33b-40). He gave no more than his personal advice in a specific congregational context. He certainly didn't present an apostolic doctrine. Rather, he wrote to bring order where there was disorder, to protect the sensibilities of a largely Jewish church, and to safeguard the church's reputation in the surrounding society.

## The Mission Imperative

Today's Australian society allows women to occupy leadership positions at all levels. Therefore, the argument goes, if we don't ordain women we will alienate our contemporaries and hinder the church's mission. The church will become increasingly irrelevant to our modern society that accepts the equality of the sexes as an inalienable human right. This argument has been called the 'mission imperative.'

The mission imperative touches a nerve in a church which is increasingly concerned about its smallness, its resources, and its survival. But before we accept the mission imperative argument and change our established theological position, abandoning a 2000-year practice of the church, we need to consider carefully whether the

mission imperative truly reflects the biblical texts, and whether we want to build our mission theology and practice on it.

## St Paul and the Mission Imperative

Paul gives his prohibition against women speaking and teaching in the church while writing to two Christian communities. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians about 55 AD, toward the end of his three-year stay in Ephesus.

Corinth was the chief city of Greece and a commercial crossroad in Paul's time. Travellers and traders from all over the Roman world knew Corinth well. As well as being a cultural centre, Corinth was a religious centre that contained at least 12 pagan temples as well as a Jewish synagogue. Paul noted that Corinth honoured many 'gods' and many 'lords' (8:5).



In particular Corinth was a centre for the worship of Aphrodite. Her temple in Corinth was staffed by a large number of female slaves (temple prostitutes), who are said to have made the place a tourist attraction and enhanced its prosperity. This may give us an insight into Paul's frequent admonitions for chastity in 1 Corinthians. But is there any evidence that Paul's prohibition of women as pastors is his response to a contemporary mission imperative? Is there evidence that Paul compromised in favour of the sensibilities of converts and the reputation of the church in the Corinthian society? Some would say that there is. I do not agree.

But what about the almost identical prohibition in 1 Tim 2:11,12? Paul wrote 1 Timothy about 63-65 AD, some eight to ten years after his stay in Ephesus and the writing of 1 Corinthians. Paul had sent Timothy to Ephesus to supervise the city's growing church. Like Corinth, Ephesus was a large seaport city, and a commercial and cultural centre. After living there for three years Paul knew the city well.

The Temple of Artemis that dominated Ephesus was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The Ephesian Artemis was a form of the Asian mother-goddess. She was a fertile mother and a goddess of human, animal, and plant fertility.

The worship of this Artemis was not confined to Ephesus, but was prevalent in nearly all the cities of Asia, in many places on the Greek mainland, in the south of Gaul, Syria, and in Rome itself. She was 'worshipped throughout the province of Asia and the world' (Acts 19:27). Her temple was a huge landholding corporation served by eunuch-priests, attendants called *Essenes*, and thousands of female slaves called *hierodules*.

## Where is the Evidence?

The first-century Ephesians and Corinthians were very familiar with women presiding at worship in the religions that surrounded them (e.g. the recently excavated temple of Demeter and Kore in Corinth). If Paul's prohibition is to prevent converts or others making the wrong connections between Christianity and the pagan religions through the involvement of women as worship leaders, as some argue, where is the evidence? Paul makes no mention of it in 1 Corinthians or in 1 Timothy. In fact, he does not even hint at it. Likewise, if it were simply Paul's pastoral advice to protect the sensibilities of the Jewish members of the church, this is not consistent with his other writings. It seems implausible that this is the reason, based on what Paul writes in Galatians for instance.

Paul had no difficulty in forcefully condemning the imposition of circumcision in Galatia without any regard for the sensibilities of his Jewish readers. He even related how he castigated Peter for deferring to Jewish sensibilities when the truth of the gospel was at stake (Gal 2:14, see also Gal 1:10). And what are we to make of Paul's so-called deference to Jewish sensibilities in light of the much quoted Gal 3:28? Rather than trying to develop a hypothetical pastoral reason for Paul's prohibition, it is far easier to see his reasons in what he wrote in the texts.

In 1 Corinthians Paul says the prohibition is because of a church-wide practice, the Law, a command of the Lord, and evangelical decorum (14:33b,34,37,40). He does not use his fear of offending the 'weaker brother', as a reason, as he does in Romans 14 and 15. In 1 Timothy Paul grounds his prohibition on consistent apostolic

We preach Christ crucified; a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. (1 Corinthians 1:23)