

# Abounding in Thanksgiving: A Sermon on Prayer

Genesis 18:20-33  
Psalm 138  
Colossians 2:6-15  
Luke 11:1-13



This morning's lectionary readings focus on prayer. The Genesis passage continues the story of three travelers who visit Abraham and promise that he will have a son. One of the visitors is identified to be God, and Abraham has a discussion with God. In fact, Abraham actually argues with God; he haggles with him like someone in a Middle Eastern market. In the Psalm (as in many Psalms), we have a specific example of a prayer: "I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart . . . I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name." (Ps. 138: 1-2) In the gospel reading, Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray in Luke's version of the Lord's prayer; the next paragraph in Luke contains Jesus' well known promise about prayer: "And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened." (Luke 11:9-10)

In my sermon this morning, I am going to try to answer the question, "What is prayer?" I am going to begin, however, with

three examples of misunderstandings of prayer to help make clear what prayer is not.

The first is an objection to prayer that began with the New Atheists and often appears in the comments section on the internet when unbelievers want to make fun of people of faith. Atheist commenters regularly accuse Christians of having an "imaginary friend." The point is that prayer is something childish that an adult should have grown out of. Belief in a God who answers our prayers is like the boy Calvin in the old comic strip Calvin and Hobbes whose stuffed toy tiger was his imaginary friend.

The second approach views prayer as a philosophical problem. People ask: "If God knows everything and if God is going to do what he intends to do anyway, then what is the point of prayer? Surely we cannot change God's mind?" Prayer, then, becomes, not something we do, but a philosophical problem about how we bring together God's almighty power and human freedom.

The third approach is that of the prosperity gospel. The claim is made that if we have enough faith, God will answer our prayers. We will never be sick. We will never be poor. If we become sick, if we are poor, it must be because we do not have enough faith.

Each one of these approaches is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of what prayer is, and the best way to correct misunderstandings is to offer a proper understanding. For a proper understanding of prayer, we can look at the one passage in our readings that only mentions prayer in three words, "abounding in thanksgiving." In his epistle to the Colossians, the apostle Paul writes: "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving." (Col. 2:6-7) This is an example of what biblical scholars call Paul's "indicative-

imperative." Since God has done this in Christ; therefore, you should do that.

Although "indicative-imperative" is a kind of technical term for biblical scholars, there is nothing mysterious about the idea. It is just a way of saying that Paul understands there to be a relationship between knowledge and practice. What we do depends on what we know. Recently, the Christian philosopher James K. A. Smith has written a book entitled *You Are What You Love*. Smith's point is that the things we do show what we love more than the things that we claim to know. There's a great example in 1 John 3:17. John asks: "But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?" If we say that we love God, but we don't show it by how we treat people, we really don't love God.

But I would add that, while it is true that we do what we love, it is also true that we cannot love what we do not know. So the New Atheist does not pray because he believes that he has outgrown the god who is an imaginary friend. The New Atheist looks at the universe and he says that the lights may be on, but there's nobody home. Or maybe the lights are not even on. The Christian looks at the universe, however, and he says the lights are on, and we know that someone is home because Jesus is the light. Paul writes: "as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him," and "For in him," meaning, in Christ, "the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority." (Col. 2:9-10) We Christians know that there is someone at home in the universe because that someone has actually paid us a visit. God has become one of us in Jesus Christ.

What then is prayer? Prayer is living in the world as if we believe that there really is a God and that God has done certain things. Prayer is living as if there is someone at home in the universe. Prayer is our response to how God in his

goodness has acted in Jesus Christ. It is how we walk as we have received Christ.

But prayer is also an action. It is something we do. It is not simply believing certain things or having the right doctrines. (And that is where Jamie Smith is right when he says that “You Are What You Love.”) “Walk” is a verb suggesting that the Christian life is a journey. The image is one of pilgrimage. We have a destination. We have a goal. We have a starting place and a path, and Jesus Christ is the starting place, the path, and the goal. But we actually have to take steps, to put one foot in front of the other. So prayer is a kind of shorthand way of describing the Christian journey. There are other things we do besides prayer: Worship, sacraments, acts of mercy, but, in a sense, all of Christian life is prayer.

And this is where all three of the misunderstandings I mention get it wrong. Prayer is not, like the New Atheists think, about having an imaginary friend. Prayer is living as if there is someone home in the universe because that Someone has come to us in Jesus Christ. Prayer is not a philosophical problem about whether our prayers can change God’s mind. It is rather what the apostle Paul calls a walk, walking in Christ, “rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.” Finally, prayer is not magic, as the prosperity gospel preachers seem to think. Prayer is not a relationship with Santa Claus, but a call to follow Jesus Christ, and that will mean taking up a cross. When we assume that prayer means that God should answer all of our requests, we need to remember that Jesus Christ prayed in the garden of Gethsemane that the cup of suffering would pass him by, and it didn’t. Not even the incarnate Son of God had all of his prayers answered.

If prayer is an imperative – Do this! – what are the indicatives? What the Bible tells us about who God is and what he has done tells us why and how we should pray.

First, prayer is an acknowledgment that we are not alone, and that we are made for someone and something. At the beginning of his Confessions, St. Augustine wrote: "You have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." Even here, once again, when we talk about creation, it is Jesus Christ who is at the center. Earlier in the letter to the Colossians from which we read this morning, Paul wrote: "He (that is, Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together." (Col. 1:15-17) As John's gospel puts it: "All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made." (John 1:3). So we live in a world that God has created, and he has created it through Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, the eternal Son of God who became flesh as one of us.

All of our texts tell us something about this God who has created the world and created us – that God is good and he cares for his creatures. In Abraham's argument with God in Genesis 18, he asks a fundamental question to which the answer is supposed to be self-evident: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" (Gen. 18:24) In the Psalm, we find a word which is one of the characteristic ways in which the Bible describes God, the Hebrew word *hesed*, which English Bibles translate as "loving kindness" or "steadfast love": "I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness. . . . The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever." (Ps. 138:2, 8) In the gospel reading, Jesus asks "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:13) In the next chapter in Luke's gospel, we read Luke's version of material that we also find in Matthew's sermon on the Mount:

“And [Jesus] said to his disciples, ‘Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! . . . Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!’” (Luke 12:24-28) If the Creator of all things cares for birds and flowers and grass, he certainly cares for us.

Second, the texts speak of what theologians call providence. God not only has created the world, but he is in charge of the world. He knows what he is doing, and, in the end, he is going to make things right. The Psalmist writes, “For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly, but the haughty he knows from afar. Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life . . . The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.” (Ps. 138:6-8) In the Lord’s prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray that God’s kingdom will come, and his will should be done (Luke 11:2; cf. Matt. 6:10).

Third, Paul’s letter to the Colossians tell us that this God who has created the world and watches over it and us, has redeemed us in Jesus Christ. This redemption is good news and not bad news. God himself has come among us in Christ. Paul writes that in him dwells the fulness of God, but we also have come to share in Christ’s fulness. Paul writes that we have been buried with Christ in baptism, that we have been raised with Christ through faith in his resurrection, that when we were dead in our sins, God made us alive in Christ and forgave us our sins (Col. 2:9-13). Who we are – our identity – thus flows from our union with Christ. We are people whose sins are forgiven and who have new life because we are united to Christ in his death and resurrection.

Our temptation is to find our identity elsewhere, and that is why Paul warns us of the dangers of being held captive by what he calls philosophy and empty deceit. We live in a world in which the culture of consumerism attempts to fill our infinite hunger for the God who has made us for himself with baubles and trinkets – with all kinds of “stuff” that will, in the end, leave us hungry. As Augustine says, “Our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” The empty promises of contemporary culture cannot compete with this one Jew from Nazareth in whom the fulness of Deity dwells. The false promises of our culture cannot give us something that can satisfy our infinite desire for love because only an infinite God who loves us infinitely can do that, and our culture only believes in the kinds of small things that can be sold by advertising. Contemporary culture can not believe in a God who loves us infinitely, or in a world that was created by love.

These then are the indicatives. These are the reasons that it makes sense to pray. God loves us and created us. God cares for us and watches over us. God has redeemed us in Christ. What then are the imperatives? In light of the above, what should be our response? While volumes could be and have been written, I am going to mention three aspects of prayer that correspond to the three points I made above.

Our first response should be gratitude. The Psalmist writes: “I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart,” and later, “All the kings of the earth shall give you thanks, O Lord, for they have heard the words of your mouth.” (Ps. 138:1,4) Paul writes that we should “abound in thanksgiving.” (Col. 2:7). Prayer is the recognition that we are creatures and depend on God, that everything we have is a gift from God. Prayer is saying “Thank you” to a God who created us, who has given us our life and all the good things in our lives, and who has loved us and gave himself for us in Jesus Christ.

Second, prayer is a recognition of our dependence on God. Because everything we have comes from God, prayer is the

recognition that we can trust God and so can depend on him to meet our needs. So after thanksgiving, prayer consists of trust and petition. The Psalmist prays: "On the day I called, you answered me," and "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; you stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and your right hand delivers me." (Ps. 138:3, 7) In the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples, he teaches us to pray "Give us each day our daily bread." (Luke 11:3) Jesus reminds us that if our child asked us for an egg, we would not give him a scorpion. If we care enough for our children to give them good things, certainly we can depend on our heavenly Father to care for us just as much (Luke 11:11-13). In 1 Peter 5:7, we are told to "Cast all of your cares upon the Lord, for he cares for you." This does not mean that nothing bad will ever happen to us. It does mean that in a world that is filled with troubles, we can trust that God is in charge and he knows what he is about. As Paul writes in Romans, "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" And again, there are Paul's familiar words, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." (Rom. 8:28, 32-32)

Finally, prayer is confession of sin. In the Lord's prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray, "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive as we forgive everyone who is indebted to us." (Luke 11:4) This is perhaps the hardest part of prayer for contemporary culture to understand. The reason, I think, is that there has been a shift in modern culture from a culture of guilt to a culture of shame. Guilt is an acknowledgment of wrong-doing, that someone has done something objectively wrong that really hurts other people. Shame, however, is not about objective wrong-doing, but about cultural disapproval. Shame is not so much about something we have done as about something we are. The current culture rejects language of sin because they think sin language is about cultural shaming, and no one wants to be



shamed. At the same time, our culture is one where people constantly shame each other. That is perhaps why there seems to be so much anger these days. Everyone shames, but no one wants to be shamed. With shame, there can never be forgiveness.

An important part of prayer is confession of sin, but confession flows out of forgiveness; it is not a condition of forgiveness. The gospel offers us forgiveness, not shame. Paul writes, "And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him." (Col. 2:13-15) In a culture of shame, forgiveness is good news because it can set aside our guilt. Forgiveness saves shame for those internal and external voices that would continue to condemn us, but no longer can because we have died and risen with Christ. In a culture of shame, it is good news to know that the God who created the world, who loves us, who watches over us, who cares for us, has taken upon himself in the cross of Christ all of those things about which we might rightly or wrongly feel shame. Confession is good news because it is good news to no longer have to bear the weight of guilt and shame.

So these are the three main tasks of prayer: gratitude, trust, confession. And prayer is the action that follows from the three things we know about what God has done for us: that the good God has created us and given us all things as a gift; that God cares for us, watches over us, and works all things for our good; that God has redeemed us in Christ, and delivered us from all that can condemn or accuse us. But at the same time, do not forget. Prayer is an action; it is something that we need to do. It is not enough to know that we should be grateful, that we should trust God for what we need,

that we should confess our sins. Prayer is a pilgrimage. Prayer is a journey in which we must put one foot in front of the other. As Paul writes, “as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him.” As we leave this building this morning, let us take seriously the words of the post-communion prayer: “And we humbly beseech thee, O heavenly Father, so to assist us with thy grace, that we may continue in that holy fellowship, and do all such good works as thou hast prepared for us to walk in; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honor and glory, world without end. Amen.”

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## **Concerning Women's Ordination: The Argument From Symbolism Part 1 (God, Christ, Apostles)**



In the previous essay, I addressed what I consider the definitive Catholic objection to the ordination of women – that a priest/presbyter acts as a representative of

Jesus Christ, and that a woman cannot be ordained because, since Christ is a male, a woman cannot represent a male Christ. In that essay, I focused on the liturgical version of that argument: in celebrating the Eucharist, the priest acts *in persona Christi* (in the person of Christ), and a woman cannot act *in persona Christi*.<sup>1</sup> In the following two essays, I intend to address a slightly different version of the argument, based on male and female symbolism. The structure of the argument is the same – that a female priest cannot represent a male Christ – but the focus is on the symbolic dimensions of masculinity and femininity rather than the narrower issue of liturgical celebration.

What is a symbol? In his classic text, *Symbolism and Belief*, Edwyn Bevan defined a symbol as “something presented to the senses or the imagination – usually the senses – which stands for something else.” Bevan distinguished between two kinds of symbols: (1) “visible objects or sounds which stand for something of which we already have direct knowledge,” and which “are not intended to give us any information about the nature of the thing symbolized, but to remind us them,” and (2) symbols that “purport to give information about the things they symbolize, to convey knowledge of their nature, which those who see or hear the symbols have not had before or have not otherwise.” The symbols of the first kind have no resemblance to the thing symbolized; the connection is simply a matter of convention. (For example, there is no resemblance between a stop sign and the command to stop, and there is nothing about the word “stop” that is like the action of stopping.) The second kind of symbol “purport[s] to give information about the nature of something not otherwise known,” and “resemblance is essential.”<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Manfred Hauke, one of the authors who embraces the symbolic argument against women’s ordination, refers to a symbol as that something that “finds its special expression . . . where two realities enter into sensibly apprehensible interconnection.”

Hauke distinguishes a symbol from an “arbitrarily defined sign” (like a stop sign) in that a symbol is “suited in advance, by virtue of its inner structure, to entering into certain relationships, for example, ‘sun’ and ‘light’ in relationship to intellectual clarity.”<sup>3</sup> (Thus, Bevan’s first definition of symbol corresponds to Hauke’s definition of “sign,” while his second definition of symbol corresponds to Hauke’s definition of symbol.)

The use of symbols is essential to religious language and practice insofar as religions need some visual or linguistic way to refer to non-visible realities. Bevan states that “in religion things are presented to the senses, or ideas presented to the mind, which purport, not to call to mind other things within the experience of the worshipper, but to convey to him knowledge of things beyond the range of any human experience.”<sup>4</sup> Anglican apologist C.S. Lewis insisted that Christianity necessarily uses physical imagery (what we have called “symbol”) to refer to spiritual realities because “anyone who talks about things that cannot be seen, or touched, or heard of, or the like, must inevitably talk as *if they could* be seen or touched or heard . . .” According to Lewis, metaphorical (or symbolic) language is indispensable to Christian faith; language that says that one of the members of the Trinity “entered the universe” to become one of its own creatures is every bit as metaphorical (or symbolic) as “he came down from heaven.” The former only substitutes imagery of vertical for horizontal movement.<sup>5</sup>

There has been in the last half century an increased emphasis in theology on the importance of both symbol and narrative. Roman Catholic theologian Avery Dulles has written that symbols are “signs imbued with a plenitude or depth of meaning that surpasses the capacity of conceptual thinking and propositional speech. A symbol . . . is a perceptible sign that evokes a realization of that which surpasses ordinary

objective cognition.”<sup>6</sup> According to Dulles, the “Christian religion is a set of relationships with God mediated by the Christian symbols. These symbols are imbedded in the Bible and in the living tradition of the Christian community.”<sup>7</sup> Dulles has suggested “symbolic mediation” as a helpful way to understand the notion of revelation, which “is always mediated through symbol – that is to say, through an externally perceived sign that works mysteriously on the human consciousness so as to suggest more than it can clearly describe or define.” Symbol is thus understood to be a third alternative to either a literalist propositionalism or the non-cognitive “experientialism” of much liberal theology. Although God is beyond description and definition, God’s reality is truly communicated through symbol.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, I would add a partial corrective to the theological discussion of symbol from the field of narrative theology. It is the narrative content of the biblical texts that provides meaning to the symbols, and not vice versa. For example, a fundamental divide in modern theology concerns whether or not the person and work of Jesus Christ are constitutive of a salvation we can find nowhere else, or, rather, whether they are illustrative of some general principle or principles that can be found elsewhere as well. If we take the person and work of Jesus Christ as constitutive of our salvation, we will understand the stories and symbols of the gospels to form our own understandings and to challenge our preconceptions of God, Christ, and the world. So, for example, not only will we find the symbolism of the “Father” language that Jesus used to describe God to be informative, challenging, and even subversive of our own understanding of what it means to be a “father,” but we will find that it illuminates and challenges our preconceptions of what it means to be God, and to point in the direction of an ontological relationship between Jesus and his Father grounded in the eternally constitutive trinitarian relations between Father,

Son, and Holy Spirit. Conversely, if we understand the person and work of Jesus to be primarily illustrative of other generally known truths, we will tend to view the symbols and narratives of the gospel as projections of a prior universally available religious experience, and thus correctable in ways that speak more adequately to contemporary religious expression.

Such an illustrative and projectionist understanding of symbol can be found in the writings of Liberal Protestant (or Catholic modernist) theologians such as feminist theologian Sallie McFague. McFague has argued that all religious language is fundamentally metaphorical, the projections of human experience to talk about the relation between the divine and the world: “[T]heology . . . is principally an elaboration of a few basic metaphors and models in an attempt to express the claim of Christianity in a powerful, comprehensive, and contemporary way. . . . the elaboration of key metaphors and models.”<sup>9</sup> In contrast to Dulles’s account of “symbolic mediation,” McFague believes that what she calls “metaphors” do not actually tell us anything about God’s nature, but are simply projections of our limited religious experience. As the writers of Scripture used metaphors (or symbols) that spoke to their own needs, so we are free to use metaphors drawn from our own contemporary experience. McFague believes that many of the metaphors found in Scripture are outmoded because they are hierarchical and oppressive, and we would do better to embrace contemporary metaphors such as Mother, Lover, and Friend, and the earth as “God’s body.”<sup>10</sup> McFague acknowledges that her understanding of metaphor (or symbol) is projectionist and does not actually tell us anything positive about God. The approach is functional and pragmatic, but some metaphors are more “illuminating” and “fruitful” than others.<sup>11</sup>

In summary, there has been in modern theology a significant emphasis on the value of symbol for communicating religious

reality. Symbols which have some resemblance to that which they symbolize are distinguished from conventional signs which have no such resemblance. There is a significant division between those theologies which presume that religious symbols provide genuine participatory knowledge of transcendent reality (as in Dulles's notion of "symbolic mediation") and those liberal Protestant (or Catholic modernist) theologies that presume that all such use of symbols (or metaphors) is merely projectionist; they tell us nothing about God, but something about ourselves and our own religious experiences.

### **Symbol and Women's Ordination**

The significance of symbols for religious language and theology has thus been a major theme in much modern theology, including among theologians who affirm women's ordination. What is distinctive about the symbolic argument *against* women's ordination is the claim that the theology and practice of women's ordination is in conflict with key symbols of Christian faith. In an early essay in this discussion entitled "Priestesses in the Church," C.S. Lewis wrote:

*One of the ends for which sex was created was to symbolize for us the hidden things of God. One of the functions of human marriage is to express the nature of the union between Christ and the Church. We have no authority to take the living and sensitive figures which God has painted on the canvas of our nature and shift them about as if they were mere geometrical figures.*

(Lewis asserted that the ordination of women would imply that we might as well pray to God as Mother as Father, that the incarnation might as well have taken a female as a male form, that the second person of the Trinity could as well be called Daughter as Son, and that the Church could be the bridegroom and Christ the bride.)<sup>12</sup> Manfred Hauke has written, "[O]fficial



priesthood for women would obscure the spiritual nature of the relationship Christ-Church and endanger the Christian image of God.”<sup>13</sup> Sara Butler expresses her concerns:

*By challenging the tradition that saw a permanent norm for the ministerial priesthood in Christ’s call of men, but not women, as apostles, the objections end up questioning the Lord’s intention with respect to the priesthood, the Church’s hierarchical constitution, and even its foundation. By calling into question the sacramental significance [my emphasis] of the complementarity of the sexes, the objections undermine not only the distinction between Christ and his Church . . . but also the biblical revelation that God created humanity male and female . . . The biblical doctrine that the difference between man and woman is willed by God, and with it the doctrine of Marriage as a sacrament, is thereby put in doubt.*<sup>14</sup>

The following is a concise summary of the argument against women’s ordination based on symbolism. It is a synthetic and composite summary since variations of the argument are used by different authors representing different Christian traditions; however, as stated, forms of the argument appear in authors who are broadly “Catholic” in their approach, whether Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, or Anglican.

(1) Throughout Scripture, God is portrayed as male, not as female. This is because maleness symbolizes transcendence. The biblical God is the creator who creates from nothing, and is distinct from creation. In contrast, goddess religions are religions of immanence which identify deity and the creation; to portray God as female leads to pantheism – as one finds in modern feminist theology.<sup>15</sup>

(2) The Old Testament priesthood was always an exclusively male office; this contrasts with pagan goddess religions, in



which fertility religion is accompanied by cultic prostitution (priestesses). In the Hebrew religion, the priest represents God; a male priest represents the biblical God's masculinity.<sup>16</sup>

(3) In the incarnation, the Son of God became incarnate as a male and identified the first person of the Trinity as his Father. That the Son of God became incarnate as a male has theological implications. In the incarnation, the male Jesus (who has no physical human father) represents the male (active transcendent) principle, while his mother Mary represents the (receptive immanent) female principle. Thus, Jesus could only have been male.<sup>17</sup>

(4) Although Jesus could have called anyone to be his apostles, significantly, he called only male apostles. Because bishops and priests are successors of the apostles, they must be male as were the original twelve apostles. If Jesus had intended that women could be ordained, he would certainly have called his mother Mary to be an apostle, but he did not. That Mary was not an apostle speaks negatively to the question of whether women can be ordained.<sup>18</sup>

(5) There is an anthropological appeal to sexual symbolism. Roman Catholic author Manfred Hauke is one of the earliest writers to use this argument, and does so at great length. Hauke argues that the symbols of masculinity and femininity transcend culture, and he appeals to precedent in both ancient religions, and modern biology, sociology, and psychology.<sup>19</sup> According to Hauke, men are active and external (symbolizing transcendence), while women are receptive and internal (representing immanence): "The dynamics of the male are expansive, outer directed and aimed at overcoming particular sorts of resistance. The dynamics of the female are more adaptive to nature, that is, more strongly adaptive to the demands of the existing situation. . . ." Men tend toward more in the direction of "abstractive reason," while women are

“guided more strongly by intuition and feeling.”<sup>20</sup> According to Hauke, this male-female symbolism (man as active/external/rational/overcoming/transcendent in contrast to woman as receptive/internal/intuitive/relational/feeling/immanent) is presumed throughout both Scripture and church tradition and is fundamental to the order of creation and redemption found therein (thus the subtitle of Hauke’s book).<sup>21</sup>

(6) The apostle Paul’s reading of Genesis 1-2 in Romans 5 is significant for Paul’s understanding of the male as symbolically normative. Although Eve sinned first, Paul speaks of Adam (a male) as representative of all humanity (both male and female); Christ (as male) is the second Adam. Since transcendence contains immanence, but immanence cannot contain transcendence, males (as transcendent) can represent both males and females (as Adam and Christ represent all humanity), but females (as exclusively immanent) can represent only females. Accordingly, a male priest can represent both a male Christ (the second Adam) and a female church, but a female priest could represent neither. A woman cannot represent Christ because Christ is male, but neither can a woman represent the church because the church is composed of both males and females, and a woman can represent only females.<sup>22</sup>

(7) In a manner similar to Protestant complementarians, Catholic opponents of women’s ordination appeal to Paul’s references in 1 Corinthians 11 and Ephesians 5 to Christ as “head” of the church, but rather than reading the argument in terms of male authority (as do Protestant complementarians), they argue rather that male “headship” indicates that only males have a representative (symbolic) role.<sup>23</sup>

(8) Based on symbolic speculation originated by Roman Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, opponents to women’s ordination argue for the symbolic roles of the apostle Peter

and the virgin Mary. Peter as an apostle and the rock on whom Christ builds his church represents the male principle; Mary as the virgin mother of Christ represents the female receptive principle. Peter was called to be an apostle, but Mary was not. As a male apostle, Peter represents the (male) clergy who are successors of the apostles; in contrast, Mary represents the laity (who are symbolically female) and the church.<sup>24</sup>

(9) The argument from liturgy builds on the marriage analogy found in Ephesians 5. In the Old Testament, God is portrayed as the (male) husband, of which the nation of Israel is the (female) bride. In the New Testament, (the male) Christ is portrayed (symbolically) as both the husband and head of the church, which is his body, and is (symbolically) feminine. The ordained priest (as male) represents both God and (the male) Christ; the laity (as both male and female) represent Mary and the church as the bride of Christ.<sup>25</sup>

(10) Finally, the ordained priest acts as father and head of the congregation (who are his family); as father, the priest must be male.<sup>26</sup>

How to respond to these arguments against women's ordination based on symbolism, and, more specifically, the argument that male-female symbolism is inherent to the nature and structure of revelation and Christian faith, that the abandonment of this symbolism would be, in essence, an abandonment of Christian faith, and that the ordination of women would constitute just such an abandonment or reversal of essential Christian symbolism?

As a preliminary, it is unfortunate that writers such as Hauke (and others) identify advocacy of women's ordination exclusively with the position of theologically-liberal feminist writers such as Rosemary Ruether, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Elizabeth Johnson, Mary Daly or Letty Russell. This liberal feminist theology tends to share the following

characteristics:

First, as noted above, since these feminist theologians tend to believe that religious language is projectionist, they argue (as noted above with McFague) that we are as free to use feminine language in reference to God as masculine; indeed such language is preferable: they speak of the “divine feminine,” “God/ess” (Reuther), “She Who Is” (Johnson), God as “mother,” God as “Wisdom/Sophia” (1993 Re-Imagining Conference, Johnson, Schüssler Fiorenza). A statement by post-Christian feminist Mary Daly is frequently cited: “If God is male, then the male is God.”<sup>27</sup>

Second, coupled with this female deity language is an accompanying rejection of “dualism” and an embrace of an alternative theology of immanence or “panentheism” in which God and creation are in some sense identified;<sup>28</sup> Hauke sets up this immanentist feminism as the single foil against which he writes his book.

Third, this feminist theology tends to view the Christian Scriptures as oppressive rather than salvific; advocates interpret the text in light of the assumed meaning of symbols as used outside the text rather than re-interpreting the symbols in light of the logic of the text’s narrative; thus, it is claimed that the notion of God as “Father” has its origins in a hierarchical patriarchy. The corresponding Roman Catholic equivalent to McFague’s projectionist hermeneutic is Schüssler Fiorenza’s “hermeneutic of suspicion,” which views the biblical writings as containing material that is inherently androcentric and oppressive to women.<sup>29</sup>

Fourth, given its projectionist understanding of symbol, feminist theology tends to think of the person and work of Christ as illustrative rather than constitutive of salvation; its Christology is adoptionist, and its notion of atonement is exemplarist. (The historic doctrine of the atonement is

dismissed as divine “child abuse.”) Jesus Christ is not a Savior from sin, but an inspiration and example for feminist liberation. Jesus of Nazareth was not the Son of God incarnate, but someone in whom the divine feminine principle of Wisdom/Sophia was especially present. (If the relationship between God and creation is understood in a monist or panentheist fashion, then there cannot be anything unique about the incarnation. The difference between Jesus and other human beings can be no more than a matter of degree.)<sup>30</sup>

Fifth, there is a loss of the doctrine of the Trinity; if God is not Father, and Jesus is not his eternal Son, then language of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is inherently problematic. The substitution of non-Trinitarian language such as Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer or Parent, Lover, and Friend points to a unitarian understanding of deity.<sup>31</sup>

Finally, this liberal feminist theology tends to advocate “role-model” theology.” As illustrated in Mary Daly’s axiom “If God is male, then the male is God,” role-model theology presumes that religious communities formulate their understandings of “gods” or “goddesses” to express social values. Since a proper theology expresses proper social values, a theology that is committed to full equality of the sexes will not speak of God using masculine language.<sup>32</sup>

This liberal/modernist “immanentist” feminist theology needs to be distinguished from the biblical and Catholic egalitarian feminism of authors such as (among Catholics and Orthodox) Edward Kilmartin, Kallistos Ware and Elisabeth Behr-Siegel, and (among Protestants) Ben Witherington, Alan Padgett, N.T. Wright, Kathryn Greene-McCreight, or the Evangelical organization *Christians for Biblical Equality*. (Writing in 1986, Hauke refers to Behr-Siegel in two footnotes, praising, with unintentional irony, the Orthodox as a “bulwark in the defense of the male priesthood.”<sup>33</sup> He makes no references to

Kilmartin in his text. His discussion of Protestant theologians focuses almost exclusively on liberal Protestant feminists.)

Kathryn Greene-McCreight uses the expression “biblical feminism” to refer to this alternative position. In contrast to “mainstream feminist” theologians, “biblical feminists” proceed on the basis of a “hermeneutics of trust,” in which the Bible is understood to be primarily an “*inspired witness* to the grace of God in Jesus Christ,” a witness that is “not fundamentally dangerous but rather life-giving.” Biblical feminists “attempt to read all of reality through the lens of the biblical narrative, and not vice versa.” They take their clues not from the secular Enlightenment and the historically liberal theology that follows in the train of Friedrich Schleiermacher, but from a view of the church as the people of God. For biblical feminists, the main problem to be addressed is not that of sexist oppression, but of human sinfulness and the need for salvation. Where mainstream feminists focus on gaining equal rights for women in the church, biblical feminists ask for an equal opportunity to serve the church.<sup>34</sup>

By ignoring the alternative of an orthodox Catholic and Evangelical argument for women’s ordination, Hauke (and other opponents) portray the discussion in terms of a false dichotomy between a revisionist monist feminism that embraces “goddess” worship and the only orthodox Catholic (or Evangelical) position – one that rejects women’s ordination. To preserve the distinction between these two very different groups endorsing women’s ordination, in the rest of this essay I will use the terms “feminist theology” to refer to the views of “mainstream feminist” immanence theologians and “egalitarianism” to refer to the views of orthodox advocates of women’s ordination (Greene-McCreight’s “biblical feminists”), whether Catholic or Protestant.

To keep the discussion within reasonable length, I will

present my response in two essays. In the first, I will focus on issues of symbolism connected with central creedal doctrines of God and creation, the incarnation, and, in Catholic theology, the closely related issue of the role of the apostles as successors to and representatives of Christ. These are the concerns at the center of the Vatican's rejection of women's ordination. In the second essay, I will focus on the anthropological concerns rising from the claim that men and women have different symbolic significance – specifically, that men represent transcendence and women represent immanence. These are not the Vatican's reasons for rejecting women's ordination, but they have been important for some Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican opponents.

### **Is God male?**

One of the ironic commonalities uniting mainstream feminists and those who argue against women's ordination from concerns about symbolism is a shared commitment to what I have called "role-model theology." Feminist theologians assume that, since religion functions to construct divine models to be imitated by humans, the metaphor of God as Father must be rejected because it legitimates patriarchy.<sup>35</sup> Conversely, anti-feminists such as Hauke argue that, since God is Father, not only must mainstream feminism be rejected, but the ordination of women must be rejected as well because a woman priest cannot adequately represent a God who is Father or the male Jesus Christ who is the Son of God. Both groups share the common assumption that the God of the Bible is a male whose function is to provide a gender-based model to be emulated; is this assumption correct?

Against role-model theology, it must first be strongly affirmed that the God of the Bible has no sexuality and is thus not a male. Rather, sexuality is part of creation, created by God as a fundamental feature of creation (Gen. 1 and 2). Human beings as male and female are equally created in



the image of God (Gen. 1:27). Throughout Scripture, God is portrayed as other than creation, an otherness which is identified with God's holiness. God is God and not human (Num. 23:19; Hosea 11:9; Isaiah 31:3; 40:18). Throughout Scripture, there is a consistent diatribe against idolatry, the basic offense of which is worshiping the creature as if it were the Creator (Rom. 1:25). In the covenant with Israel at Sinai, the biblical God speaks explicitly against the danger of identifying the divine with any form of sexuality: "Therefore watch yourselves very carefully. Since you saw no form on the day that the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, beware lest you act corruptly by making a carved image for yourselves, in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female . . ." (Dt. 4:15-18).<sup>36</sup>

Christian tradition is equally emphatic that God has no sexuality. Athanasius, the great advocate of Nicene orthodoxy, wrote (concerning God's fatherhood and Christ's eternal sonship):

*Accordingly, as in saying "offspring," we have no human thoughts, and, though we know God to be a Father, we entertain no material ideas concerning Him, but while we listen to these illustrations and terms, we think suitably of God, for He is not as man, so in like manner, when we hear of "coessential," we ought to transcend all sense . . . so as to know, that not by will, but in truth, is He genuine from the Father, as Life from Fountain, and Radiance from Light. Else why should we understand "offspring" and "son," in no corporeal way, while we conceive of "coessential" as after the manner of bodies?<sup>37</sup>*

Similarly, Hillary of Poitiers wrote concerning the Trinity: "[T]hat which is Divine and eternal must be one without distinction of sex . . ." The theologian must not derive his or her conceptions of God from preconceptions, but from God's



own revelation: “[H]e must not measure the Divine nature by the limitations of his own, but gauge God’s assertions concerning Himself by the scale of His own glorious self-revelation.”<sup>38</sup>

Later, the Medieval Catholic theologian Thomas Aquinas wrote that “it is absolutely true that God is not a body,” and “it is impossible that God should be a body.”<sup>39</sup> The post-Reformation Anglican 39 Articles state: “There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the Maker, and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there be three Persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.” If God has no bodily parts, God has no sexuality, and God is not male. Trinitarian language does not mean that a male God is the Father of a male Son.<sup>40</sup>

Given that the triune God is neither male nor female, any language or imagery used to describe God in sexual terms is necessarily symbolic or metaphorical. At the same time, it should be acknowledged that such biblical imagery is overwhelmingly masculine, including use of the personal pronoun “he.” Occasionally, it is suggested (even by more moderate feminists or by Evangelical egalitarians) that this masculine language is not the whole story and that “Scripture also contains a significant amount of feminine imagery for God.” Similarly, it is pointed out that, in the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament, wisdom, personified as a woman, is portrayed as an attribute of God.<sup>41</sup>

The argument is misleading, however. Roland Frye has pointed out the significant difference between how Scripture uses metaphor and simile in reference to God. A metaphor functions by identifying and naming; a simile functions by comparing two things as one to the other, by claiming that one thing

resembles another. Scripture applies numerous masculine metaphors to God: in Psalm 23, the author addresses God: “The Lord *is* my shepherd.” In the New Testament, the same metaphor is applied to Christ: “I *am* the good shepherd” (John 10:11), “Jesus the great shepherd of the sheep” (Heb. 13:20) (my emphasis). In both cases, the metaphor functions as a name or identification: God *is* the shepherd; Jesus *is* the good shepherd.

In contrast, a simile does not identify one thing with another, but notes a comparison between two different things. Isaiah 42:13 states, “The Lord goes out *like* a mighty man, like a man of war he stirs up his zeal.” Here God is compared to a warrior, but is not *identified* or named as one. In verse 14, a female simile appears: “now I will cry out *like* a woman in labor; I will gasp and pant.” In Isaiah 66:13, God states: “As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.” In both cases, God is *compared* to a mother, but *not identified* as a mother. Frye points out that while God is regularly identified or named in Scripture using metaphorical masculine language, figurative female language referring to God uses the comparative language of simile, not metaphor. God is *compared* to a mother, but God is never *addressed* or *named* as mother. Similarly, Frye points out that the wisdom figure of Proverbs is not a “female divinity” or a feminine hypostasis of the Old Testament God (the “Wisdom/Sophia” of feminist theologians), but rather a literary device – the personification of an abstract attribute (the divine wisdom by which God creates the world) in which we treat as a person that which is not actually a person.<sup>[42](#)</sup>

Given then that God has no sex, what do we make of the Bible’s dominant use of masculine metaphorical symbolic imagery to describe God? Is the Bible teaching that God is a male after all?

One of the most helpful discussions of the significance of

male imagery in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) is that of Tikva Frymer-Kensky, in her book *In the Wake of the Goddesses*. According to Frymer-Kensky, the key factor that distinguishes Israel's religion from that of the surrounding cultures (with their worship of both male gods and female goddesses) is Israel's embrace of monotheism. For Israel, the one God absorbed all the powers that were shared among the numerous pagan divinities. There was no more interplay between numerous divine powers because Israel's one God exercised power over all creation, including not only those powers assigned to male gods but also to female goddesses. Israel's God alone was responsible for the weather, fertility of crops, sickness and health, childbirth. Humankind received more responsibility as well, as human beings now became responsible for the social activities that had formerly been assigned to gods and goddesses; human beings become responsible for knowledge and culture. Activities that had once been the responsibility of goddesses – storage, administration, wisdom, song – were now assigned to human beings. Because there is only one God, the biblical God does not have a consort. There is no Hebrew goddess; rather, the nation of Israel itself was personified as a female figure, and Israel (and the city of Zion) are elevated to the role of Yahweh's bride. The image of Zion as the beloved bride “expresses a sense of the immanent presence of God and of God's concern for Israel.” (In the New Testament, this nuptial imagery is taken up and transformed as Christ is identified as the bridegroom and “head” of the church, which is identified as his bride [Eph. 5]). Accordingly, Frymer-Kensky claims: “Throughout the Bible, in every aspect of biblical thought human beings gain in prominence in – and because of – the absence of goddesses.”<sup>43</sup>

Frymer-Kensky acknowledges that the Bible does indeed portray Israel's God using masculine imagery. Yahweh is only referred to by the male pronoun (“he,” never “she”). The masculine qualities of God are, however, exclusively “social male-gender characteristics”: God is King, Shepherd, Lord. At the same

time, although Yahweh takes over the functions of female goddesses, there is no element whatsoever of sexuality or sexual attraction in Israel's understanding of God: "The monotheist God is not sexually a male." God's body parts are described anthropomorphically in the Bible (the "arm of the Lord," the "right hand of God"); however, "God is not imagined below the waist." Frymer-Kensky makes the point repeatedly. Although God is the "husband" of Israel, "God does not behave in sexual ways. . ." She writes: "God is not a sexual male . . . God is not imagined in erotic terms, and sexuality was simply not part of the divine order. God is not sexed, God does not model sexuality, and God does not bestow sexual power."<sup>44</sup>

If the male imagery of the Bible is never sexualized, what then of the "fatherhood" of God? This masculine metaphor of God as "Father" seems to be the primary problematic concern of feminist theology, and, conversely, Hauke appeals primarily to the "Fatherhood of God" as establishing divine transcendence over against the immanence of feminist theology.<sup>45</sup> Given its significance for the debate, it is important to note that the title of "Father" is applied to God only a handful of times in the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy 32:6 and Mal. 2:10, God is described as the "father" who created Israel. In Isaiah 64:7, God is addressed as "our Father," whose work is compared to a potter: "[W]e are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand." In Jeremiah 31:9, God is described as "a father to Israel," and Ephraim as "my firstborn." (In Hosea 11:1, Israel is described as a "son," although God is not specifically called "Father.") In Psalm 103:13, there is a simile in which the Lord shows compassion "as a father" shows compassion to his children. There are also a handful of passages where God is described to have a special father-son relationship to Israel's king (2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 2:7, 89:26-28).<sup>46</sup>

The Old Testament uses other metaphors (such as judge, warrior, or king) to refer to God far more frequently than it does “father.” The distinctive feature of the “father” metaphor is its personal nature; the Old Testament’s use of “father” language points to God’s compassion and providential care for both Israel and the king. Certainly God is Creator of the entire universe; however, God is not described as “father” to the universe as a whole, but to Israel or the king.<sup>47</sup>

This rare use of “father” language contrasts with the practice of Israel’s neighbors, who regularly referred to their “gods” and “goddesses” as both “father” and “mother.” A likely reason for Israel’s reluctance to use either “father” or “mother” imagery for God had to do with the Hebrew desire to distinguish their God from pagan deities. Yahweh was to be identified neither with Baal, the god of fertility nor with El, the “father” of the gods.<sup>48</sup>

The rarity of “Father” language in the Old Testament contrasts with the New Testament, where “Father” is the regular way to refer to God, where “our Father” is the new way in which Christians address God in prayer. The fundamental reason for the difference lies in the example of Jesus, whose practice it was to address God as *abba* or “my Father,” and who understood himself in relationship to the Father as “the Son.” In the New Testament, this special relationship that obtained between Jesus and his Father becomes the basis for the self-understanding of the church: “Christians came to believe that one comes to the Father through Jesus the Son . . . because Jesus believed he had a special relationship with God the Father.”<sup>49</sup> This relationship between Jesus as Son and God as his Father is found throughout the gospels. In the writings of Paul, the gift of the Holy Spirit to the church after the resurrection of Christ enables Christians to confess Jesus as Lord and to pray to God as the Father. For Paul, the distinctive understanding of God as Father comes through a

distinctive relationship to Jesus Christ as the crucified and risen Son, in a union with the risen Christ made possible by the Holy Spirit. God cannot be known as Father apart from the trinitarian relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.<sup>50</sup>

There are then two primary reasons that the Bible uses masculine imagery in reference to God; the first has to do with monotheism; as creator of the universe, the one God exercises all of the functions of both male gods and female goddesses in pagan religions, but this “masculine” symbolism is not understood at all in a sexual manner. Second, while there are anticipations of the notion of God as “father” in the Old Testament, it is the portrayal in the New Testament of Jesus Christ as the unique Son of God that leads to the new naming of God as the Father of Jesus Christ, and, by extension, of the church as adopted sons and daughters of the Father.

As noted above, however, there is an additional reason that theologians like Hauke give for the masculine imagery of God in the Bible: the notion that God is transcendent over creation: “[F]or a personal transcendent image of God . . . it is the masculine traits that occupy the foreground.”<sup>51</sup> The argument is stated concisely in the Anglican *Forward in Faith* document *Consecrated Women?*:

*What the Hebrew Scriptures so desperately want to convey about God is that he is set apart from the gods. God does not create from within himself; he does not bear and give birth to the creation. . . . From the choices available from human experience, only the term Father and the relationship suggested by Fatherhood does justice to the action of the God of Israel. It is biological fathers who take the initiative in creating new life. They bring it to being not within, but outside, their own bodies.<sup>52</sup>*

There is an initial plausibility to this claim. As noted above, feminist theologians who substitute female imagery for the Bible's dominant male metaphors – identifying God as “mother” or using “goddess” language – are also immanentist and panentheist; for example, they refer to the earth as “God's body.”<sup>53</sup> (This contrasts with the New Testament's imagery of the church, not the earth, as the body, not of God, but of Christ.) Old Testament scholar Elizabeth Achtemeier suggested that the “basic reason” for the Bible's masculine language is that “the God of the Bible will not let himself be identified with creation . . . And it is that holiness, that otherness, that transcendence of the Creator, which also distinguishes biblical religion from all others.”<sup>54</sup> Both Achtemeier and Frymer-Kensky point to Genesis 1 to indicate the uniqueness of Israel's understanding of the God of creation.<sup>55</sup>

Insofar as feminist theologians advocate monist theologies that identify God (or the goddess) with creation, the criticism is justified.<sup>56</sup> At the same time, however, caution is necessary concerning the simple equation “male = transcendent; female = immanent.” The Biblical account of creation does indeed emphasize God's transcendence in contrast to theologies of panentheism/immanence.<sup>57</sup> However, it is significant that the Bible does not emphasize male imagery to denote transcendence. The dominant imagery that the Bible uses in emphasizing God's transcendence over creation is either God's word (Gen. 1, Is. 43:1, 6-7; 45:18-19), divine unity (monotheism) (Is. 43:11; 44:6, 8; 45:18, 22-25; 46:9), the imagery of height itself (Is. 40:22; 44:24), or a combination of these images. Significantly, Bevan notes that the imagery of height to indicate “transcendence” is not translatable. Any attempt to explain the metaphor uses the metaphor, which simply serves to emphasize the distinction between God and creation.<sup>58</sup> At the same time that the Bible associated God with height – God's



throne is in the heavens – God is not identified with the heavens or sky (as in pantheist Stoicism), but rather creates the heavens (Gen. 1:1).<sup>59</sup>

Significantly, the “Father” symbolism of the Bible is not associated with God’s creation of or transcendence over the world, but is always used personally and socially: God is not “father” of the world in creation, but is rather the “father” of Israel or the king in the Old Testament, but, more definitively, the Father of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Jesus teaches his disciples to pray to “our Father in heaven,” but, again, the symbolism is personal. The Father is “our Father,” not the father of the universe. The Father in heaven is transcendent, but the transcendence is associated with “height” imagery (Our Father *in heaven*).

As noted above, the writers of the Scriptures seemed hesitant to use “father” language when speaking of God as Creator, and the reason is certainly as noted. The masculine metaphors applied to God have nothing to do with sexuality, but, more specifically, *any* understanding of God as parent of the universe, whether using *either* female “mother” imagery or male “father” imagery, would *equally* have pantheist implications. Significantly, the church fathers understood the implications of the distinction between “fatherhood” and “sonship” (on the one hand), and creation (on the other) in their formulations of the doctrines of incarnation and the Trinity. Against Arius’s heretical claim that the Son is a creature, Athanasius made a fundamental distinction between “begetting” and “creating.” If the Son is indeed the Son of the Father, then the Son must be of the same nature (*homoousios*) as the Father.<sup>60</sup> So the Nicene Creed states that the Son is “begotten not made.” (As noted in the quotations from Athanasius and Hillary above, this Fatherhood of God and the eternal begetting of the Son by the Father, is non-sexual.) In contrast, God creates the world from nothing (*ex nihilo*). The universe is not a son of God, but a creature.



It would seem then, that Hauke (and other critics of feminist theology) are correct to emphasize the transcendence of God over against feminist immanence; however, in trying to tie the notion of transcendence to masculine imagery of God as Father, they violate Trinitarian logic, but also, in their own way, repeat the error of the feminist theology they intend to criticize. Both masculine "father" language and feminine "mother" imagery would be equally mistaken if used to describe God's creation of the universe, because both would be equally monist. The "Father" imagery of Scripture is personal; it refers to God's eternal relationship to the eternal Son in the Trinity, not to God's creation of the universe.

Finally, a note of caution is necessary in the misuse of masculine metaphors to advance a theology that misses the significance of how the metaphors actually function. So-called "traditional readings" that use the masculine metaphors to legitimate traditional patriarchal structures can be as guilty of this as the feminist readings that reject the male imagery as oppressive. Both approaches tend to read the narratives as if the metaphor itself provided its own meaning. The error is to focus on the metaphor as such rather than the subject matter that the metaphor intends to illumine. When Christians call God "Father," they are not referring to God as a generic "father" of creation, but as "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Attending to the narrative structure of the biblical texts, one finds that they subvert a patriarchal reading. The God described metaphorically as the husband of Israel does not divorce his unfaithful spouse, but loves her despite her infidelity and attempts to win her back (Hosea). The Father of Jesus Christ "did not spare his Son but gave him up for us all" (Rom. 8:32). The Son who existed in the "form of God," did not hoard his prerogatives, but "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant," humbling himself to the death on a cross (Phil. 2). The Spirit incorporates the church into the body of Christ, in which there is neither slave nor free, male nor female (Gal. 3:28). To read these masculine metaphors as

“oppressive to women” is to take them out of context, but it would be an equal misreading to read them as endorsing male privilege or hierarchy or as providing a “role model” for male-only ordination.<sup>[61](#)</sup>

## **A Male Priesthood?**

Hauke’s discussion of priesthood in the Old Testament is, at best, ambiguous. He points out that “women are totally excluded from the offices of priest and Levite.”<sup>[62](#)</sup> He also acknowledges that there were occasionally women prophets. At the same time, he acknowledges that there may well have been cultural and practical reasons for this exclusion of women from the Old Testament priesthood: patriarchal conditions largely restricted the role of women to house and family with limited participation in public affairs; the domestic and maternal duties of women would often have prevented their participation in temple functions; women would not have been physically strong enough to participate in the sacrificial slaying of large animals; menstruation and child-bearing would often have made women ceremonially unclean and excluded from worship. Hauke also points to the so-called Canaanite fertility cult involving female prostitution by priestesses. The most significant argument he advances is that “a priest is not only a representative of the people but also God’s delegate . . .” Significantly, he recognizes that “these facts are not sufficient in themselves to prove that there was an internal necessity for the exclusion of women from Old Testament priestly office.”<sup>[63](#)</sup>

On the other hand, Hauke makes the following arguments against women priests based on anthropological symbolism. He defines a priest as “a mediator between God and man,” who functions as the “representation of the Divinity in relation to man.” Insofar as the emphasis is on “transcendence and the active workings of God,” it is appropriate to reserve the priesthood

to men. The priest also has a “public representation of man in relation to the Divinity,” and for this also, men are more appropriate, as the male “steps outward” into the presence of God, and by virtue of his “more strongly developed capacities for abstract thought and energetic will” is more able to represent the common interest and lead a religious group in a “not subjective-emotive way.”<sup>64</sup>

Negatively, Hauke points to the “clear association of women with divine immanence,” and states that “priestesses play a special role in the service of female deities, and particularly of mother goddesses.” There is thus an “intimate connection” between the “image of God and that of the priest.”<sup>65</sup> He writes: “To the sphere of liturgical symbolism . . . belongs the priest as representative of the community before God and of God vis-à-vis the community.”<sup>66</sup>

I have already dealt with the issue of women priestesses in the Old Testament at greater length in an essay entitled “Concerning Women’s Ordination: A Presbytera is not a Priestess (Part 1: Old Testament Priesthood).”<sup>67</sup> I argued in that essay that the so-called “Canaanite fertility cult” is a myth. There were no “sacred prostitutes” in the ancient world. I also argued that the most plausible reason for the exclusion of women from the Old Testament priesthood is precisely one that Hauke acknowledges here – that Old Testament purity regulations would have prohibited women from participating in temple worship. Frymer-Kensky’s claim that the “religious dimension of sexuality disappears in biblical monotheism” provides the rationale. She states: “The priests, guardians of Israel’s ongoing contact with the Holy, had to be particularly careful to keep preserve (sic) the separation between Israel’s priestly functions and attributes of any hint of sexuality.” One of the purposes of the impurity provisions of Israel’s law was to keep both sexual activity and death separate from the sacred realm. Anyone who was ritually impure was not allowed

to participate in the rites of the temple.<sup>68</sup>

As noted in my previous essay, the regular occasions when women would have been ritually impure would have provided sufficient reason for the exclusion of women from Israel's priesthood. At the same time, as I argued in that essay, the situation of the New Testament church is different insofar as Christ's redemption has fulfilled the purpose of Israel's temple rituals so that there are no longer concerns about ritual purity.

More important for the discussion of symbolism is Hauke's claim concerning the representational nature of priesthood, where he relies on general reflections concerning anthropology and symbolism rather than a careful reading of the biblical text. (I will address this male-transcendence female-immanence anthropology in the next essay.)<sup>69</sup> The suggestion that a male priest represents a male divinity while a female priestess represents a female goddess might (or might not) have been correct in polytheistic religions, but any such notion of the priest acting as a representation (in the sense of image) of Israel's God would have been prohibited by the anti-iconic nature of Israel's religion summed up in the second commandment (Exodus 20:4-5). There were no images of Israel's God in the temple, and the priest would not have been thought of as such an image. The priest did indeed act as a representative on the part of God to the people, and of the people to God, but here, Hauke (and others) fail to distinguish between a representative (in the sense of spokesperson or ambassador) and a representation (in the sense of an image or likeness). A spokesperson or ambassador can act as a representative (in the sense of speaking on behalf of) while not acting as a representation (in the sense of bearing a physical resemblance). Priests in the Old Testament were representatives, not representations.<sup>70</sup>

Moreover, any argument from Old Testament priesthood is also a

red herring insofar as it addresses the wrong issue. The historic (Western Catholic) understanding of the priesthood is not that the priest represents God (in the divine nature), but rather, that the priest represents Christ (acts *in persona Christi*) in his incarnate humanity. That is the issue that needs to be addressed. (It is perhaps significant here that the historic Eastern understanding of icons allows for icons of Christ, but not of the Trinity. The icon called *The Old Testament Trinity* pictures not the divine persons in themselves but the three angels who appeared to Abraham (Gen. 18)).

### **A Male Incarnation?**

As noted in previous essays, what I have called the new Catholic argument against the ordination of women first appeared in Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Inter Insigniores* – the basic argument being that there must be a physical resemblance between the male priest who celebrates the Eucharist and Jesus Christ, who as God incarnate, became human as a male human being. The pope recognizes that, as the “firstborn of all humanity, of women as well as men,” the unity which Christ established makes no distinction between male and female (Gal. 3:28). “Nevertheless,” he continues, “the incarnation of the Word took place according to the male sex: this is indeed a question of fact, and this fact, while not implying any alleged natural superiority of man over woman, cannot be disassociated from the economy of salvation.” The symbolism to which the pope points is that of “nuptial mystery.” In the Old Testament, God is portrayed as the divine bridegroom to whom Israel is the bride. In the New Testament, Christ is the bridegroom and the church is his bride. As Eve was born from Adam's side, so the church is born from Christ's wounded side. (The pope appeals to the imagery of 2 Corinthians 11:2; Eph. 5:22, 23; John 3:29; Rev. 19:7, 9; Mark 2:19; Matt. 22:1-14.) He sums up the argument by appealing to the symbolism of the Eucharist:

*That is why we can never ignore the fact that Christ is a man. And therefore, unless one is to disregard the importance of this symbolism for the economy of Revelation, it must be admitted that, in actions which demand the character of ordination and in which Christ himself, the author of the Covenant, the Bridegroom, the Head of the Church, is represented, exercising his ministry of salvation – which is in the highest degree the case of the Eucharist – his role (this is the original sense of the word persona) must be taken by a man. This does not stem from any personal superiority of the latter in the order of values, but only from a difference of fact on the level of functions and service.*<sup>71</sup>

The essential argument here is one of liturgical and eucharistic theology, and I have addressed it at length in a previous essay.<sup>72</sup> For the sake of this essay, the key concern has to do with the symbolic significance of the masculinity of Christ. The masculinity of Jesus Christ is the presupposition of the symbolism of the “nuptial mystery,” in which Christ is the bridegroom and the church is the bride.

The Anglican *Forward in Faith* document *Consecrated Women?* states that “[t]o turn the maleness of Christ into . . . a merely trivial detail is . . . seriously to damage the classical doctrine of the Incarnation and of the person of Christ.” There could be no incarnation in which the Godhead assumed humanity in a sexually undifferentiated manner. Since, the document claims, God is Father, and Christ “bears his image and likeness,” “the only possibility is for the Redeemer to be born as a male, including both sexes (male by virtue of his own humanity; female by virtue of the one from whom that human nature is derived, Mary . . . ).”<sup>73</sup> The maleness of Christ generates an entire family of images, which are critical to the understanding of redemption: Christ the bridegroom, Christ the High Priest, Christ the Sacrifice for

the sins of the world.<sup>74</sup> The document asks whether God could have become incarnate as a woman: “[W]e believe that the answer must be ‘No.’” A divine daughter would have spoken of a “Mother in heaven,” and so could not have been the image of the Father.<sup>75</sup>

Hauke also endorses the symbolism of Bride-Bridegroom imagery as the starting point for his argument: “The Roman declaration on women in the priesthood thus goes to the heart of the symbolism of the sexes when it interprets the mystery of Christ and the Church in terms of the images of bridegroom and bride.”<sup>76</sup> Hauke goes beyond this, however, by expressing his Christological argument, once again, in terms of an anthropological claim concerning male transcendence and female immanence. He reflects on the three Christological offices of prophet, priest, and king. As teacher, Jesus engages in a public forum, which is more suited to men than women. (According to Hauke, women are more effective in small groups and with children.) Teaching and miracles are an expression of Jesus’ power, “which corresponds to his masculine expansivity.” In Jesus’ kingly office, he acts as lawgiver and judge, and “bearers of authority are more often men than women.” Finally, in his priestly sacrifice (on the cross), Jesus represents God toward humanity and the community to God. As God’s gift to human beings, Christ manifests “a typically masculine dynamics.” As representative of the church, “public worship is marked by the eccentricity of the male.”<sup>77</sup>

As with concerns about divine transcendence over against immanentist or panentheist notions of deity, there is much in the above argument with which the Catholic or Evangelical egalitarian would sympathize. Certainly, if the Word as the second person of the Trinity became incarnate, the incarnation would have had to have taken place either as a male or female human being, and Jesus Christ is certainly a male human being – as he was a Jewish male who lived in first-century Judea,

was born in Bethlehem to a Jewish maiden named Miriam, had twelve Jewish male apostles, and was crucified by a Roman governor named Pontius Pilate on a hill outside the Jewish city of Jerusalem. Jesus' male humanity is one of the particularities inevitably connected with a redemption in history – what is sometimes called the scandal of particularity. Although there is no sexuality in the Divine Trinity itself, Jesus (as a human male who was born of a virgin mother) is rightly identified as the Son of the God who is his Father, not his mother.

Given that the Word had to become incarnate as either a male or a female, would it have been possible for God to have become incarnate as a woman? Interestingly, the Medieval Catholic theologian Thomas Aquinas argued that “hypothetically, God could have assumed the female sex had he wished.”<sup>78</sup> Significantly, the church fathers emphasized Christ's humanness, but said little about his “maleness.” According to Orthodox bishop Kallistos Ware:

*What matters for them is not the fact that he became male (ἀνήρ, vir) but the fact that he became human (ἄνθρωπος, homo) . . . It is indeed true that Christ at his incarnation became a male, but that is not what the creed is concerned to assert. The creed is referring to the salvation of the entire human race, men and women together, and so it says that Christ took the human nature that is common to us all, whether we are male or female.*<sup>79</sup>

Along the same lines, in an essay entitled “Can a Male Savior Save Women?,” Jay Wesley Richards argues against feminist claims that a male savior cannot save women that dividing human nature along sexual lines would come into conflict with Cappadocian Christology. Sexuality is an accidental property of human nature. Every human being is necessarily either a male or a female, but if what is essential about humanity is



human nature and not human sexuality, then we can meaningfully assert that the assumption of a human nature by the Logos in the male Jesus enables him to stand in for humanity as a whole. In assuming human nature, the Word does not assume a *male* human nature, but fully assumes human nature *as a male* in such a manner that all human beings (whether male or female) can be saved.<sup>80</sup>

That the Word became incarnate as a man was not necessary, but it was what Thomas Aquinas would have called “fitting.”<sup>81</sup> Given then that it is not essential or necessary that in the incarnation the Word would have become incarnate as a male human being, why might it have been soteriologically fitting for Jesus Christ to be male? First, this makes sense in what I have referred to in a previous essay as the principle of “Christological subversion,” what New Testament scholar Michael Gorman has called “cruciformity,” or what Alan Padgett has called “submission II” (voluntary mutual submission).<sup>82</sup> As Gorman has argued, the kenotic self-emptying of Phillipians 2 is the key to understanding Christ’s salvific mission. The first-century Mediterranean culture in which Jesus exercised his ministry was an honor/shame culture in which women were already necessarily in submission to men. Only a male Savior could challenge and defeat Mediterranean honor culture by voluntarily undergoing the humiliation of death by crucifixion and then conquering death through resurrection. Only a male Savior could meaningfully teach that salvation comes not through domination, but through voluntarily becoming a servant.

At the same time, the maleness of Jesus Christ allows for typological continuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament as the latter fulfills the former. Given that Jesus Christ is the Word of God incarnate, and God is portrayed using masculine metaphors in the Old Testament, it certainly makes symbolic sense for Jesus to be male. There really is a

parallel between the nuptial imagery of Yahweh and Israel, and Christ as the bridegroom and the church as his bride. Egalitarians affirm this!

Once again, however, the clue to properly interpreting the metaphors of Scripture is provided by their narrative context. The narrative context of the parallel between the husband/Christ and bride/Church symbolic imagery of Ephesians 5:32 is provided by 5:1, where Paul instructs the members of the church to “walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God,” and verse 21, where all are asked to “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” The model enjoined on the church throughout the passage is the pattern of Christ-imitation for all (not men only), which Gorman calls “cruciformity.” Jesus Christ is the “head” of the church, which is his body, but he is the head who “loved the church and gave himself up for her” (v. 25). It is the narrative structure of the passage that defines what is meant for Christ to be bridegroom and the church to be bride. To read this passage as if its point was that ordained clergy should be male because Christ is male is to divorce the nuptial symbolism from its textual context to make a theological point that was nowhere in Paul’s mind, while simultaneously missing the point that Paul was actually making about the cruciform imitation of Christ which applies to all Christians – women as well as men. The “male-only” ordination argument simply misreads the passage.

Typologically, Christ’s three offices of prophet, priest, and king also make sense only if Jesus Christ is a Jewish male because Jesus as antitype fulfills the pattern of three Old Testament Jewish males: Moses, Aaron (or Melchizedek), and David. Again, however, the principle of Christological subversion comes into play as it is the New Testament narratives that give meaning to the typological symbols. As prophet, Jesus’ claims not to do away with the Mosaic law, but

fulfills it (Matt. 5:17). At the same time, Jesus' fulfillment of the law involves an "eschatological reversal" in which he shows favor to lost sinners rather than those who are considered "righteous." Jesus subverted Jewish distinctions between "clean" and "unclean" by ministering to Gentiles (Mark 7: 24-30; Luke 1:7-10), by healing a Samaritan leper (Luke 17:11-19), and by asking for a drink of water from a Samaritan woman (John 4:7-9). He allowed a "sinful" woman (presumably a prostitute) to wash his feet (Luke 7:36-50). He refused to condemn a woman caught in adultery (John 8:11-11). Jesus should have been made ceremonially unclean by being touched by a menstruating woman and by touching a dead girl. Instead, he healed the woman and raised the dead girl to life (Mark 5:21-43).<sup>83</sup> Jesus antagonized the religious leaders of his time by healing on the sabbath (Mark 3:1-16). His claim to forgive sins led to accusations of blasphemy (Mark 2:12-12). After his crucifixion and resurrection, early Christians realized the implications of Jesus' fulfillment of Jewish law by welcoming Gentile members of the church without insisting on male circumcision or kosher diet (Acts 15:22-29).

That Christians believe that Jesus fulfilled the role of Old Testament priesthood is also subversive. Although not of the traditional priestly tribe of Levi, the New Testament proclaims that Jesus is the High Priest (of the order of Melchizedek rather than Aaron) who is simultaneously priest, victim, and temple, and it is through his death on the cross that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament notion of priestly sacrifice by taking upon himself the sins of humanity.<sup>84</sup>

It is perhaps the office of king in which christological subversion is most evident. As the notice posted by Pontius Pilate over Jesus' cross makes clear, it is Jesus the crucified peasant who is "king of the Jews." This man who was condemned to death by the religious and political leaders of his time as a religious blasphemer, a law-breaker, and a political pretender, who died in the most humiliating and

shameful manner imaginable in his culture, was proclaimed in his resurrection by the God of Israel who was his Father to be the divine judge who pardons rather than condemns the guilty.

Certainly it is symbolically and theologically significant that Jesus Christ was (and is) a male, but significant, among other things, precisely because, through his life and mission, Jesus radically challenged and subverted traditional honor/shame culture, and, with it, male privilege. As with the marriage symbolism of Ephesians, to conclude from the gospel narratives that the crucial point of Jesus' masculinity is to provide a pattern for exclusively male ordination is to misread the texts.

## **Male Apostles**

In my previous essay, "Women's Ordination and the Priesthood of Christ (*in persona Christi*)," I addressed what I consider to be the fundamental (Catholic) theological argument against the ordination of women: in presiding at the Eucharist, the priest represents Christ by acting *in persona Christi* (in the person of Christ).<sup>85</sup> Because a woman cannot represent a male Christ, women cannot preside at the celebration of the Eucharist. The argument concerning male apostles is the corresponding historical warrant supplied by Catholic opponents of women's ordination. Male-only ordination is grounded in the example of Jesus who chose only men as apostles. Butler makes the following claims: (1) The fundamental reason that the church does not ordain women is based not on any notion of women's inferiority, but on the "fact" of Jesus' example. (2) Jesus chose twelve male apostles, and no women; in so doing, he expressed his will for the priesthood. (3) Bishops are successors of the apostles, and so, must themselves be males. (4) The unbroken tradition of the church confirms this practice of not ordaining women. She summarizes the argument succinctly:

*This doctrine of priesthood, as we shall see, determines the judgment of the Catholic Church concerning the possibility of ordaining women. The answer to the question "Why?" is bound up with the belief that Holy Orders is a sacrament instituted by Christ, that his intention for the priesthood is known by way of the mission he gave the Twelve, and that this office is passed on in apostolic succession. If the Church does not have the authority to change her tradition regarding this, it is because the ministry is a gift which the Lord "entrusted to the Apostles" and which she is bound to preserve.*<sup>86</sup>

Again, she writes: "The fact that Jesus did not choose any women to belong to the Twelve, and that the apostles followed his example by handing on the apostolic charge only to men, was seen to be the fundamental reason." As noted above, the argument first appears in Pope Paul VI's *Inter Insigniores*: "Jesus Christ did not call any women to become part of the Twelve. . . . Even his Mother, who was so closely associated with the mystery of her Son, and whose incomparable role is emphasized by the Gospels of Luke and John, was not invested with the apostolic ministry."<sup>87</sup> Butler is clear that the heart of the argument in *Inter Insigniores* concerns the twelve apostles and their relation to the subsequent church:

*This rather sober, ecclesiastical formulation directs attention to the vocation and symbolism of the Twelve, and its importance for the constitution of the Church. It is by way of Jesus' choice of 12 men that we know his will for the apostolic ministry of bishops and priests. No other appeal is made.*<sup>88</sup>

The argument thus stands and falls on the symbolic significance of Jesus having chosen only men to be his apostles. Everything else depends on it. Once again, the crucial weakness in the argument lies in a tendency to impose

onto the text preconceived assumptions about what the symbols of the Scripture must mean rather than allowing the narrative structure of the texts to determine the meaning of the symbols. As with the case of Jesus' masculinity, the reason his apostles had to be male is evident from the text itself. Jesus chose *male* apostles for the same reason that he chose *twelve* apostles and *Jewish* apostles. Insofar as Jesus' followers represent the new Israel, Jesus' twelve apostles typologically represent the twelve tribes of Israel, and, specifically, the twelve patriarchs (sons of Jacob/Israel) from whom the nation of Israel was descended. In the new age, Jesus gives his apostles a special role in judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30). The book of Revelation records that the New Jerusalem has twelve gates on which are written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, and twelve foundations on which are written the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (Rev. 21:12-14). Gentile inclusion in the church rests on the foundation of the (Jewish) twelve apostles and on the (Hebrew) prophets (Eph. 2:11, 19-21). At his Last Supper, Jesus is present with his twelve disciples, and reconstitutes the passover as a meal of bread and wine in which he forms a new covenant. Significantly, it is at this last meal where Jesus pronounces the role of the twelve in judging Israel (Luke 22:14-30; cf Jer. 31:33-34). The twelve had to be free Jewish males, and not slaves, women or Gentiles, in order to fulfill the symbolic function of their typological role.<sup>89</sup>

*Inter Insigniores* emphasizes that "Jesus Christ did not call any women to become part of the Twelve." Butler asserts that, given Jesus' freedom in breaking from the cultural roles of his time, the way that he freely mingled with women, and his disregard for ritual purity laws, he could have called women apostles if he had wanted to: "If Jesus did not share the prejudices of his contemporaries, it would appear that he 'could have' entrusted the apostolic church to women if he had wished to, but freely chose to do otherwise." She also

mentions (with approval?) several times in her book the significance of the fact that Jesus did not call even his mother (the virgin Mary) to be one of his apostles or to exercise priestly ministry.<sup>90</sup> However, that Jesus was free from the prejudices of his contemporaries does not mean that, in some kind of absolute freedom without regard either to cultural context or Jewish faith, he “could have” entrusted the apostolic ministry to women, anymore than he could have called someone who was Chinese or Buddhist to be an apostle. As a reviewer of Butler’s book points out, the demand of communication places limits on what one can say. If the twelve apostles were to play the symbolic role that Jesus assigned to them – as representatives of the New Israel and the twelve patriarchs – they had to be twelve free Jewish males.<sup>91</sup>

The question then of why Mary the virgin mother of Jesus was not called to be an apostle is fairly easily answered. As a Jewish woman, Mary could not have fulfilled the typological role fulfilled by the twelve. At the same time, pointing to Mary as a counter-example to women’s ordination is rather odd. It is asked why (if women could have been ordained), Mary was not ordained. Yet, apart from her significance as the mother of Jesus, Mary’s role either in the earthly mission of Jesus, or in the later New Testament church, seems to have been fairly limited. For instance, she did not play the kind of major role in the ministry of Jesus that was played by the sisters Mary and Martha of Bethany or by Mary Magdalene. After the resurrection of Jesus, Mary is mentioned by name only once in the book of Acts (Acts 1:14), and not at all in any of the epistles.<sup>92</sup> Again, women like Lydia (Acts 16:11) or Priscilla (Acts 18:2, 18, 26; Rom. 16:3; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 4:19) or the numerous women Paul greets in some of his letters (Rom. 16) seemed to have played more significant roles in the early church than did the virgin Mary. It would seem that her single vocation in redemptive history was to be the mother of Jesus.

Significantly, Butler recognizes the typological symbolic significance of the twelve, but insists, following *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*, that “the symbolism of the Twelve is not limited to representing the 12 patriarchs of Israel, and that their vocation is not limited to judging the 12 tribes of Israel.” Her claim is that those who raise this objection “deny that the Lord’s choice of the Twelve . . . . reveals his will for the ordained ministry.” To the contrary, she writes, “The Church must consult the tradition, and the tradition sees in his example with respect to the Twelve an expression of his will for the ordained ministry.”<sup>93</sup>

The argument as Butler sets it out is circular, and thus begs the question. The structure of the argument is as follows:

(1) We know that in the post-New Testament church, the reasons for not ordaining women are theological, not cultural, and are grounded in Christ’s will, because Christ chose only male apostles.

(2) We know that masculinity is what is important about Christ’s choosing the apostles and not simply biblical typology (the number twelve and Jewishness) because in the post-apostolic church, no women were ordained (although Gentiles were).<sup>94</sup>

To express the argument succinctly:

(1) Christ’s choosing of male apostles is used to explain the practice of the post-apostolic church, but then (in a circular manner),

(2) The practice of the apostolic church is used to explain Christ’s choosing of male apostles.

What we can actually affirm with certainty is the following:

(1) The primary reason that Jesus chose only male apostles is the same reason he chose only twelve apostles and only Jewish



apostles – the fulfillment of Old Testament typology. Moreover, the twelve apostles had a distinctive role, which cannot be repeated. The apostles were companions of and witnesses to the mission of Jesus (Matt. 12:28; Acts 1:8, 21-22). The apostles were witnesses to Jesus' resurrection (Acts 1:22, 1 Cor. 9:1). After his death, the role of Judas was replaced by Matthias, but after that, there were no more replacements. Bishops and presbyters may be successors to the apostles, but they are not themselves apostles.<sup>95</sup>

(2) We do not know whether the office of bishop and presbyter was based on the office of apostle, and if so, to what extent.<sup>96</sup> We do not know whether the practice of the post-resurrection church concerning presbyters and bishops was based on the masculinity of the apostles because the New Testament never addresses the issue. The argument concerning the ordination of women based on the practice of the New Testament church after the resurrection of Jesus is thus necessarily an argument from silence. No writer of the New Testament ever says "women should be ordained," but neither does any New Testament writer say, "women should not be ordained." We can speculate about the actual practice of the New Testament church, but the data is limited. The New Testament says nothing about the actual practices of sacramental ministry that are so essential for Butler's argument. The New Testament contains no descriptions of how the Eucharist was celebrated and who might have officiated. Because we do not know who presided at the Eucharist, we do not know whether women did so for the same reason we do not know whether men did so. (I will discuss the ministerial roles that women practiced in the New Testament church in a later essay.)<sup>97</sup>

Moreover, Butler cannot appeal to those New Testament passages used by Protestant complementarians to reject women's ordination because the passages do not have to do with

sacramental ministry, but rather with speaking and teaching, and Butler is clear that the Roman Catholic Church no longer considers these prohibitions to have anything to do with ordination. Women are allowed to speak and teach in Roman Catholic Churches; they just cannot preside at the Eucharist.<sup>98</sup>

Finally, the understanding of priesthood and sacrifice that is so essential to Butler's argument is anachronistic. The early church did not understand a presbyter to be a priest or to exercise a sacrificial ministry in the sense that Butler imagines. Insofar as presbyteral ministry is "priestly," it is Christ who celebrates and the sacrifice is Christ's, not that of the presider.<sup>99</sup>

In the end, Butler has to appeal to post-biblical tradition to make her argument. What about this tradition, then? Butler points out that the early church did not object to the admission of Gentiles, but did object to the ordination of women.<sup>100</sup> Again, however, in the case of the New Testament, this is an argument from silence. The New Testament neither approves of nor objects to women's ordination because it does not address the issue. After the New Testament, we know the main reason that the tradition rejected women's ordination – which Butler acknowledges in her book – was because women were considered to be ontologically inferior to men, less intelligent, more emotional, and more easily tempted.<sup>101</sup>

Butler is clear that the contemporary Catholic Church does not use this argument, so, in an attempt to save the argument from tradition, Butler appeals to an anti-Montanist work of the fourth-century bishop Epiphanius of Salamis, whom she refers to as the "first undisputed witness of paristic opposition to the priestly ordination of women."<sup>102</sup> Epiphanius does indeed argue against women's ordination based on the fact that Jesus chose only male apostles, but his arguments are the unhelpful arguments that I have already addressed: (1) that there were

no women priests in the Old Testament (Panarion 79.2,3); (2) that the virgin Mary was not a priest (79.3,1), and (3) that no woman was an apostle or priest in the New Testament (79.3,3-4). Butler states concerning Epiphanius: "Epiphanius bears witness, then, to the tradition that God's will regarding the female priesthood is known by means of Christ's choice of the Twelve. . . . The reason is not their 'subject' status or some unworthiness deriving from their sex; it is a dispensation of the Lord's will."<sup>103</sup> To the contrary, Epiphanius does embrace the arguments that Butler would prefer to avoid. There is the appeal to women's ontological inferiority: "Women are unstable, prone to error, and mean-spirited . . . so here the devil has seen fit to disgorge ridiculous teaching from the mouths of women." (Panarion 79.1,6-7). There is also the prohibition of women teaching based on the Pauline passages: "[T]he Word of God does not allow a women 'to speak' in church either, or to 'bear rule over a man.'" (Panarion 79.3,6).<sup>104</sup> Perhaps Epiphanius is not so helpful after all.

The argument against women's ordination based on the masculinity of the apostles is, as noted above, a circular argument: (1) The traditional argument against women's ordination is acknowledged as inadequate insofar as it was based on the presumption of the ontological inferiority of women. Given that the original argument from tradition is insufficient, it becomes necessary to appeal to Scripture, namely the example of the male apostolate; However, (2) the argument from the male apostolate is also insufficient, as Butler acknowledges.<sup>105</sup> Accordingly, (3) we must appeal beyond Scripture to tradition, and specifically to the rather isolated witness of one fourth-century bishop. However, when we examine the writings of this bishop, we find that he has little to offer in terms of actual argument beyond the mere assertion that Christ chose only male apostles (which no one denies), and, unfortunately, embraces the assumptions concerning women's inferiority and prohibition of women's

teaching that have already been found insufficient. So we find ourselves back where we began.

## **Conclusion**

In this essay, I have examined a key modern Catholic argument against the ordination of women based on symbolism. The argument is essentially an appeal to masculine imagery found in both Scripture and tradition.

First, it is noted that the dominant symbolic imagery used to portray God in the Scriptures is masculine. Specifically, the God of the Old Testament is a God, not a goddess, who is transcendent to and freely creates the world. God is not mother, and the world is not his body. In the New Testament, God is the Father (not mother) of Jesus Christ.

Second, the Old Testament priesthood was an exclusively male priesthood, and the primary reason for this is that priests are representatives of God. Only a male priest can represent a God who is portrayed using male imagery.

Third, in the incarnation, the Son of God became incarnate as a male Savior who addressed God as his Father (not his mother).

Fourth, Jesus Christ (the male Saviour) chose only male apostles to be his witnesses and representatives.

Fifth, insofar as contemporary priests are successors to the male apostles, they must also be males in order that they might function as successors of the male apostles and represent the male Jesus Christ.

In contrast to those mainstream feminist theologians who find this masculine imagery oppressive, those theologians whom I have designated as Catholic and Evangelical egalitarians (whom Greene-McCreight designates as "biblical feminists") would not object to any of the masculine imagery to which the Catholic

opponents of women's ordination appeal in this argument. The Bible does indeed portray God using masculine imagery; the Old Testament priesthood was exclusively male; in Jesus Christ, the Son of God did indeed become incarnate as a male human being who addressed God as his Father; Jesus did indeed choose twelve male apostles, and, as successors to the apostles, contemporary clergy are indeed called to be representatives of Christ. None of this is denied. The key issue concerns the symbolic significance of this male imagery.

The old saying is that if the only tool one has is a hammer, then everything looks like a nail. In the symbolic argument against women's ordination, it seems that the concern to reject the possibility of women's ordination is the hammer that drives the tendency to turn every example of male imagery in the Bible and the Christian tradition into the nail that must be struck. In this essay, I have taken another look at this masculine imagery and specifically asked the question, "how does the narrative context of the biblical texts make sense of the imagery?," rather than assuming ahead of time that, since we already know the meaning of masculine imagery, and since we already know the meaning of representation, it is a simple task to make a straightforward connection between masculine imagery and male-only church office.

In each case, the masculine imagery has a function, but it is not the function imagined by the opponents of women's ordination. The God of the Bible is certainly portrayed using masculine imagery, but the purpose of this male symbolism has nothing to do with sexual modeling since God has no sex. Rather, in Israel, the one God takes on all of the tasks of both the pagan male gods and female goddesses. To call God "he," means that God is a "person," not that God is a male.

The Old Testament priesthood was indeed a male-only office, but the primary reason for a male priesthood had to do with the purity codes of the Old Testament law, a law that was fulfilled by Christ, and whose purity regulations were

abrogated when Gentiles were admitted to the church.

Jesus Christ the Son of God did indeed become incarnate as a male human being. Only as a man could Jesus have fulfilled the Old Testament typological roles of prophet, priest, and king. At the same time, Jesus fulfilled these roles in a manner that was subversive and challenged traditional Mediterranean "shame culture." Jesus fulfilled Old Testament law and promises by transforming them, and by calling both men and women to be his followers and to be servants of one another.

Jesus certainly called only twelve men to be his apostles. Again, only in calling twelve Jewish men could Jesus have both fulfilled and transformed the symbolism of Old Testament typology. That Jesus' twelve apostles were males no more requires that their successors be males than that their successors be Jewish or twelve in number. More specifically, what it means to be a "representative" of Christ has nothing to do with male or female sexuality, and everything to do with what Michael Gorman has called "cruciformity." The pattern of mutual submission to which all of Christ's followers are called means following Jesus Christ in the pattern of his self-emptying in which, rather than holding tightly to his divine prerogatives, the Son of God humbled himself, took on the form of a servant and became obedient "even to death on a cross" (Phil. 2:1-11). To be a representative of Christ means to follow this pattern by taking up our own cross, to become servants of the Triune God, and servants of one another. Both men and women are called to this task. Those who are called to church office have the special task of serving the church in the ministry of word and sacrament. For Catholic and Evangelical egalitarians, the ordination of women to the office of word and sacrament is not a demand for "equal rights" in the church, but a request for an equal opportunity to serve in the church.

1 "Concerning Women's Ordination: Women's Ordination and the Priesthood of Christ (in persona Christi),"

<http://willgwitt.org/theology/concerning-womens-ordination-and-the-priesthood-of-christ>.

[2](#) Edwyn Bevan, *Symbolism and Belief* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1938, 1957), 11-13.

[3](#) Manfred Hauke, *Women in the Priesthood? A Systematic Analysis of the Light of the Order of Creation and Redemption*, trans. David Kipp (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 121-122.

[4](#) Bevan, 14.

[5](#) C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1947, 1960) 73, 79.

[6](#) Avery Dulles, *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1992), 18.

[7](#) Dulles, 19.

[8](#) Avery Dulles, S.J., *Models of Revelation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1983), 131-173.

[9](#) Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), x-xi.

[10](#) McFague, ix.

[11](#) McFague, 192-193.

[12](#) C.S. Lewis, "Priestesses in the Church," *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, Walter Hooper, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 237-238.

[13](#) Hauke, 479.

[14](#) Sara Butler, *The Catholic Priesthood and Women: A Guide to the Teaching of the Church* (Mundelin, IL: Hillenbrand Books, 2007), 111.

[15](#) Hauke, 65-72, 175-190, 216-243; Jonathan Baker, ed. *Consecrated Women? A Contribution to the Women Bishops Debate* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2004), 18-19.

[16](#) Hauke, 190-194.

[17](#) *Consecrated Women?*, 22, 26-29; Hauke, 249-276, 297-325.

[18](#) In the modern discussion, the argument first appears in Pope Paul VI's *Inter Insigniores*. [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19761015\\_inter-insigniores\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19761015_inter-insigniores_en.html); Butler, 5, 50, 66-70, 72-76, 105; Hauke, 326-339.

[19](#) Hauke, 85-204.

[20](#) Hauke, 90, 92, 94.

[21](#) Butler, 91, appeals to the nuptial imagery of "the husband's initiative and the wife's response as a paradigm of the initiative of divine grace and the human response" as parallel to the ordained priest as the Bridegroom and the "other baptized" as the Bride.

[22](#) Hauke, 175-190; Thomas Hopko, "Presbyter/Bishop: A Masculine Ministry," *Women and the Priesthood*, Thomas Hopko, ed., new edition (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1999), 143-147.

[23](#) Butler, 82-92; *Consecrated Women?*, 29-31; Hopko, 144-145, 157-15.;

[24](#) *Consecrated Women?*, 40-43; Hauke, 318-325; See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mary for Today* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988); *The Office of Peter and the Structure of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986); *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory III. Dramatic Personae* "Persons in Christ" (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 283-360).

[25](#) The imagery appears in Pope John Paul II's encyclical



“Pastores Dabo Vobis”: “The priest is called to be the living image of Jesus Christ, the spouse of the Church. . . . in virtue of his configuration to Christ, the head and shepherd, the priest stands in this spousal relationship with regard to the community.”

[http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_25031992\\_pastores-dabo-vobis.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_25031992_pastores-dabo-vobis.html); *Consecrated Women?*, 34-47; Hauke, 330-339, Butler, 78-82, 88-92.

[26](#) Hopko, 156-159, 164.

[27](#) *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973, 1985), 19. In the first paragraph of *Beyond God the Father*, Daly writes: “If God in ‘his’ heaven is a father ruling ‘his’ people, then it is in the ‘nature’ of things and according to divine plan and the order of the universe that society be male-dominated.” (13); Rosemary Reuther, *Sexism and God Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983, 1993); Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (NY: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1992); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (NY: Continuum Publishing Group, 1994, 2004).

[28](#) McFague, 72, 129,

[29](#) Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “The Will to Choose or to Reject: Continuing Our Critical Work,” in Letty Russell, *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985); *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston; Beacon Press, 1995).

[30](#) Johnson, 150-169. McFague, 64-65, 145.

[31](#) McFague, 91, 181.

[32](#) Garrett Green, “The Gender of God and the Theology of

Metaphor," *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism*, Alvin F. Kimel, Jr., ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 48.

[33](#) Hauke, 50n, 193n.

[34](#) Kathryn Greene-McCreight, *Feminist Reconstructions of Christian Doctrine: Narrative Analysis and Appraisal* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 36-40.

[35](#) Green, 52.

[36](#) Elizabeth Achtemeier, "Exchanging God for 'No Gods': A Discussion of Female Language for God," *Speaking the Christian God*, 4; Roland M. Frye, "Language for God and Feminist Language: Problems and Principles," *Speaking the Christian God*, 20.

[37](#) Athanasius, *De Synodis* 42. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, second series, vol. 4, Philip Schaff, ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994); <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf204.xxii.ii.iii.html>.

[38](#) Hillary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity* 1.4, 18. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, second series, vol. 9, W. Sanday, ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994); <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf209.ii.v.ii.i.html>.

[39](#) *Summa Theologiae* 1.3. art. 1; Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fr. Laurence Shapcote, O.P. (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012); *Summa Theologica* (New York: Benziger Bros, 1948; reprinted Christian Classics, 1981); <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa>; <http://www.dhspriority.org/thomas/summa/index.html>.

[40](#) Addressing the issue of the Son's maleness, it is important to distinguish between the immanent and the economic Trinity,

between the Son's eternal generation and his temporal mission, as well as the two-fold principle of predication of the *communicatio idiomatum*. One of the implications of the hypostatic union is that the Son is a single divine person with two natures, one divine and one human. Because of the unity of person, two sets of predicates can be attributed to the Son, but the distinction of natures must also be maintained. As divine, the Son is eternal, but as human, the incarnate Son was born in Bethlehem at a particular time. Similarly, it is true that the Son *as divine* has no sexuality because God *as God* has no body; it is also true however that the Son *as human* is male because the Son became incarnate as the human male Jesus Christ.

[41](#) Judy L. Brown, "God, Gender and Biblical Metaphor," *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, eds. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 291-293.

[42](#) Frye, 34-43.

[43](#) Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (New York: Macmillan, Inc., 1992), 83-117, 168-178.

[44](#) Frymer-Kensky, 188-189.

[45](#) Hauke begins his discussion of the biblical material with the subheading "*GOD AS FATHER.*," 217. For reasons that will become clear, there is actually little in Hauke's discussion concerning "God as Father" until he reaches the New Testament.

[46](#) Ben Witherington III and Laura M. Ice, *The Shadow of the Almighty: Father, Son and Spirit in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 1-2.

[47](#) Witherington and Ice, 2-3.

[48](#) Witherington and Ice, 2-3.

[49](#) Witherington and Ice, 20-21.

[50](#) Witherington and Ice, 19-65; Wesley Hill, *Paul and the Trinity: Persons, Relations and the Pauline Letters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdans, 2015).

[51](#) Hauke, 184.

[52](#) *Consecrated Women?*, 18.

[53](#) McFague, 69-77.

[54](#) Achtemeier, 8.

[55](#) Achtemeier, 10; Frymer-Kensky, 93.

[56](#) See also David A. Scott, "Creation as Christ: A Problematic in Some Feminist Theology," and Stephen M. Smith, "Worldview, Language, and Radical Feminism: An Evangelical Appraisal," *Speaking the Christian God*, 237-275.

[57](#) Bevan, 28-81.

[58](#) Bevan, 28, 68.

[59](#) Bevan, 44-48.

[60](#) Athanasius, *Contra Arianos*, 2.4-5; "Oration Against the Arians (*Orationes contra Arianos*)," *Athanasius: Select Works and Letters: Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Vol. 4*, Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994).

[61](#) Green, 59-60.

[62](#) Hauke, 212.

[63](#) Hauke, 209-215.

[64](#) Hauke, 190-191.

[65](#) Hauke, 192.

[66](#) Hauke, 194.

[67](#)

<http://willgwitt.org/theology/concerning-womens-ordination-a-p-resbytera-is-not-a-priestess-part-1>.

[68](#) Frymer-Kensky, 188-190.

[69](#) "Concerning Women's Ordination: The Argument From Symbolism (Part 2: Transcendence, Immanence and Sexual Typology)," <http://willgwitt.org/theology/concerning-womens-ordination-the-argument-from-symbolism-part-2>.

[70](#) Hugh Montefiore, "The Theology of Priesthood," *Yes to Women Priests* (Essex: Mayhew-McCrimmon, 1978), 3.

[71](#) Paul VI, *Declaration Inte Insigniores: On the Question of Admission of Women To The Ministerial Priesthood*; [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19761015\\_inter-insigniores\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19761015_inter-insigniores_en.html).

[72](#) "Concerning Women's Ordination: Women's Ordination and the Priesthood of Christ (in persona Christi)," <http://willgwitt.org/theology/concerning-womens-ordination-and-the-priesthood-of-christ>.

[73](#) *Consecrated Women?* 4.1.3; 4.1.5, 27.

[74](#) *Consecrated Women?* 4.1.6, 28.

[75](#) *Consecrated Women?*, Footnote 41, 27.

[76](#) Hauke, 256.

[77](#) Hauke, 263, 264.

[78](#) Paul Gondreau, "The Humanity of Christ, the Incarnate Word," *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, Rik van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow, eds. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), n. 275. The reference is to *III Sent. d. 12 q. 3 art.1 sol. 2*.

[79](#) Elisabeth Behr-Sigel and Kallistos Ware, *The Ordination of Women in the Orthodox Church* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2000), 87.

[80](#) Jay Wesley Richards, "Can a Male Savior Save Women: Gregory of Nazianzus on the Logos' Assumption of Human Nature," *Christian Scholar's Review*, 28(1) (Fall 1998): 42-57. Significantly, the authors of *Consecrated Women?* quote a letter from E.L. Mascall that states "It was *male human nature* the Son of God united to his divine person" and that "no *female human nature* was assumed by a divine person." (28). To the contrary, there is no *male human nature* as such. If the Word united a *male human nature* to himself, but no *female human nature* was assumed, then the feminist theologians are correct – a male Savior who assumed a *male human nature* could not save women.

[81](#) Adam Johnson, "A Fuller Account: The Role of 'Fittingness' in Thomas Aquinas' Development of the Doctrine of the Atonement," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 12(3) July 2010.

[82](#) Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); Alan Padgett, *As Christ Submits to the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 38, 59. See my essays "Concerning Women's Ordination: Disciples of Jesus," <http://willgwitt.org/theology/concerning-womens-ordination-disciples-of-jesus> and "Concerning Women's Ordination: Mutual Submission," <http://willgwitt.org/theology/concerning-womens-ordination-mutual-submission>.

[83](#) See my discussion in "Concerning Women's Ordination: Disciples of Jesus," <http://willgwitt.org/theology/concerning-womens-ordination-disciples-of-jesus>.

[84](#) See my essay, “Concerning Women’s Ordination: Women’s Ordination and the Priesthood of Christ (Biblical and Patristic Background),” <http://willgwitt.org/theology/womens-ordination-and-the-priesthood-of-christ-biblical-and-patristic-background>.

[85](#) “Concerning Women’s Ordination: Women’s Ordination and the Priesthood of Christ (in persona Christi),” <http://willgwitt.org/theology/concerning-womens-ordination-and-the-priesthood-of-christ>.

[86](#) Butler, 4.

[87](#) [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19761015\\_inter-insigniores\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19761015_inter-insigniores_en.html).

[88](#) Butler, 76.

[89](#) Aida Besonçon Spencer, “Jesus’ Treatment of Women in the Gospels,” *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, eds. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 135-136.

[90](#) Butler, 63, 65, 67; Hauke also finds it significant that Jesus called only male apostles: “That no woman received the apostolic charge is particularly remarkable . . .” Hauke, 333.

[91](#) Robert J. Egan, “Why Not? Scripture, History and Women’s Ordination,” *Commonweal Magazine* (April 3, 2008); <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/why-not-0>.

[92](#) Gal. 4:4 states that Christ was “born of a woman,” but does not mention her name.

[93](#) Butler, 94, 95.

[94](#) Hauke also contrasts the role of women with Gentile converts: “[T]here was never any controversy about the pros

and cons of admitting Gentile Christians to apostolic office . . .” Hauke, 334. By “apostolic office,” Hauke is referring to post-apostolic ordination, since there were no Gentile apostles.

[95](#) Hauke insists that, “since their office remains necessary until Christ’s Second Coming, they transferred it, with laying on of hands, to their successors.” He insists that the task of an ordinary parish priest celebrating the Eucharist, “distinguishes itself in no way from that of Saint Peter or John.” Hauke, 335. This misses the significance of the radical distinction between the twelve apostles and contemporary clergy. No “ordinary parish priest” accompanied Jesus during the years of Jesus’ earthly ministry, or was a witness to Jesus’ resurrection. More significant for this argument, no modern *Gentile* parish priest could function in the typological role of the twelve necessarily Jewish apostles who typologically represented the new Israel.

[96](#) “There is no evidence in the New Testament that Jesus made any connection between the Twelve and any established offices or continuing roles of leadership in the local communities like elders or overseers.” Egan, “Why not?”

[97](#) “Concerning Women’s Ordination: Women’s Ministry in the New Testament (Office),” <http://willgwitt.org/theology/womens-ordination-office>.

[98](#) Butler recognizes that previous Roman Catholic objections appealed to “Pauline texts that prohibited women’s public teaching in the Church and their exercise of authority over men . . .” However, “[b]ecause the contemporary magisterium has abandoned the view that women are unilaterally subject to men, it obviously does not supply this as the reason women cannot be priests.” Butler, 46, 47.

[99](#) See my essay “Concerning Women’s Ordination: Women’s Ordination and the Priesthood of Christ (Biblical and



Patristic Background)”;  
<http://willgwitt.org/theology/womens-ordination-and-the-priesthood-of-christ-biblical-and-patristic-background>.

[100](#) Butler, 103.

[101](#) See my essay, “Concerning Women’s Ordination: The Argument “From Tradition” is not the “Traditional” Argument”;  
<http://willgwitt.org/theology/concerning-womens-ordination-the-argument-from-tradition-is-not-the-traditional-argument>.

[102](#) Butler, 61.

[103](#) Butler, 63.

[104](#) *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis*, Books II and III, trans. Frank Williams (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994). For a selection of the relevant texts from Epiphanius, see:  
<http://www.womenpriests.org/traditio/epiphan.asp>.

[105](#) Butler acknowledges, citing *Inter Insigniores*: “In any event, ‘a purely historical exegesis of the texts cannot suffice’ to establish Christ’s will on the matter. The Church must consult the tradition, and the tradition sees in his example with respect to the Twelve an expression of his will for the ordained ministry.” Butler, 95.