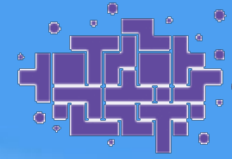




NATURE AND GENDER: UNRAVELING CONSERVATIVE PARADIGMS

PANEL





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LIVING AND BELIEVING GENDER IN A NEO-CONSERVATIVE FUTURE: THE CASE OF WOMEN'S (NON) ORDINATION IN LATVIAN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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The project Izp-2021/1-0182 is implemented within the framework of the Latvian Science Council's fundamental and applied projects competition

GOAL OF THE PROJECT

-
- by **providing evidence-based interdisciplinary knowledge**,
 - becoming a **platform for the discussion** on causes, mechanisms and effects of gender discrimination,
 - **to strengthen gender equality** and contribute to preventing gender discrimination in Latvia

THIS IS NOT IN THEIR NATURE: ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN IN THE VIEWS OF THE PASTORS AND LAITY OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF LATVIA

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**LIVING AND BELIEVING GENDER IN A NEO-CONSERVATIVE
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EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH**



BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

- 1975 women's ordination in Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia (ELCL) introduced
- 1993 the suspension of women's ordination
- 2016 constitutional changes limiting ordination to men only

1. ARGUMENTS DERIVED FROM THE INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE

- “Faithfulness to the word of God”

"The Synod unanimously voted that we will continue to be the kind of church that existed during the time of the apostles, church fathers, great church teachers, reformers, and even our pre-war church. We must obey God rather than men. That was the intention of the Synod," (Vanags: Women and men are equal, but they may have different roles, LETA, July 1, 2016).

1. ARGUMENTS DERIVED FROM THE INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE

"Cultures change, traditions change, but God's Word does not change. Do we take what is written seriously? Or do we approach it from a historical-critical perspective, where we begin to search for God's Word in the Bible? Then, as our professor once said, what's left of the Bible is a small, thin notebook." (Zigmunds, pastor)

"Western churches should think very carefully about where they have deviated from the truth. It's very simple—is God's Word normatively binding? Sola scriptura—can we depart from the foundation of Scripture?" (Tālis, pastor)

"... speaking about ordination, I think it's correct, well if it's written in the Bible, I think it's also quite clear, I think it's one of those clear things that a woman is not meant to teach men." (Justs, layman)

2. ARGUMENTS BASED ON CHURCH TRADITION

"It was entrusted in that way, and we obeyed, we did it, and did not disrupt the established order. Because we often see, well, what good comes from it. What good, what good does the world or Latvia gain from women's ordination? It exists now, we see it, but it doesn't bring any blessing. If we look at it maybe in a shorter time frame, yes, okay, we might see some blessing, but in the long term, it brings no blessing." (Rinalds, pastor)

"We are very similar to the Roman Catholic Church, to the Orthodox, all of us..." (Sīmanis, pastor)

3. ARGUMENTS BASED ON LEADERSHIP AUTHORITY

"We prayed for a very long time before Jānis Vanags—our archbishop—was ordained. There were several candidates, and we prayed fervently as a congregation, as well as personally, because it would have an impact on all of us, even as simple congregation members. And he was elected. And he is accountable to God for that. We have received what God has intended for us. Looking back, we see that he has made the right decisions." (Vēsma, laywoman)

"... unquestionably, the archbishop is our spiritual leader as such, and he believes that this is correct, and ultimately decisions about ordination or non-ordination are made by the bishops in accordance with the decisions of the church synod. That's how it is, but why others ordain, I haven't researched; I can't answer that question." (Gatis, deacon)

"I respect that opinions can vary. I think to myself that I am not so extraordinarily wise and knowledgeable as to be infallible in evaluating whether only one opinion is correct or incorrect." (Miervaldis, pastor)

4. ARGUMENTS BASED ON GENDER DIFFERENCES

“I don’t know—you know, like... the so-called physiological cycle that women have, right? ... I think—well, a woman is considered unclean, isn’t she? Well, okay, in the Old Testament, yes, unclean at that time. ...Standing at the altar, taking the cup—such a sacred act, let’s say. I don’t know, maybe I’m old-fashioned, but I can’t accept it, I just can’t.” (Anita, laywoman)

“Why should a man kneel before a woman, say, at the altar? But should a woman kneel? A woman can. I think women are more humble. ... I respect that opinions can vary. But I think women are more humble.” (Anita, laywoman)

“But the order is still that men are in this spiritual and leadership role. God is also a father and male, from whom everything originates.” (Helmut, pastor)

“What is a woman? She bears children, she is gentle, she is loving, she is a mother. A man is the one who defends, who protects his family. ... Without even talking about stereotypes, God has established that a woman is the weaker sex. God’s word speaks to that. God intended women to bring children into the world.” (Toms, layman)

5. ARGUMENTS FROM PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

“...because women like that—if they get into power, they kind of know how to manage, and you can’t push them aside like before. And then they usurp that power, and it becomes quite difficult. I know that we’ve had that at work, where one worked here” (Dzintis, male layperson).

“And I’ve had to listen to a female pastor too—well, you know, if the sermon is about flowers in the field and clouds floating in the sky, but God’s word is only as much as has been read, which has to be read, then I don’t get anything from it. It’s something nicely talked about, something that makes your ears itch and everyone likes, but there’s no spiritual strengthening or comfort” (Zigmunds, pastor).

“Maybe during the sermon you don’t need to talk about something like... I don’t know, about jars of jam or something else, I don’t know, somehow it all seemed strange. Why is that? Maybe it’s due to some particularities of age, or something else, I don’t know. It seemed completely not okay to me.” (Arvis, pastor).

IN THE BEST COMPANY

John Calvin: “Natural propriety has been maintained, women have in all ages been excluded from the public management of affairs.” “Now it is certain that women were never received to any public office. And who has let it, or been the stay of it, but that God only has imprinted such a knowledge in *nature*, that although we be not otherwise taught, yet we know that it were an unseemly thing to have women govern men?” (<https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/calvin-nature-and-women/>)

Luther «But it is true that in this sense the Holy Spirit omits women, children and incapable people, but only chooses capable men (except for necessity), (...) A woman should not teach the people. In general, there should be an able, chosen man, but not children, women and other persons who are not able, although they are able to hear the word of God, receive baptism, sacrament, absolution and are true holy Christians, as St. Peter says. » WA 50, 600, 12-20





CONCLUSIONS

- What is understood by gender and natural gender roles is sacralised.
- Gender is a fundamental social structure and organizing principle that serves the creation of difference, hierarchy, and power relations within the framework of a gender order.
- Religion plays a key role in the justification, establishment, and legitimization of social order and—since gender forms a fundamental organizational principle for society—particularly of the gender order. Religion defines the essence, roles, tasks, and goals of humans with regard to gender.
- The interpretation of gender roles as returning to patriarchy seems to bring stability. The decision not to ordain women is rarely based solely on theological arguments; prejudices about gender roles and even misogyny play a central role.

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TO BE CONTINUED...