

I Get Mail or Concerning Justification and Doctrinal Development

A reader left some comments on an essay I'd written a few years ago entitled Anglican Reflections on Justification by Faith. Unfortunately, an adequate response required more space than would fit in a comment box. Here's my response to the first comment:

Very good article. Some Reformers identified the doctrine of justification as the "article by which the church stands or falls" and Luther himself said something very similar. Yet, as you indicate, the Reformation understanding of justification as 1) forensic and 2) distinct from sanctification was a genuine doctrinal development. Alister McGrath agreed with this assessment saying that the Reformation understanding was a "theological novum." Herein lies the problem: if the reformed view of justification is a theological novum and it is central to our understanding of salvation, then it would seem that the church had erred on a central doctrine for 1500 years; indeed, it would seem that the church only began to "stand" with this theological discovery. So, I'm curious as to why you would label the Reformers view of justification as Doctrinal Development 1 instead of Doctrinal Development 2 (designations that you used in an essay on DD). Thanks. Steve



Steve,

Three different issues need to be addressed here. First is the notion of doctrinal development itself. What constitutes a genuine as opposed to an illegitimate doctrinal development? Second concerns the question of whether justification by grace through faith is a genuine doctrinal development or rather an illegitimate development. Third, if justification is the article by which the church stands or falls, was it the case that the church “erred on a central doctrine for 1500 years”?

(1) So what constitutes a “doctrinal development”? A doctrinal development takes place when the church affirms as definitive a doctrinal position that had not been clearly articulated previously. In a very real sense, by definition, all doctrinal developments are “theological *novi*,” and it is for this reason that they often meet with opposition. Primary examples would be the councils of Nicea and Chalcedon. Nicea affirmed dogmatically that Jesus Christ is *homoousios* (of the same nature or “consubstantial”) with the Father. Chalcedon affirmed what became the official dogma concerning the incarnation – that Jesus Christ is one divine person with two natures, one divine and one human. Some resisted *homoousios* on the grounds that it was not a biblical expression, and that it was suspect as being “Sabellian.” Nestorians and monophysites/miaphysites rejected Chalcedon for opposite reasons. Nestorians rejected the language of “one person” because they suspected it was monophysite, while monophysites rejected Chalcedon because they suspected it of Nestorianism.

(2) In terms of J. B. Mozley's distinction between "Development 1" and "Development 2," Development 1 (as I wrote in an earlier essay) is "the necessary logical unfolding of what is already clearly present in the New Testament." If what the NT teaches about Jesus Christ is correct, that he is the "Word made flesh" (John 1:1, 14) who "existed in the form of God," yet took on the "form of a servant" (Phil. 2:1-11), through whom God created the world (Col. 1:16), in whom the "fullness of Deity dwells bodily" (Col. 2:9), then *homoousios* follows as a legitimate and necessary doctrinal development. Similarly, if Jesus Christ is One, "God become human," and not simply a human being in whom God is especially present, then Chalcedon necessarily follows.

In contrast, "Development 2 is genuinely new development that is not simply the necessary articulation of what is said explicitly in the Scriptures." As I mentioned in the earlier essay, examples of "Development 2" would be the Roman Catholic Marian dogmas and the infallibility of the papacy. Development 2 "adds something genuinely new to the content of faith."

(3) I would add some further qualifications to the nature of genuine developments. While developments are by necessity "theological *novi*," they do not appear from nowhere. There are (almost?) always anticipations in the previous tradition of the church, but there are also ambiguities. These ambiguities can be ignored until a theological crisis forces the church to make a definitive affirmation in order to clarify the ambiguity. So, although church Fathers like Irenaeus clearly affirmed the deity of Christ, there was also a tendency toward "subordinationism" among many of the fathers as well. Before Nicea, many of the church fathers affirmed that Jesus was greater than creation, was in some sense "God," but was also in some manner less than the Father. Arius's affirmation that the Word is a creature and not the Creator forced the church to definitively reject subordinationism. If Jesus Christ is fully God, then he must be of the same "substance as," and

cannot be "less than" the Father. Similarly, the failure of pre-Chalcedonian theologians to clearly distinguish between person and nature in the incarnation eventually led to the impasses between Alexandrian and Antiochene theologians: Alexandrians affirmed that if Christ is one, then he must have one divine/human nature. Antiochenes affirmed that if Christ is both fully human and fully divine, then he must be a conjunction of divine and human natures. There are clear anticipations of Chalcedon in Cyril of Alexandria, but Chalcedon affirmed a distinction between person and nature that Cyril had not clearly articulated.

(4) It is also possible for developments to take place that continue to be church-dividing. Examples would include the difference between the West's affirmation of the *filioque* and the East's affirmation of the distinction between the divine "essence" and "energies." One of the reasons that I am a Western Christian, specifically, an Anglican, and not (Eastern) Orthodox is that I am convinced that the *filioque* is a legitimate (and indeed necessary) doctrinal development, while I regard the essence/energies distinction as mistaken.

(5) Note also in this regard that one of the distinctives of doctrinal development is the introduction of previously unacknowledged distinctions in order to resolve theological impasses, and that asking the proper theological question can lead to the definitive distinctions. Athanasius insisted that the key theological question was "whether Christ is Creator or creature?," and the *homoousios* provided a formula to maintain the distinction between Creator and creature. Cyril insisted that the key theological question concerned "whether Christ was God become human or a grace-filled human being?," that is, whether the union of Christ was ontological or merely moral, and the distinction between one divine person and two natures (one divine, one human) formulated that distinction. From the Western perspective, the *filioque* is necessary to distinguish between the Son and the Spirit: if the divine persons are

identified in terms of relations of origin, and both the Son and the Spirit proceed from the Father, then necessarily there must be some difference between the way that the Son and the Spirit proceed, or the second and third persons are indistinguishable. On the other hand, the Orthodox introduced a distinction between the divine essence and energies that the West finds problematic because it would seem to compromise the divine simplicity.

(6) One of the ironies of doctrinal developments is that, while they are, in a certain sense, “theological *novi*,” once articulated, they are always “articles by which the church stands or falls.” So, before Nicea, the ambiguity of affirming both the deity of Christ along with subordinationist language was possible; afterwards, subordinationism was rejected as heresy because it conflicted with affirming the full deity of Christ. Before Chalcedon, failures to distinguish clearly between person and nature were permissible; after Chalcedon, a clear distinction between Christ’s single divine person and his two human and divine natures was necessary in order to avoid the mutual heresies of Nestorianism and monophysitism. Both Nicea and Chalcedon are necessary because if Christ is not fully divine, he cannot save; if he is not fully human, he cannot save *us*.

Each of the above six points has some bearing on my claim that the Reformation understanding of justification, and specifically, the distinction between justification and sanctification, is a “genuine doctrinal development.”

(1) The Reformation formulation of justification is a “theological *novum*,” but this is true by definition of all doctrinal developments. The reason why a clear distinction between justification and sanctification had not been previously formulated is that this had not previously been raised as an issue in the church that necessitated a dogmatic definition. There were reasons for this, e.g., the absence of the kinds of controversies in the East that led to the Western

rejection of Pelagianism, the misleading Vulgate translation of Greek *dikaiousune* (to declare righteous) as Latin *justificare* (to make righteous). In a manner similar to the way that Arianism and Nestorianism led to crises concerning Christology in the patristic period, numerous factors in the late Medieval Western Church led to the crisis concerning justification: (1) the combination of Nominalism with a semi-Pelagian theology of grace (William of Ockham and Gabriel Biel); (2) anxieties concerning assurance of salvation connected with the Medieval penitential system; (3) a highly penitential spirituality following the Black Death; (4) the crisis concerning the sale of indulgences; (5) recognition following the publication of Erasmus's Greek NT that *dikaiousune* is a forensic term.

As with the previous Christological crises during the patristic era, once the crisis arose, a definitive decision had to be made. The Reformers represented one response, while the Council of Trent equally represented a different response. In the sense that both the Reformation and Trent are different responses to the same theological crisis, both are examples of doctrinal development and both are thus "theological *novi*." The issue of development of doctrine concerns which was the appropriate response. (There is a parallel here to Eastern/Western disagreements concerning the *filioque* and the essence/energies distinction. In each case, doctrinal developments that were not universally accepted resulted in permanent ecclesial disagreement.)

(2) Is the Reformation distinction between justification and sanctification an authentic doctrinal development in the sense of an articulation of something already present in Scripture (Development 1), or, rather, something genuinely new in the sense of an "addition," an articulation of something that is not already found in Scripture (Development 2)?

As noted in my essay, the Reformation understanding is rooted in three theological affirmations all found in Scripture: (1)

the union between Christ and the Church. (This is a theme found throughout the NT and affirmed in the tradition of the church); (2) Justification and sanctification as two aspects of union with Christ, each dealing with a separate aspect of the problem of sin: guilt and forgiveness (justification); transformation and cleansing from indwelling sin, conformity to Christ's righteousness in holiness (sanctification). (As with union with Christ, forgiveness of sin and holiness are themes found throughout Scripture and the tradition of the church); (3) The distinction between justification as a forensic declaration and sanctification as not merely forensic but a genuine transformation. This distinction is based on the apostle Paul's use of different terminology: *dikaiosune*, which is courtroom language, translated "justification" or "righteousness" and *hagiosmos* translated "sanctification" or "holiness."

As I noted in my original essay, distinction (3) is recognized by all modern biblical scholars (including Roman Catholics), but was not noticed in the Latin West before the Reformation because the Vulgate misleadingly translated *dikaiosune* as *justificare*. If the Reformation is a development of doctrine, it is not a case of Development 2 as a new doctrine adding something to Scripture, but is rather an articulation based on a distinction found in the biblical text itself. To the extent that Trent continued to insist on defining justification as "to make righteous," and conflated justification and sanctification, it failed to acknowledge a distinction that is in the biblical text. Trent's failure to recognize this distinction has affinities to earlier failures of those during the patristic period to recognize the necessity of making new distinctions (such as the Nicene language of *homoousios* or the Chalcedonian distinction between persons and nature), rather refusing to go beyond an earlier position when it was no longer capable of addressing issues raised by a new crisis.

3) Granted that the Reformation understanding of justification

is a development, one would not expect to find it spelled out explicitly in pre-Reformation writers – otherwise it would not be a development.

Nonetheless, as with other doctrinal developments, there are anticipations of the Reformation position in the tradition. Reformers such as Thomas Cranmer, John Jewel, and Richard Hooker pointed to language in the church fathers that (at the least) anticipates justification by faith. Irenaeus regularly uses pauline language of justification by faith, and his emphasis on salvation as “progress” joins together a notion of participation (union with Christ) with sanctification language (Against Heresies 2.28.3; 4.13.4; 2.26.1; 1.25.5). The Reformers’ affinities to Augustine are well-known; I would also point to Medieval figures such as Walter Hilton, whose distinction in *The Ladder of Perfection* between an initial faith and a later progression in holiness sounds much like the Reformation distinction between justification and sanctification, as well as Thomas Aquinas, whose close reading of the apostle Paul, discussion of the “new law” as the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and friendship with Christ, and statements such as that without the Holy Spirit, even the “law of the NT would kill,” at times sounds surprisingly like Luther.

(4) As with Nicea and Chalcedon, and later with Eastern/Western disagreements about such matters as the *filioque*, the Reformation understanding of justification has been church-dividing. As with these earlier developments that also led to division, the development itself is not necessarily problematic. The crucial question concerns which attempt to resolve a theological crisis that had not existed previously was the more legitimate response to the problem, which represented the best hermeneutical attempt to be faithful to the teaching of Scripture – in this case, whether Trent or the Reformers?

(5) As with previous theological disagreements that led to

doctrinal development, the crucial disagreement concerning the Reformation was eventually able to be formulated in a question or several related questions that led to making crucial distinctions. The questions were: Is the "formal cause" of justification the alien righteousness of Christ (something outside us), or rather, "infused righteousness," something inside us? Is my right-standing before God a matter of looking entirely outside myself and my own moral efforts, depending only on what Jesus Christ has done for me in his atoning work? Or do I hope to be righteous before God by looking to how well I have cooperated with Christ, looking inside myself for evidence of good works, and basing my standing on the quality of those good works? And the crucial distinction was that between justification as a forensic declaration (imputation) and sanctification as a genuine participation in Christ's holiness (infusion). To refuse the distinction between justification and sanctification is necessarily to understand the "formal cause" of my salvation in terms of something "inside me" (infused grace), and my righteous-standing before God as based on the quality of my cooperation.

(6) Is justification by faith the "article by which the Church stands or falls," and, if so, does this imply that "the church had erred in a central doctrine for 1500 years"?

I would suggest that there are several "articles by which the Church stands or falls," and that the ecumenical Councils articulated some of these: the deity of Christ (Nicea), the proper understanding of Christ's person and natures (Chalcedon), the doctrine of the Trinity. That these doctrines were not carefully formulated for several hundred years after the close of the NT canon does not imply that the "church had erred" for several hundred years before Nicea or Chalcedon. To the contrary, what became the official doctrine of the Church at the ecumenical councils was already present both in Scripture and in the earlier teaching of Church Fathers such as Irenaeus; however, it took a number of theological crises

to achieve a precise formulation of what it was that the Church believed about Jesus Christ as fully divine and fully human and the doctrine of God as three in one. Were the incarnation and the Trinity always doctrines on which the church “stood or fell”? Yes, but it took the ecumenical councils to spell out carefully what this meant.

In the same way, I would suggest that a proper understanding of the doctrine of grace is a matter on which the church stands or falls, and that means a proper understanding of the relation between justification and sanctification. It was the theological crises that occasioned the Protestant Reformation that led to the careful distinctions between justification and sanctification that were spelled out by the Reformers in a genuine development of doctrine. As I wrote in my original essay, “Justification by grace alone through faith alone is a summary way of saying that Jesus Christ saves. . . . [J]ustification is Christ’s work, not ours. In faith, we look away from ourselves and our own moral efforts, to receive a salvation that is entirely a gift of the triune God.” No more than Nicea and Chalcedon imply that the “church had erred” in a fundamental manner for several hundred years before the ecumenical councils, does the Reformation imply that the “church had erred” concerning the doctrines of grace for 1500 years. However, as with Nicea and Chalcedon, fundamental instabilities in the church’s earlier formulations eventually led to a theological crisis in which new theological affirmations were necessary (a “development of doctrine”), and new distinctions needed to be made in order to address the crisis. Once those distinctions were spelled out, to refuse the distinctions would indeed be mistaken on a matter on which the church stands or falls. Fortunately, the church stands on the reality of Christ’s person and saving work, and not necessarily on our proper articulation of doctrines of soteriology or grace. (In other words, even those who do not affirm that we are justified by grace alone through faith in Christ alone can still have saving faith in the Christ who

justifies.)

Reflections on the Hypostatic Union: How Can a Single Person Have Two Intellects and Wills?



One of the most difficult concepts for students of theology to get their heads around is the orthodox doctrine of the incarnation. Students generally are willing to affirm that Jesus Christ is a single person (against Nestorianism), that he is “God become a human being” and not a human being in whom God was especially present (against adoptionism), that he is fully God and fully human (Chalcedon); however, I have found that concerns arise when some of the affirmations of the later Councils are discussed. Affirmations of ditheletism (that Christ has two intellect and wills, one human and one divine) and *anhypostasia* (that because Christ is a single divine person, he has no distinct human person) create puzzlement. In an email conversation with

a well-known contemporary Evangelical theologian, I was once told that the notion that Jesus had both a divine intellect and will and a human intellect and will sounded like "Nestorianism." More recently, a student complained that saying that Jesus was not a human person sounded like Apollinarianism. A student sent me an email awhile back, raising some of these questions, and I have belatedly responded:

I'm still stuck on the single personhood of Christ in the face of two natures. I understand the distinction (the who vs. the what) and the necessity to keep either from being diminished/replaced by the other. But I'm struggling with how to understand someone with two wills, two knowledges, two ontologies, as a single anything. I know at some point we plead mystery, but I want to get as close as I can before I do.

Concerning personhood, I think the following is necessary:

- a) A person is absolutely unique. There are many human beings, but there is only one unique Bill Witt or D___ S___ (name omitted).
- b) A person is consciously aware, and the source of his or her own actions.
- c) A person knows and wills and, on that basis, is able to act in a responsible manner.
- d) A person is relational – specifically a person is in relation to other persons as I and you.
- e) For all of the above reasons, a person is a "some one" rather than a "some thing."

Where things get confusing for us is that in the only cases of personhood of which we have immediate experience (that of fellow human beings), every person is an embodied individual

with a single intellect and will. If there is more than one intellect and will, there is more than one person.

However, in the case of the Trinity and the incarnation, this become problematic. The orthodox doctrine of the Trinity is that there are three persons, but one nature and not three intellects and three wills, but a single intellect and will. The three persons of the Trinity all know, will, and love with one divine intellect and will. The Augustinian and Thomist "psychological" Trinitarian model goes so far as to equate the Son/Word with the divine Wisdom (Intellect) and the Spirit with divine Love (will). Karl Barth and Karl Rahner were so concerned that speaking of three divine "persons" might lead to a conception of three separate knowing and willing "individuals" that they preferred to speak of the Trinitarian persons as "modes of being." However, the more recent consensus seems to be that the traditional language is still preferable because Barth's and Rahner's position does not adequately enough distinguish the Trinitarian persons as individual centers of relational consciousness and loving. God really is three distinct persons (not one), but the three persons know and love one another with the same undivided intellect and will.

In the case of the Son, the orthodox position is that the Son is a single Divine Person; however, as human, it is necessary to speak of this divine person as knowing and willing with a human (not divine) intellect and will. Within the sphere of the incarnation, God the Son (a distinct divine person) knows and acts as a human being, and that necessarily involves a human intellect and will. If the puzzle concerning the Trinity is how three persons can share a single intellect and will, the puzzle concerning the incarnate Son is how a single person can have two intellects and two wills.

The best thinkers on this issue are in agreement that the fundamental distinction that enabled patristic trinitarian and incarnational theology to move forward was the distinction

between person and nature. As long as the location of union continued to be "natures," then either monophysitism/Apollinarianism or adoptionism/Nestorianism were inevitable. If one focuses on union, and assumes that the divine nature is at the center of the union between Christ's deity and humanity, then the humanity must yield to the divinity, and Jesus is not genuinely human. On the other hand, if one focuses on the distinctiveness of the natures, and insists that they must each maintain their own integrity, then the question arises of how Christ is genuinely one, and not simply a human being who has a special relationship with God. What the distinction between person and natures enables is to make it clear that the incarnate Christ's center of identity is that of the Second member of the Trinity. Who is Jesus Christ? He is God incarnate. At the same time, in order to maintain the integrity of both deity and humanity in the incarnation, it must be clear that both natures are complete – Jesus Christ is completely human and completely divine. What is the incarnate Jesus Christ? He is a man, but he is also God.

It is this distinction between person and nature that leads inevitably to the distinction between person (which is divine) and intellect and will (which, are respectively, divine in the divine nature, and human in the human nature). Either Apollinarianism or Nestorianism would be easier to understand. If Jesus is a single divine person with a single divine intellect and will (Apollinarianism), that fits within our known categories, but it means that Jesus is not genuinely human. If Jesus's genuinely human intellect and will mean that Jesus is a human person, then the question arises, how is he genuinely God, and not simply another example of a prophet or a saint?

I think the following might be at least semi-helpful in terms of providing some clarification, but without making things any easier to conceive (fit our heads around).

In the five distinctives of personhood above – (a), (d), and (e) point to characteristics of the person's distinctiveness – what distinguishes one person from another; (b) and (c) point not to characteristics of the person's identity in itself, but to activities of the person. The person "is aware," "acts," "knows," "wills," "is responsible." In each case, it is possible to distinguish the person as the source of activity from the activity itself. It is the person who knows, acts, wills, and loves. The intellect and will do not know, will, and love; rather the person knows and loves using an intellect and will. A person is inseparable from an intellect and will, but is not simply identified with them. The person is the source of the action (the someone), but is not simply identified with the action.

In the case of the incarnation, a divine person, who, as one of the members of the Trinity, is the source of divine actions using the divine intellect and will, now has assumed a human nature, that is, the humanity of a single human individual. Within the sphere of the incarnation, the second person of the Trinity now takes on an additional role; the person of the Word (the center of identity in the sense of a), d), and e) becomes the source of activity of the human Jesus, but in this case, this same divine person exercises actions b) and c) through a human intellect and will. That is, the divine person of the Word (the "who" of Jesus) in the sense of a), d), and e), genuinely lives as a human being and so is conscious, is the source of human actions, knows, wills, loves, and is responsible in a completely human manner.

This, I think, is as far as the ecumenical councils got. They did not really address the question you ask: "how to understand someone with two wills, two knowledges, two ontologies, as a single anything?" I'm hoping that perhaps some of what I've written addresses that. The single unique center of identity who is the Word of God and who knows, wills, and acts, does so in two different ways, both as human

and divine. The incarnate Word is not a “single anything,” he is two “anythings,” one divine, one human. At the same time, he is a single “anyone.” He is the same distinct, knowing, willing, responsible individual exercising his personal activities of knowing, willing, acting within two different spheres of activity, one divine, one human.

I also addressed some of this awhile ago in an essay I wrote on Cyril of Alexandria, and I’ll include some of that below:

The uniqueness of the second person of the Trinity’s access to the consciousness of the incarnate Jesus lies in personal identity. Or rather, the second person of the Trinity does not simply have access to the mind of Jesus. He is Jesus. The person of the Word takes the place of what would be a human person in the incarnate Word, and that person is the center of the human consciousness and will of the incarnate Word. It is not the human mind that knows or the human will that wills, but the divine person who knows using the human mind, and the divine person who wills using the human will. Because it is the person who acts, knows, and wills, the person of the Word knows himself (and not someone else) to be acting, knowing, and willing in the actions of Jesus.

But because there are two natures (with two minds and wills), the same person acting as the one center of consciousness experiences himself in two different ways (as human and as divine) in two consciousnesses. As divine (in his divine mind), the knowledge of the Word must encompass both the contents of his divine and human minds (because the divine mind is omniscient). As human (in his human mind), the same person of the Word knows only the contents of his human mind—because the two natures do not lose their personal integrity, and because it is not the nature of human minds to be omniscient.

At the same time, we must insist that the limitations of the person of the Word incarnate are not limitations on the Word

in his divine nature as such. The divine nature neither changes, grows, or diminishes in the incarnation. Rather, through entering into a new relation to the humanity he has assumed, the Word begins a new mode of existence, in which he experiences the limitations of a genuine human life. The limitations are those inherent to human nature as such. They are not limitations of deity.

Finally, it is important to recognize . . . that the humanity of the incarnate Christ is permanent. The incarnation is not a temporary measure in which the Eternal Word starts out being God, ceases to be God for awhile and becomes human, and then (after his resurrection) becomes God again. Rather, in the incarnation, the Word undergoes a permanent kenosis, in which he makes our humanity personally his own, and retains it for eternity, both lowering himself to experience personally the smallness of our humanity, but also elevating that humanity which becomes his forever. It is through the mediation of that permanently assumed humanity that we come to share in the communion of the Triune life, that is always the grounds of our own access to God the Father, through the Son in the unity of the Spirit.

I Get Mail: A Response to a Catholic Reader

I got an email awhile ago from a young Roman Catholic gentleman who expressed appreciation for some of what I've written on my blog, following a growing frustration with online rationalist Roman Catholic apologetics.

I first came across your blog ten years ago when I was

fifteen and beginning to seriously study the Reformation and Roman Catholicism from a Baptist background, and read it intermittently for a couple of years. I did eventually become a Catholic, at twenty four, but recently began reading your blog again. . . . The reason I've returned to reading your blog is largely because of a burnout with modern Catholic discourse [especially rationalist Catholic apologetics] . . . I've found that reading solid devotional writing like yours, whether from Catholics, Protestants, or Orthodox, does far more for my faith than the old polemical reading I used to do.



Dear xxxxx,

I've been meaning to reply to your kind email. It is Ash Wednesday, and I have a little time. Your email was quite encouraging to me. Around six months ago, I began receiving repeated emails from a Roman Catholic gentleman who would ask one-line questions such as "Who founded your church?," while including links to conservative Catholic apologetics sites. I sent several replies that I hoped would be charitable, but he ignored what I actually wrote, and just kept bombarding me. Finally, I had to block his email address. So imagine how encouraging it was to receive a positive email from a Catholic reader of my blog. I often wonder whether what I write is

helpful to anyone except myself, and I am always happy to hear when it is.

Concerning what you write about rationalist apologetics: I find conservative online apologetics to be generally toxic; it does not matter what brand is being sold. The biggest problem with these people seems to be a peculiarly modern obsession with epistemological certitude coupled with an obsessive Cartesian anxiety about doubt. These folks spend way too much time focusing on arguments as to why their side is the only correct one, and far too little time exploring the substance of their Christian faith, whether they be Catholic, Orthodox, some kind of Protestant, or Anglican (like myself).

One of the most helpful books I have read in recent years was D. Stephen Long's *Saving Karl Barth: Hans Urs von Balthasar's Preoccupation* (Fortress Press, 2014). In this book, Long (a Methodist) writes about how Balthasar (a Roman Catholic) rediscovered the heart of Christian faith through reading Karl Barth (Reformed). Barth's theology focused on the Nicene-Chalcedonian center of Christian faith: the Trinity and the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. Balthasar believed that if Catholicism were going to be renewed in the 20th century, it needed to return to this Nicene-Chalcedonian center, and abandon the unfruitful manualist Apologetics of the late 19th and early 20th century that focused on Catholic quarrels with Protestantism and modernity. It is this creedal center that I have found most fruitful for my own theology and spiritual life.

I too am a former Baptist who, after pursuing an MA at a Roman Catholic seminary, got as far as Canterbury (Anglicanism), but never was quite able to cross the Tiber. Still, I received all of my graduate training at Roman Catholic institutions and have always been grateful to those Catholic donors who made possible my scholarship at the University of Notre Dame. I have learned much from Catholics, and continue to read them with profit.

If you have now found your home in the Catholic Church, I would encourage you to begin exploring the riches of your tradition. In the modern era, I would recommend reading people like von Balthasar, Henri de Lubac, Yves Congar, or Louis Bouyer. Among better contemporary writers, I would point to Matthew Levering, Giles Emery, Robert Barron, and Thomas Weinandy. I return again and again to the spiritual writings of Dominican Simon Tugwell, but also have appreciated Thomas Merton and Dorothy Day.

If you still find yourself drawn to apologetics, I would recommend reading modern Catholic philosophers such as Alasdair MacIntyre or Charles Taylor.

Of course, you should not neglect the stream of Catholic tradition from which all modern orthodox Christians drink. (Since they wrote before the Reformation, I am happy to claim these people as well). Thomas Aquinas continues to be the pre-modern thinker I read most, and, fortunately, there is a modern revival of scholarship. The best introduction to Thomas's thought is probably Jean-Pierre Torrell's two volume work on *Saint Thomas Aquinas: The Person and his Work* and *Saint Thomas Aquinas: Spiritual Master*. Although he is primarily a philosopher, I have learned much from my doctoral dissertation director, David Burrell. Just as important are Medieval spiritual writers like Julian of Norwich and Walter Hilton.

And, of course, there is the entire treasure of patristic writers to explore: Irenaeus, Athanasius, Cyril of Alexandria, the Cappadocians, Augustine.

Finally, if enough time has passed that you're willing to venture again into non-Roman Catholic territory, I would recommend reading for spiritual refreshment (among Anglicans) the poetry of George Herbert, the sermons of John Donne, and the spiritual writings of Thomas Traherne. In theology, besides Karl Barth, Thomas F. Torrance is perhaps the greatest

of modern ecumenical theologians. Among philosophers – again, there’s that apologetic stuff – I would recommend James K. A. Smith’s *Kingdom* trilogy (or the popular short version, *You are What You Love*), or the writings of David Bentley Hart (Orthodox). In the area of Christian ethics, Stanley Hauerwas and Oliver O’Donovan can’t be beat.

What all of these writers have in common is a generous Catholic (or catholic) theology that is rooted in the creedal center of Nicene-Chalcedonian orthodoxy. If you immerse yourself in the writings of such people, and combine it with a spirituality rooted in Scripture, daily prayer, and regular liturgical worship, you cannot go far wrong. And you’re right. Stay away from the apologetics blogosphere. It is toxic.

Grace and Peace,
Bill Witt

Concerning Women’s Ordination: Aquinas and the “Tradition Challenge”



Of all of the essays I have written on the topic of women’s ordination, the one that has received the most negative feedback has been the one entitled “Concerning Women’s

Ordination: The Argument 'From Tradition' is not the 'Traditional' Argument." In this essay, I argue that despite claims simply to be upholding the church's historic tradition, both versions of the current arguments against women's ordination used respectively by Roman Catholics and by Protestants are not traditional at all, but actually represent departures from the historical reasons that women were not ordained.

In that essay, I made the case (citing numerous historical examples) that historical opposition to women's ordination is rooted in an ontology of inequality: women could not be ordained because they were less intelligent, emotionally unstable, and more subject to temptation than men. Moreover, the traditional argument was not simply an argument against the ordination of women, but against any leadership of men over women.

It seems fairly obvious why so many have reacted negatively to this essay. If I am correct, historical opposition to women's ordination is not only based in a questionable major assumption, but is also directly contrary to a key claim of both the new Catholic and the new Protestant positions, that opposition to women's ordination is not based on any kind of intellectual or moral inequality. Resistance to this essay led me to post something I called the "Tradition Challenge." In that essay, I laid out the traditional position in three premises:

(A) Women are less intelligent, more emotionally unstable, and more subject to temptation than men.

(B) Ordination necessitates exercising authority over others, particularly teaching and speaking in an authoritative manner. Women cannot be ordained because they are necessarily subordinate to men, and therefore cannot exercise authority in this manner. This is primarily an exclusion from women exercising any authority whatsoever over men, and only secondarily a specific exclusion from ordination.

(C) Proposition (B) is a direct corollary or consequence of Proposition (A). Women are necessarily subordinate to men, and cannot exercise authority over them because of an ontological incapacity located in a deficiency in reason, emotional instability, and susceptibility to temptation. Because of this ontological deficiency, they cannot exercise authority over or teach men, and so cannot be ordained.

To the contrary, both Evangelical “complementarians” and Catholic traditionalists affirm:

(A1) Women share an equal intellectual, moral, and spiritual capacity with men. They are not less intelligent, emotionally unstable, or more subject to temptation than men.

Protestant “complementarians” continue to affirm (B), but because they no longer affirm (A), must affirm the following rather than (C):

(C1) Although (A1), women still cannot be ordained because God has created different “gender roles” rooted in “male headship.”

The Catholic traditionalist affirms neither (A), (B), nor (C), but rather affirms (A1) plus:

(B1) The argument from authority no longer applies. Women can exercise any role of teaching, exercising authority, and speaking, and even preaching within the church. (There are no “gender roles” rooted in “headship.”)

(B2) The distinct function of ordination has to do with presiding at the sacraments. The presiding minister (the priest) represents Jesus Christ, that is, acts in the “person of Christ” (in persona Christi) when presiding at the sacraments. Because Jesus Christ is a male, only a male priest can represent a male Christ.

(C2) Because women do not resemble a male Christ, women cannot be ordained.

In order for Protestant “complementarians” and Catholic traditionalists to make the case that they are simply defending the traditional position, they would need to affirm (A), (B), and (C); however, they rather affirm (A1) (both), (C1) (Protestants), (B1), (B2) and (C2) (Catholics). In conclusion, not only do Protestant “complementarians” and Catholic traditionalists depart from the traditional reasons for opposition to women’s ordination, they do not even agree with each other in their reasons for doing so.

I concluded that essay with a challenge:

Provide an actual historical reference from the Christian tradition that corresponds to what I have called the Complementarian or Sacramentalist positions. It is not enough to provide some individual positive statement about women mentioned by a Patristic, Medieval, or Reformation author.

Rather, from a discussion that specifically deals with the issue of women’s ordination and opposes it, provide an example from a Patristic, Medieval, or Reformation author (or authors) that clearly endorses either (A1), (B), and (C1), or (A1), (B1), (B2), and (C2) as a coherent and integrated position. It is not enough to find individual quotations from an author that can be read to endorse any single one of the above propositions. Rather, in the same way that I have shown through detailed quotations that there is a sizeable body of Patristic, Medieval, and Reformation writers who endorse (A), (B), and (C) and bring them together to form a coherent argument against women’s ordination based on female ontological incapacity, an adequate demonstration that what I have called the (2) Protestant Complementarian or (3) Catholic Sacramentalist positions are not innovations to the tradition would have to substantiate with actual textual

references that one or the other of these two was an actual position that was held by someone in the history of the church before the mid-twentieth century.

So far, there has been only one attempt to respond to the challenge, which I addressed in “Concerning Women’s Ordination: A Response to the ‘Ordination Challenge.’” I recently discovered what might be considered a kind of “response” to the original essay, but the author neither contacted me nor commented on my blog. The comment appeared after my “Tradition Challenge,” but the author seems unaware of it. The writer, who only identified himself (I assume the author is “he”) as *post-Presby papist prowler*, challenges my reading of Thomas Aquinas:

I only read the third article in the series, but I found it selective to the point of dishonesty. He claims that before the 20th century everyone thought women were intellectually inferior to men, yet ignores this from Aquinas:

Of course, no one likes to be accused of dishonesty. In my case, if I have misstated, I am more than willing to be corrected, especially regarding Thomas Aquinas, as I consider myself at least a “Peeping Thomist.” If it should turn out that Thomas Aquinas was a glaring exception to the standard argument, I would be thrilled. Unfortunately, the writer shows that he did not read me very well when he states that I claim that “before the 20th century everyone thought women were intellectually inferior to men.” In the essay, I actually stated: “It seems that Martin Luther may be an exception to the patristic and Medieval notion that women are inherently less rational and capable of leadership than men.” In another essay, I wrote: “There have been some exceptions. In his exegesis of Genesis, Martin Luther suggested that, apart from the fall, women would not have been subordinate to men. John Chrysostom, in his commentary on 1 Corinthians, stated that

the subjection of women to men is a direct consequence of the fall . . .” Yet we need to be careful. “One swallow does not a summer make.” The same Chrysostom states that “To woman is assigned the presidency of the household; to man all the business of state, the marketplace, the administration of government . . . She cannot handle state business well, but she can raise children correctly . . .” and that God has assigned “greater tasks” to men and “lesser” ones to women. In other words, whatever might have been the case before the fall, Chrysostom seems to have believed that one of the consequences of the fall is that women are lacking in a certain kind of competence that would prohibit them from doing “greater tasks,” such as, presumably, ordained ministry.

post-Presby papist prowler accuses me of being “selective” because I ignore the following passage in Aquinas:

Therefore we must understand that when Scripture had said, “to the image of God He created him,” it added, “male and female He created them,” not to imply that the image of God came through the distinction of sex, but that the image of God belongs to both sexes, since it is in the mind, wherein there is no sexual distinction of sex, but that the image of God belongs to both sexes, since it is in the mind, wherein there is no sexual distinction. Wherefore the Apostle (Col. 3:10), after saying, “According to the image of Him that created him,” added, “Where there is neither male nor female.” ST 1.93.6.ad 2

However, it would appear that I am not the one who is being selective. The section of my essay that covered Aquinas was only a few paragraphs long, and I began in an entirely positive manner – “Thomas could speak in almost glowing terms of the relations between men and women” – and followed with a citation in which Aquinas speaks of “the social union of man and woman,” writing that woman should not be subject to man’s contempt as his slave because she was created from his side

(*Summa Theologiae* 1.1.92.3). I did not include a citation from ST 1.93.6, although I did acknowledge that Aquinas “argues that women share equally in human nature with men.” I am happy to have it pointed out that Aquinas states that the image of God “is in the mind, wherein there is no sexual distinction.” At first reading, this would indeed seem to accord with (A1). However, what Aquinas writes in 1.1.93.6 has to be read alongside what he writes in the previous question, which I cited: “At the same time, however, women are subject to men based on an economic subordination in which ‘the superior makes use of his subjects for their own benefit and good. . . . For good order would have been wanting in the human family if some were not governed by others wiser than themselves. So by such a kind of subjection woman is naturally subject to man, because in man the discretion of reason predominates.’” (S.T. 1.92.1). So whatever Aquinas means by stating that women equally share in the image of God, and that there is no sexual distinction “in the mind,” this does not prevent him from also stating that women are subject to men “for their own benefit and good,” because “in man [in contrast to woman] the discretion of reason predominates.”

post-Presby papist prowler then turns to *Supplement to the Summa Theologiae*, q. 39, which I had cited, and states:

Furthermore, Aquinas explicitly uses the sacramental argument:

Objection 1: It would seem that the female sex is no impediment to receiving Orders. For the office of prophet is greater than the office of priest, since a prophet stands midway between God and priests, just as the priest does between God and people. Now the office of prophet was sometimes granted to women, as may be gathered from 4 Kgs. 22:14. Therefore the office of priest also may be competent to them.

Reply to Objection 1: Prophecy is not a sacrament but a gift

of God. Wherefore there it is not the signification, but only the thing which is necessary. And since in matters pertaining to the soul woman does not differ from man as to the thing (for sometimes a woman is found to be better than many men as regards the soul), it follows that she can receive the gift of prophecy and the like, but not the sacrament of Orders.

And he even said that women may exercise temporal power, and presumably over men given that his given example was Deborah:

And thereby appears the Reply to the Second and Third Objections. However, as to abbesses, it is said that they have not ordinary authority, but delegated as it were, on account of the danger of men and women living together. But Deborah exercised authority in temporal, not in priestly matters, even as now woman may have temporal power.

Again, however, it is *post-Presby papist prowler* who is being selective, and not myself. *post-Presby papist prowler* states that Aquinas uses the “sacramental” argument, but he does not state what Aquinas’s sacramental argument actually is. In his *sed contra*, Aquinas cites 1 Tim. 2:12, making clear that his concern is with authority of men over women (the traditional argument), and not whether a female priest can represent a male Christ (which is the current “sacramental” argument). Aquinas makes a standard sacramental distinction between a sign and the reality of the sign. In his reply to objection 1, he distinguishes between prophecy and a sacrament, distinguishing between I would call “charisma” and “orders.” Women can prophecy (exercise a charismatic gift) because they have the reality – “sometimes a woman is found to be better than many men as regards the soul” – but women cannot have the signification, i.e., the sign. What is the “sign”? Not resemblance to a male Christ, but authority. Thomas states the reason for his opposition to the ordination of women at the conclusion of his *Respondeo*, which I cited: “Accordingly, since it is not possible in the female sex to signify eminence

of degree, for a woman is in the state of subjection, it follows that she cannot receive the sacrament of Order.”

What then about Aquinas’s references to “abbesses” and to the prophetess Deborah? Both cases actually make clear that Aquinas’s concerns are about women exercising authority over men in the church (the traditional argument) and not about sacramental representation of a male Christ (the new argument). Concerning abbesses, Aquinas writes that their authority is “delegated . . . on account of the danger of men and women living together,” delegated, that is, from a superior male authority, a male authority which would be preferable if there were no dangers of sexual temptation. Aquinas does seem to acknowledge concerning Deborah that women can exercise “temporal,” but not “priestly” power. This would indeed make his position different from those earlier writers like John Chrysostom or Thomas’s teacher Albertus Magnus or (later) Richard Hooker and John Knox, who quite explicitly draw a connection between an inability to exercise temporal authority and an inability to exercise ecclesial authority. I am pleased to acknowledge that difference. At the same time, Aquinas makes clear that his opposition to the ordination of women is nonetheless because “it is not possible in the female sex to signify eminence of degree,” specifically because a “woman is in the state of subjection.” Aquinas wrote this early in his career, but when he later wrote the *Summa Theologiae*, he made clear the reason for female subjection: “woman is naturally subject to man, because in man the discretion of reason predominates.”

It is apparent then that Aquinas’s reasons for opposition to the ordination of women are the traditional ones. He endorses (A), (B), and (C). But how is this consistent with what Aquinas wrote about women (like Deborah) exercising temporal power? I honestly cannot see that it is. If the necessary subjection of women to men provides the reason why women cannot be ordained (and Aquinas states that it is), then this

should apply not only in the case of priestly ordination, but in temporal power as well. If subjection of women to men is not sufficient grounds for denying temporal power to women, "since in matters pertaining to the soul, woman does not differ from man . . . [and] sometimes a woman is found to be better than many men as regards the soul . . . ," then it should not be grounds for denying ordination. Aquinas is simply inconsistent here, not to say incoherent.

Whether Aquinas is consistent or not, it is once again necessary to be reminded that his position is not the current Roman Catholic position. In my original essay, I had quoted Roman Catholic author Sarah Butler: "Because 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." It was, however, Aquinas's reason.

Finally, this again make clear that the main argument of my original essay stands. In my "Tradition Challenge," I had written: "from a discussion that specifically deals with the issue of women's ordination and opposes it, provide an example from a Patristic, Medieval, or Reformation author (or authors) that clearly endorses either (A1), (B), and (C1), or (A1), (B1), (B2), and (C2) as a coherent and integrated position. It is not enough to find individual quotations from an author that can be read to endorse any single one of the above propositions." At the most, *post-Presby papist prowler* has shown that Aquinas allowed that under certain circumstances, women could exercise charismatic gifts and some kind of temporal authority. I am happy to concede that in this one area, Aquinas differed from the vast majority of the earlier tradition. He did not affirm (B) in its totality. However, at the most, all that *post-Presby papist prowler* has done is to "find individual quotations . . . that can be read to endorse [one] of the above propositions." Aquinas seems to have embraced a kind of incomplete (or rather inconsistent) version

of (A1) and a slightly modified (B), which does not exclude women from occasionally exercising temporal authority. He continues to affirm (C). *post-Presby papist prowler* has not shown that Aquinas affirmed either “(A1), (B), and (C1), or (A1), (B1), (B2), and (C2) as a coherent and integrated position.”

American Evangelicalism and Anglicanism

(The following is based on a talk I gave as part of a TSM panel, addressing the question “What is Evangelicalism?”)



I teach at “Trinity School for Ministry: An evangelical seminary in the Anglican tradition.” What does that word “Evangelical” mean? In what sense am I an Evangelical Anglican? There are at least three ways in which the word “Evangelical” could function in relationship to Anglicanism. First, it could simply be pointing to the Reformation heritage of Anglicanism. Like Lutheranism or the Reformed tradition, Anglicanism traces its roots to the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century, including such definitive markers as the three (or five) *solas*: *sola scriptura*, *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, *solus Christus*, *solus Deo gloria*. The term could also refer to a particular movement within Anglicanism that focuses on Anglicanism’s Reformation identity. An extreme version of

this kind of Evangelical Anglicanism would understand pristine Anglicanism to have existed for the short number of years during the reign of Edward VI between Cranmer's second Prayer Book of 1552 (definitely not the 1549), and the beginning of the reign of Queen Mary. Definitive identity markers would include the 1552 BCP, the 39 Articles (1563) and the Book of Homilies (1547, 1562, and 1571). Much later Anglicanism (beginning with the Caroline Divines and perhaps Richard Hooker) would be interpreted as a "falling away" from these original pristine touchstones. I intend rather to use the term to refer to a more recent distinctly American phenomena – North American Evangelicalism of the mid-20th and early 21st centuries. This is the context of my own upbringing, but also the church background of the majority of TSM's faculty and students. What might an orthodox 21st century North American Anglicanism have to offer this American version of Evangelicalism?

I will begin with a bit of autobiography. I was raised a Southern Baptist. During my high school years, I got involved for a short period of time in what was then called the "Jesus Movement," and attended a Friday night service every week where people raised their hands and sang in tongues. I was also involved in the youth group of a Southern Baptist megachurch. At the same time, I discovered the writings of C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien, and in a two-year period read all of Lewis's major published writings.

I attended an Evangelical liberal arts college in Denver where I majored in philosophy. Evangelicals were not writing theology at this time, but they were interested in apologetics, and I thought that philosophy would be a handy tool for apologetics. I discovered Thomas Aquinas, but Aquinas at this time was being read primarily as a philosopher. During my senior year in college, I discovered the writing of Wolfhart Pannenberg, but I was interested in Pannenberg because of his value for apologetics. Pannenberg defended the

historical verifiability of the resurrection of Jesus. Pannenberg was the first "real theologian" I ever read, and I called myself a "Pannenbergian" for awhile. I used terms like "proleptic anticipation of the eschaton."

Toward the end of my time in college, a number of theologians produced a document called *The Hartford Appeal*, a criticism primarily of trends in liberal Protestant theology. In the collection of essays that the participants entitled *Against the World For the World: The Hartford Appeal and the Future of American Religion*, Peter L. Berger and Richard John Neuhaus, eds. (NY: Seabury, 1976), Richard Mouw of Fuller Seminary contributed the essay, "New Alignments: Hartford and the Future of Evangelicalism."

In that essay, Mouw identified three groups of American Evangelicals existing at the time.

1) Fundamentalism was a group that came into existence in the early twentieth century in opposition to and as a rejection of Liberal Protestantism in the mainline churches.

2) NeoEvangelicalism was identified with successors of Fundamentalism who broke with its narrowness in the mid-twentieth century: Billy Graham and the journal *Christianity Today* were two of its cultural identifiers.

3) In contradistinction from both Fundamentalism and NeoEvangelicalism was "Confessionalism," identified with members of historic Reformation denominations who did not trace their roots to American sources: Lutheran, Reformed, Episcopal, Mennonite. These groups sometimes formed an uneasy alliance with Evangelicalism although they did not share its historic roots, and each had its own distinctive confessional identity.

Mouw pointed to four new influences within Evangelicalism at the time

1) "Neo-Pietism" was a new face on the scene, sharing some characteristics of earlier "pietist" and "revivalist" movements: the "Jesus Movement" and the beginnings of charismatic renewal.

2) Neo-Orthodoxy was represented by theologians like Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Evangelicals were divided, with some repudiating Barth as a new form of "liberalism" and others embracing Barth as someone from whom Evangelicals could learn much.

3) Among some Evangelicals, there was a rise of "Political Consciousness," motivated by the anti-war movement, civil rights movement, and feminism. Journals such as *Sojourners* and *The Other Side* were associated with this movement.

4) Finally, Mouw identified a group he called "Progressive Evangelicals." Mouw clearly identified with this group and wrote: "[N]eo-evangelicals usually become 'progressive' by moving in the direction of confessionalism." (And, I would add, reading Karl Barth.)

Keep these identities in mind, as I will later ask "What of these identities continue in contemporary Evangelicalism?"

After college, I knew I was no longer a Southern Baptist, but I did not know what I was. I received my MA at a Roman Catholic seminary (St. Thomas Seminary, Denver). While there, I set myself the task of thinking through the differences between Roman Catholicism and Evangelicalism, focusing on Reformation distinctives such as justification by faith and the relationship between Scripture and tradition. I studied Roman Catholic theologians like Karl Rahner.

During this time, I read a book and an essay that influenced the direction of my thought:

The *Chicago Call* was another conference, this time led by Evangelicals, whose essays were published as *The Orthodox*

Evangelicals, Robert Webber and Donald Bloesch, eds. (Thomas Nelson, 1978). This was a call for Evangelicals to rediscover their Pre-Reformation roots, and would lead to Webber's later career, writing about *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail*, and his *Ancient-Future* project. (TSM now hosts something called the "Robert E. Webber Center," which holds annual "Ancient Evangelical Future" conferences.) When I read the Chicago Call, I came across senior theologians saying the kinds of things that I was thinking at the time.

In an essay entitled "The Reformation in Recent Roman Catholic Theology," *New Theology No 1*, Martin Marty, ed. (Macmillan, 1964), Per Erik Persson, a Lutheran, endorsed a new historiography that viewed the Protestant Reformation in terms of its continuity with Medieval theology rather than in contrast or discontinuity – which had been the traditional view of both Protestants and Catholics for four hundred years. This new historiography focused on the Reformation as a "reforming movement" within the Western Catholic Church rather than a radical break. Similar views would be argued by historians such as Heiko Oberman. This "new Reformation historiography" has been a major influence on my thinking. I wrote my master's thesis on Jacob Arminius, arguing that Arminius was influenced by Thomas Aquinas.

At the end of my time at St. Thomas, I became an Episcopalian for "theological reasons." I was confirmed by Bishop Bill Frey, who went on to become Dean/President of Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry. I did not view myself as abandoning my Evangelicalism, but as embracing a more Catholic view of the church.

After graduating from St. Thomas, I received my PhD at the University of Notre Dame, where I studied under both Roman Catholics and non-Catholic faculty. The theology faculty at Notre Dame was intentionally ecumenical during this period. Non-Catholics included Methodist Stanley Haurwas (for one year), Jim White, a Methodist liturgist, and John Howard Yoder

(a Mennonite). Visiting Anglican faculty included liturgists Kenneth Stevenson and Paul Bradshaw. Roman Catholics who influenced me included my dissertation director, David Burrell (an expert on Thomas Aquinas), and Edward Kilmartin, a liturgical theologian. (Hauerwas and Burrell were both “Yale” graduates, and influenced by George Lindbeck and the “post-liberal” Yale school.)

Burrell suggested to those of us who were his students that every theologian needed to have a historical mentor, whose writings we should know well. By this point I had two, Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth. I now read Aquinas as a theologian, not primarily a philosopher. During my time at Notre Dame, I also began to study my own Anglican heritage, Anglican writers such as Thomas Cranmer, John Jewel, Richard Hooker, Caroline Divines like George Herbert, John Donne, and Thomas Traherne. (I wrote my dissertation on Jacob Arminius, again.) One of my key theological concerns became the relationship between Medieval and Reformation theology, focusing on continuities rather than discontinuities.

Skipping forward to our current setting, I mention a final set of distinctions from George Hunsinger, *The Eucharist and Ecumenism* (Cambridge University Press, 2008). Hunsinger distinguishes between three contemporary approaches to theology:

- 1) In academic “liberal” theology, “modernist norms reign supreme.”

- 2) Hunsinger identifies “enclave” theology as “a theology based narrowly on a single tradition that seeks not to learn from other traditions and to enrich them, but instead to topple and defeat them, or at least to withstand them.” I would suggest that “enclave” theology is a dangerous temptation for “confessional” theologies. Evangelicals can become “progressive” by becoming “confessional” (as Mouw wrote), but they can also become reactive, pursuing the “pure”

version of “Reformed” or “Lutheran” or “Roman Catholic,” or “Evangelical” or “Anglo-Catholic” Anglican theology.

3) Finally, “ecumenical” theology “presupposes that every tradition in the church has something valuable to contribute even if we cannot discern what it is.”

Where does American Evangelical theology stand today in terms of Mouw’s earlier categories? I would suggest the following:

1) The borders between fundamentalism and “popular Evangelicalism” are increasingly blurry. If, in an earlier generation, Billy Graham was an “Evangelical” and Jerry Falwell a “Fundamentalist,” it is not clear today whether these distinctions would hold between Franklin Graham and Jerry Falwell, Jr. Are they Evangelicals or Fundamentalists?

2) The “renewal”/charismatic movement of the 1970’s seems to have “morphed” into what are now called “contemporary worship” and “seeker churches,” or (among Anglicans), the “charismatic stream.” (Is “contemporary worship” the dominant form of worship in Evangelical churches these days?)

3) Narrow confessionalism still exists within groups like the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, and “continuing Anglicans.”

3) Finally, “Progressive confessionalists” have been succeeded by ecumenically theological Evangelicals who read not only Karl Barth, but also the church fathers. (This would now seem to be the center of academic Evangelical theology.) Calvinists like James K. A. Smith write about the importance of liturgy; the late (Evangelical) Anglican theologian John Webster was not only an expert on Karl Barth, but was reading Thomas Aquinas; Kevin Vanhoozer discusses Roman Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar in his books, and is friends with Catholic theologian Matthew Levering; Methodist D. Stephen Long writes books on *Saving Karl Barth: Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Preoccupation* (Fortress, 2014) in which he defends

Roman Catholic von Balthasars's interpretation of Barth over that of Presbyterian Bruce McCormack, and *The Perfectly Simple Triune God: Aquinas and his Legacy* (Fortress, 2016), in which he discusses Aquinas's influence in Protestant Reformation theology. Evangelical biblical scholars are now the leading heirs of the earlier "biblical theology" movement formerly associated with figures such as Walther Eichrodt, Oscar Cullmann, or Joachim Jeremias.

Where do (American) Anglicans stand in the midst of the current American Evangelical setting? I think we have a unique opportunity because of the historical nature of Anglicanism. Historically, Anglicans have embraced Reformation concerns such as the primacy and sufficiency of Scripture and justification by grace through faith, but also catholic liturgical worship, the historic creeds, the first four ecumenical councils, a (relatively high) sacramental theology (we're not Zwinglians!), and episcopacy. Our historical identity is found in a kind of "evangelical catholicism" or "catholic evangelicalism" that resonates with an Evangelical ecumenism. If more recent Evangelical Anglicans such as John Webster read not only Barth, but also (later) Aquinas, earlier Anglo-Catholics such as Michael Ramsey could also read Barth! And Anglicans have always read the church fathers!

At the same time, I have concerns about signs of a resurgence of "enclave" theologies among some Evangelicals. I do not know what to think about the reappearance (among both Catholics and Protestants) of an earlier historiography that emphasizes Reformation discontinuity with the Medieval church. (Is this a sign of retrenchment to earlier positions or simply the tendency of scholarship to move in "waves," with the need of each generation to "say something new," even if it just means saying something old again?) Among "conservative" Anglicans, I see some signs of a new "enclave" Anglicanism, a resurgence of nineteenth-century partisan conflicts, an embracing of either Protestant (or Anglo-Catholic) oppositional distinctives: To

be Evangelical (or Catholic) is to be as unlike the opposite as possible!

In terms of popular American Evangelical culture as a whole, I also have concerns about a political “circling of the wagons,” e.g., *The Benedict Option*, that at times seems to reflect more “sour grapes” about losing the “culture wars” than embracing a distinctively Christian identity.

Where do I myself stand? I’ll conclude by repeating an answer I gave in a blog post about ten years ago:

When I am asked to identify my own theological stance, I usually call myself a “Barthian Thomist.” If I were asked to identify my churchmanship, I would call myself a “catholic evangelical” or a “Reforming Catholic,” in the tradition of movements like the Mercersburg Theology, Robert Jenson and Carl Braaten’s Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology, or figures like Thomas F. Torrance. If I am an Evangelical, I am an ecumenical Evangelical, who understands the Reformation as a reforming movement in the Western Catholic Church. If am an Anglo-Catholic, I am a post-Vatican II Anglican catholic, who understands catholicism as ressourcement, not as retrenchment. If asked to choose between an evangelical and a catholic understanding of the Reformation, I would refuse that choice as a false dilemma.

I Get Mail: What About Hell?

I received the following email:

Can you please recommend a few good books on heaven and hell? A friend is confused about why good people who do not believe

Jesus is the only way don't make it to heaven.



There are actually several different questions being asked here:

- 1) Is there a hell, and why do some people go there? (I've never heard anyone complain about the possibility of people "going to heaven.")
- 2) Do "good people" who are not believing Christians all go to hell?
- 3) What about the "good Buddhist"? Is it fair for God to send good people who are not Christians through no fault of their own to hell? You do not actually mention this question, but it often lurks in the background.

I would answer briefly as follows:

The Good News

Christianity is not primarily about hell, but about God's love for humanity despite the mess we have made of the world, and the way in which God has become a human being in Christ to "set things right" (N.T. Wright's expression). The gospel (good news) is not "God is angry with you and wants to send you to hell," but "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. . ."

Why “Stuff Happens”

What’s wrong with the world? Is suffering, evil, and death an ontological problem (“just the way things are”) or a moral problem (the consequence of wrong human choices)? The Christian explanation for suffering, evil, and death is “sin.” It is not that “bad things happen to good people,” but that even so-called “good people” do bad things. A moral explanation for what’s wrong with the world is the only one that takes evil seriously or that offers any hope for a solution. If suffering, death, and evil are “just the way things are,” then there can be no ultimate solution.

The current culture supposedly does not believe in sin, but this is not really true. What has happened instead is that we have shifted from a “sin” culture to a “shame” culture. People do not want to believe in their own sin, but they have no problem in placing blame on other people, and “shaming them” when they cross some current cultural boundary. “Shaming” escalates, however, and simply leads to people “shouting each other down.” “Shaming” offers no room for forgiveness, change, or reconciliation.

Former TSM faculty member and my good friend Leander Harding says that “Sin is what other people do that I disapprove of. There are lots of things that I do that other people disapprove of, but I don’t call them sin.”

There are all kinds of signs in everyday culture that we are well aware of and believe in “other people’s” sins. We guard our email from spam and we filter our telephone calls because we are constantly on the alert for identity theft and online scams. People march in protest either for or against various causes, and current political divides indicate that both sides believe that those who disagree with them are not just mistaken, but immoral. Contrary to President Trump, we don’t believe “there are some very fine people on both sides.” Nor should we. White nationalists are evil. We live in a culture

in which people constantly have to fear about the possibility that someone with a gun will take innocent lives. It is evil to shoot down innocent people in cold blood. There is a crisis about immigration in our culture, and people rightly believe that it is evil to separate small children from their parents and put them in cages. The “me too” movement has made it clear that sexual exploitation is evil, and our culture will no longer tolerate it. The fact that even those who are accused of racism quickly deny that they are racists makes clear that we agree as a culture that racism is evil.

Where the Christian doctrine of sin is helpful is that it reminds us that the problem is not just with those “other people,” but with us as well. If “all have sinned,” then all can be forgiven. If there is no sin, but only shame, then no one can ever be forgiven, and we all must live forever not only shaming others, but with the fear that others might shame us.

What “Salvation” Means

Crucial to the Christian claim is that in the incarnation, the cross, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, God has taken on all of the suffering and evil in the world, and defeated it. As Dorothy L. Sayers wrote in her essay “The Greatest Drama Ever Staged,” on the cross, God has “taken his own medicine.” Because of Jesus, sin, death, and suffering will not have the last word.

A crucial point in the proclamation of the gospel is “God’s universal salvific will.” That is, everyone who has ever lived, came into existence because God loves them. God wills the salvation of everyone, even the worst sinner; Jesus Christ has died for everyone, and God has done and will do everything in his power to bring about the salvation of every single individual. A Collect from the Book of Common Prayer, begins: “O God, you declare your almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity . . .” In the words of Prosper of Aquitaine,

“If anyone is saved, it is because of the goodness of God; if anyone is lost, it is their own fault.”

This has implications for theological anthropology, or our understanding of what it means to be human. The following can be said of every person who has ever lived: “You are created in the image of God, you are a sinner who has been redeemed by Jesus Christ, and God truly wills your salvation.”

(A strict Calvinist would not agree with the above. That’s one of the reasons that I am not a Calvinist.)

It is important to keep in mind that salvation (“heaven”) is not “Disneyland,” a place where everyone goes to “have a good time.” Rather, salvation is redemption – the re-creation and restoration of the entire universe to be the way in which God intended it to be. Salvation is not just “living forever,” but reconciliation with and living with, knowing and loving the God who is our Creator. 1 Cor. 13:2 states that we shall “see [God] face to face,” and know as we are known. 1 John 3:2 states: “[W]e know that when he appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.” In the words of the famous prayer from Augustine’s *Confessions*, “You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”

To be created in the image of God means that we are created for fellowship and union with God, that God has created the world to share his love and goodness with creatures. We do not exist to “do our own thing,” but to know and love God, as God knows and loves us. We are created to be loved by God and to love him in return.

To be “sinful” means not just that “everyone does bad things,” but that we have turned our backs on our Creator, and thus missed the whole point of our existence. As Jesus summed up the two great commandments, the first commandment is to love God with all of our hearts, souls, and minds, and the second is to love our neighbors as ourselves. Sin is not just “doing

bad things,” but failing to love as we have been loved. In the words of the “General Confession” from *The Book of Common Prayer*, “We have not loved you with our whole heart, we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.”

Moreover, and most important, salvation or redemption is about reconciliation to God and neighbor. It is about being restored to the love for which we were created. Salvation is about forgiveness of sins, but also about union with Jesus Christ – the risen Christ sharing his life with us – knowing and loving Christ, becoming “friends” with him (John 15:15), and being in communion with him and his body, the church. Salvation is not merely about individuals “going to heaven,” but about becoming members of the church, the people of God, the body of which Jesus Christ is the head, the community of people who are learning to love God with all of their hearts and their neighbors as themselves.

Hell, no? or The Hell there is!

But if eternal life (salvation, redemption, “heaven”) means life forever with God, loving him and knowing him as he is for who he is, being part of the body of Christ, loving and forgiving our neighbor whom we now love as ourselves, what then of those who want nothing to do with God or Christ? What then of those who do not want to forgive their neighbor, or to love him or her as themselves?

The doctrine of hell is not at the heart of Christianity, but I would suggest that it is the “flip side” of the gospel – the good news that God wants to reconcile us to himself so that he can share his life with us, that salvation is about union with and sharing in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, of being part of this new community the church, who live to love God with all of their hearts and their neighbors as themselves. “Hell” is the doctrine that says that although God truly loves and wills the salvation of everyone he has ever created, that Jesus Christ has truly died for everyone,

and sincerely invites everyone who has ever lived to share in this new life in Christ, and to become part of this new community of love and forgiveness, no one will be *forced* to do so. "Hell" means that, despite all God has done for their salvation, those who refuse to be reconciled with God and one another, will be allowed to do so forever. As C.S. Lewis wrote in *The Problem of Pain*, "the doors of hell are locked on the inside."

There are several possible theological positions that have been taken in response to the doctrine of hell, and a number of questions that need to be addressed.

"Pluralism" is the position that says that "all roads lead to the same destination." Everyone will be saved by whatever religion or belief they follow. This is the position associated with liberal Protestant theologian John Hick. Former Episcopal Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori infamously stated that Jesus was "the way" of salvation *for Christians*, but that other people had their own ways. The problem with "pluralism" is that it ultimately does not take any one religion seriously, and it reduces Jesus to a good example or a wise teacher rather than the Savior of the world. Pluralism claims to respect every religion, but it does not respect any of them seriously enough to actually consider their fundamental claims, and it does not take seriously the central claim of Christianity that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world.

"Universalism" is the position that eventually everyone will be saved. Many theologians who have been orthodox in every other respect seem nonetheless to have been universalists, including theologians from whom I have learned a lot. Reformed theologian Karl Barth, Roman Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, the Scottish writer George MacDonald (who influenced C.S. Lewis), Anglican F. D. Maurice, Eastern Orthodox writer David Bentley Hart, all seem to have been universalists. The main problem with universalism as I see it,

is that it seems to conflict with the plain teaching of the New Testament, including especially the teaching of Jesus, e.g., the parables of the sheep and the goats, or the rich man and Lazarus. It also ignores the problem of those who “just say no.” Assuming that God has done everything possible for our salvation, is it not possible that some people might refuse that gift forever?

If we reject both pluralism and universalism, there seem to be two (or possibly three) final possible positions.

Exclusivism is the position at the opposite extreme from both pluralism and universalism. Exclusivism is the position that only those who have explicit faith in Jesus Christ will be saved. In other words, everyone is lost except for those who have consciously exercised faith in Jesus Christ. This has certainly been the position of many orthodox Christians. The problem with exclusivism is that it seems to fly in the face of the universal salvific will of God. If only those who are saved who explicitly have faith in Jesus Christ, then it would seem that the majority of the human race will not be saved. This would seem to imply that God’s will that no one should perish, but that all will reach repentance (2 Peter 3:9) would largely be defeated.

“Inclusivism” is the position that Jesus Christ saves, and that ultimately anyone who is saved will be saved because of the person and work of Christ. However, we cannot presume that only those who have exercised conscious and explicit faith in Christ before their death will be saved by Christ. If we take seriously that God wills everyone to be saved, and that Jesus Christ has died for everyone, that God’s grace is active everywhere, then surely it is possible that God can save even those who do not yet know that Jesus Christ is their Savior. This does not imply that everyone is saved (universalism), or that every path leads to salvation (pluralism). It does imply that God can work in mysterious ways in those who do not (yet) have explicit faith in Christ, and if (and when) they are

saved, it will be Christ who saves them. If the “good Buddhist” is ultimately saved, he or she will not be saved by being a “good Buddhist,” but because Jesus Christ has died for her sins, and because ultimately (whether in this life or the next), she will come to know Jesus Christ as her Savior. (This is a position that has been held by Roman Catholic theologians such as Karl Rahner, by C.S. Lewis, and by many contemporary Christian theologians.)

Missiologist Leslie Newbigin, and former Dean and President of Wycliffe College George Sumner, have advocated a position identified as “particularism.” Newbigin has complained that “inclusivism” focuses too much on the salvific fate of the individual, and does not take seriously enough the way that religious life takes place within particular communities. The biblical story is not concerned with individuals going to heaven and hell, but with the redemption and eschatology of the entire cosmos – a new heaven and a new earth. God brings salvation through communities; Israel is God’s people elect as the representative of the nations. The incarnate Jesus Christ is elect as the one who bears the sins of the entire world. Jesus’ followers live in the midst of the fallen world as signs of God’s kingdom, not as the select saved in the midst of the many lost, but as the sign of God’s intent to save all human beings. There will indeed be a final judgment, but there will also be surprises. Some who think they will be saved will not be, and vice versa.

George Sumner complains that Rahner’s version of inclusivism tends to reduce grace to psychology, and loses track of what Sumner calls “Christological final primacy.” “Final primacy” is the position that all other truths must be brought into relation to the single norming truth of Jesus Christ, who is the *First Truth*. Christ is the “First Truth,” the “unknown God” of Acts 17, the “Word who enlightens everyone coming into the world” (John 1:9), the One through whom even pagans have knowledge of the law “written on their hearts” (Rom. 2:15).

According to Sumner, the non-Christian religions contain "partial truths," but they also contain falsehood and ignorance. What is of chief importance is to remember that the goal (*telos*) of the narrative of salvation is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ must be at the center of any theological affirmation of salvation. To abandon Christological final primacy is to abandon Christian faith.

I would suggest that Newbigin's and Sumner's "particularism" and "final primacy" are not rejections of "Inclusivism" so much as warnings against the dangers of "Inclusivism" turning into "Pluralism." Newbigin and Sumner agree with "Inclusivists" that salvation is possible for those who do not have explicit Christian faith in this life, but they also want to be emphatic that this salvation comes from Jesus Christ, not from being a "good Buddhist."

Another possible way of expressing "inclusivism" would be to reverse the original premise of exclusivism. Exclusivism states: "*No one* is saved except for those who have *explicit faith* in Jesus Christ." Inclusivism would state rather: "*Everyone is saved* except for those who finally refuse to receive forgiveness, grace, and reconciliation in Jesus Christ." Inclusivism is the position that if the door to redemption is finally shut, it will only be shut by those who refuse to the end to receive God's redeeming and reconciling grace in Jesus Christ, and that the door to hell in the end will be shut from the inside. God has done, and will do everything he can, either in this world or the next, to save all who will be saved, and no one will be lost because they did not receive the possibility of salvation.

There is one final position I should mention: "Conditional immortality" or "annihilationism." This is the position that identifies hell not as a continuing eternal conscious state of separation from God, but as the ceasing to exist of the lost. Unlike the saved, who live in God's presence for eternity, the "damned" simply are no more. This is a position that has been

held (even if tentatively) even by some traditional Evangelical theologians such as John Stott. Whatever one thinks of "annihilationism," it would be a rejection of both pluralism and universalism, and it would be a variation on traditional understandings. Annihilationists would presumably be either exclusivists or inclusivists. (The theological critique of annihilation would be the same as that of universalism. It seems to be in conflict with the teaching of Scripture.)

Some final reflections:

What about the symbolism of hell? I think it important to recognize that the language of hellfire and brimstone connected with hell is metaphorical and symbolic. The point of the imagery is not to give a literal description of hell anymore than the symbolism of a city made of gold and precious stones is a literal description of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21), but to emphasize the great tragedy of losing out on salvation. Ultimately, hell is the prospect of eternal separation from God. Some Eastern Orthodox theologians have even suggested that hell is the burning love of God as experienced by those who eternally reject that love. In Dante's *Inferno*, he uses many different images for hell, including that of a frozen lake at the deepest level of hell. In C.S. Lewis's book *The Great Divorce*, he imagines hell as a kind of "gray city." The great loss of hell is not physical pain, but the missing out on the possibility of sharing in the Divine Love for which we have been created. Returning again to Augustine's *Confessions*, "You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You." To forever have that thirst for God who can alone makes us happy and who can alone give us rest, and yet, because we have decided forever to prefer our own wills to the joy offered us by our Creator, to be eternally restless and eternally unsatisfied, would indeed be hell.

Finally, the most important thing to remember about the

Bible's imagery of hell is that it is always addressed personally and existentially, and calls for a personal response. The Bible does not speak of hell in order for us to speculate about or to imagine the fate of others, but always as a personal reminder: Am I myself in danger of rejecting God's promise of grace and forgiveness? Is there a danger that I myself might turn my back on God's love? Am I myself in danger of missing the very purpose for which God created me?

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Thomas Aquinas for Evangelicals (Part 1)

Introduction



I first became acquainted with the writings of Thomas Aquinas when I was an undergraduate philosophy major. I became interested in Aquinas because I was interested in apologetics, and I thought that Aquinas would be helpful for doing things like providing arguments for the existence of God. I later shifted my academic focus from philosophy to theology, and have found Aquinas to be a lifelong companion on my theological journey. I am not a Roman Catholic but an Anglican, and I have often encountered a kind of discomfort when other Christians who stand on this side of the Reformation hear about my interest in Aquinas. Aquinas is considered to be the quintessential Roman Catholic theologian, and, accordingly, is regarded with suspicion by many non-Roman Catholic Christians – especially Evangelicals. My *ad hoc* response would be much like that of Christian Ethicist Stanley Hauerwas who, when he was first teaching at the University of Notre Dame, had to respond to concerns that a Methodist theologian was teaching about Thomas Aquinas. Hauerwas countered that Aquinas lived three hundred years before the Protestant Reformation, before there were any distinctions between Roman Catholics and Protestants. Aquinas was not

therefore a Roman Catholic theologian, but a church theologian, and so a Methodist had just as much right to claim him as would a Roman Catholic. Recently D. Stephen Long, another Methodist theologian, has argued persuasively that Protestants should recognize that Aquinas actually played a significant role in the history of Reformation theology, and needs to be reclaimed by Protestants. If Aquinas can be claimed by two Methodist theologians, I would argue that he certainly can be claimed by Anglicans. In what follows, I hope to provide an introduction to Aquinas's thought in a way that might be helpful for Reformation Christians, especially Evangelicals.

Who was Thomas Aquinas?

Thomas Aquinas was born sometime around 1224 or 1225 as the youngest son of lesser nobility, related to the Counts of Aquino, in the family castle of Roccasecca (in southern Italy, halfway between Rome and Naples). His family had hopes that young Thomas would enter the Benedictine order and would perhaps eventually become an abbot, but he had other ideas. There was a new kind of religious order at the time, the friars, who differed from traditional monks in that they were not cloistered – that is, they did not live in monasteries – but lived among the laity and engaged in mission in the everyday world. Friars came in two varieties, the Friars Minor (O.F.M.) or Franciscans (founded by St. Francis of Assisi) and the Order of Preachers (O.P.) or Dominicans (founded by St. Dominic). As their name suggests, the Order of Preachers focused on preaching, but also on study and teaching, so they had a more academic focus than did the Franciscans. Against his family's wishes, the young Aquinas joined the Dominicans in 1244. His family responded by having Thomas kidnapped and held him captive for a year or so. He eventually escaped, and in 1245 the Dominicans sent him to the newly founded University of Paris, a budding intellectual center, where he studied under Albertus Magnus (Albert the Great). In Paris,

Thomas studied Aristotle's ethics – Aristotle's major works were now being translated into Latin for the first time – and the writings of the Eastern Christian mystical theologian Pseudo-Dionysius.

In 1256, Aquinas received his Master in Theology (*magister in sacra pagina*); his responsibilities would have included (1) *legere* ("reading"), that is, to comment on Scripture; (2) *disputare* (disputation), to teach by responding to objections, the teaching method of scholastic theology; (3) *praedicare* (preaching). (Around 100 of Aquinas's sermons have been preserved.) From 1259 to 1274, Aquinas taught in various places, mostly in Paris and Italy. During this time, he wrote his major theological works, and, towards the end of this period, his two major works: the *Summa Contra Gentiles* and the *Summa Theologiae*.

On the Feast of St. Nicholas (Dec. 6), 1273, Aquinas was celebrating mass and had some kind of unusual experience. Afterwards, he told his *socius* ("secretary") Reginald, "Everything I have written seems like so much straw in comparison to what I have seen." Speculations run the gamut from the theory that Aquinas had some kind of mystical experience to his suffering a stroke. Whatever its nature, after this experience, Thomas ceased to write, and the *Summa Theologiae*, his greatest work, remains unfinished. He got as far as discussing the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist, but never finished writing on the other five Catholic sacraments, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, ecclesiology, or eschatology. (Nonetheless, enough exists from his other writings that scholars can at least speculate about what his views would have been. After Aquinas's death, dedicated followers put together a *Supplement* to the *Summa Theologiae*, creating a conclusion based on one of his earliest works, his Commentary on Peter Abelard's *Sentences*.)

In early 1274, Pope Gregory X summoned Aquinas to appear at the Council of Lyons, an attempt to reunite the Eastern

Orthodox and Western Catholic churches. While traveling to the council, Aquinas struck his head on the branch of a fallen tree. He became ill, and was taken to a Cistercian monastery, where he died shortly after on March 7. Although dying at the age of only 49, Aquinas's written works exceeded those of any other theologian until those of the Reformed theologian Karl Barth, in the twentieth century. As with Aquinas, Barth's master work, the *Church Dogmatics*, was never finished, ending almost exactly where Aquinas had, with the discussion of the Holy Spirit and the doctrine of the church. (Barth got as far as the doctrine of baptism.)

Objections to Aquinas

Before making a positive case for Aquinas as a theologian, it would probably be helpful to address some of the numerous objections that have been and continue to be raised against Aquinas's theology. The following objections are raised often enough to list them as "standard," especially among Evangelicals. They are so prevalent that unless they are at least addressed, any positive discussion may not get off the ground.

First, it is claimed, Thomas Aquinas was not really a theologian at all, but primarily an Aristotelian philosopher, who imposed pagan philosophy on his theology. Another way of putting this would be to say that Aquinas was primarily a "natural theologian" who was interested in doing things like "proving the existence of God." (This is an objection often found among the "Reformed," especially among those influenced either by John Calvin or Karl Barth.)

Second, an alternative, but related, critique is to complain that Aquinas was a "classical theist" who believed in such things as divine "immutability," whose "static God" is distant from, does not interact with or respond to, and thus cannot love, the creation. Aquinas's embrace of "classical theism" shows again that he was more influenced by Hellenistic

philosophy than the Bible. While the above objection would be found among Calvinists, this objection has been more characteristic of their opposite opponents, the "open theists." Variations of the critique can also be found in the writings of theologians such as Jürgen Moltmann or Robert Jenson.

Third, Aquinas is said to have made a false split between the one God and the Triune God leading to a neglect of the doctrine of the Trinity. Aquinas's "Treatise on the One God" is a case of "natural theology" rather than a biblical doctrine of God. (Insofar as Aquinas writes about the Trinity at all, the doctrine amounts to a kind of afterthought. He had to say something about the Trinity, but it plays no significant role in his theology.) This criticism, raised also against Augustine of Hippo, reflects the revival of Trinitarian theology in the late twentieth century, and the rediscovery of not only Eastern patristic theologians like the Cappadocians, but also Karl Barth's placing of the starting point of theology in the doctrine of the Trinity in his *Church Dogmatics*. Not only Protestants (Moltmann) and Eastern Orthodox theologians have raised this criticism, but also Roman Catholic theologians such as Karl Rahner.

Fourth, Aquinas's doctrine of "analogy of being" (*analogia entis*) placed God in the same category as creatures, reducing God to creaturely status. The "analogy of being" is the fundamental heresy, and the single reason why one cannot become a Roman Catholic (Karl Barth). Conversely, Aquinas's doctrine of "analogy" ends up in equivocity, meaning that ultimately we can know or say nothing about God. Unless some kind of "univocity" lies at the basis of our language of God, we will ultimately be reduced to skepticism.

Note that this objection against "analogy" actually accuses Aquinas of mutually incompatible errors, either reducing God to the level of creatures by embracing univocity, or, rather, of making God unknowable by refusing to embrace univocity. If

the former was the accusation of Karl Barth, the latter has been more the complaint of contemporary analytical philosophers of religion.

Fifth, Aquinas was a "virtue ethicist," showing once again that he owed more to Aristotle than the Bible. This objection would find its most ardent adherents among radical "Lutherans" who would suspect "virtue ethics" of being an example of "works righteousness."

Sixth, Aquinas had an inadequate doctrine of the fall, believing that the fall did not affect the intellect. Moreover, Aquinas's doctrine of grace was semi-Pelagian at best. He believed that we are justified by human merit (good works). This objection would be a standard Protestant objection raised by advocates of justification by faith alone.

Last, Aquinas was not interested in Scripture and shows little acquaintance with the Bible. Reflecting this lack of interest in the Bible, Aquinas does not have a whole lot to say about Christology. Finally, Aquinas's eucharistic doctrine can be summarized in one word: "transubstantiation." This last objection would be a typically Protestant objection of advocates of *sola scriptura*: Aquinas's theology is not a theology based on Scripture, but is simply an uncritical repetition of Medieval Roman Catholic dogma.

How to Respond?

The first set of objections – that Aquinas was primarily an Aristotelian philosopher rather than a theologian – is partially justified insofar as it has been Catholic philosophers who were initially responsible for this misreading. Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (1879), "On the Restoration of Christian Philosophy," recommended Aquinas to Roman Catholics primarily for his philosophy. For much of the 20th century, a "Thomist" meant a certain kind of "Catholic philosopher" who did such things as defend Aquinas's

arguments for the existence of God (the *quinque viae* or “five ways”), the “analogy of being,” and Thomist realist epistemology over against modern secularism and skepticism. A classic example of this approach would be the twentieth-century Roman Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain. While Thomists like this still exist, the beginning of the collapse of “Thomist philosophy” likely began with the debate between “traditional” Thomists and historian of philosophy Etienne Gilson, who argued for something called “Christian philosophy.” Contrary to Thomist advocates of a clear distinction between philosophy (natural theology) and (revealed) theology, Gilson argued that Aquinas was a Christian philosopher, that his philosophy was influenced by and only possible because of premises dependent on revelation. Toward the end of his life, Gilson recognized that even this claim did not go far enough. Gilson admitted that in his attempt to distinguish between Thomas’s “Christian philosophy” and revealed theology, he had misread Aquinas. Aquinas was not a “Christian philosopher,” but a theologian from beginning to end.

Where previous generations of “Thomist” scholars had focused on only a handful of “philosophical” texts in Aquinas’s writings, in the last couple of generations, Aquinas has begun to be read for the theologian that he was. While working on my doctorate, I studied under David Burrell, who had chairs in both philosophy and theology at the University of Notre Dame, and taught what he called “philosophical theology.” Burrell argued that the doctrine of creation from nothing (known by revelation not by philosophical speculation) was crucial for understanding Thomas Aquinas’s thought. In the last couple of decades, scholars have begun studying not only Thomas’s doctrine of creation, but his doctrine of the Trinity, his Christology and soteriology, and his doctrine of grace.

The additional claims that Aquinas was a “classical theist” or that he separated the doctrine of the One God from the Triune

God are largely based on misreadings – at least insofar as the critics presume that the primary influence on Aquinas's thought here is Hellenistic (pagan) philosophy. Rather, as numerous scholars have shown in recent years, Thomas's primary concern in his doctrine of creation is to preserve the unique distinction between Creator and creature implied in the Christian doctrine of creation from nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*). Again, far from peripheral, the doctrines of the Trinity and the incarnation are central to and pervade the *Summa Theologiae* from beginning to end.

The criticisms of Barth and analytic philosophers concerning "analogy of being" rather cancel each other out insofar as they accuse Aquinas of opposite errors. Barth's criticism is certainly the most serious; however, in what is arguably still one of the best studies of Barth's theology, Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar demonstrated that Barth had simply misread Aquinas on analogy. ("Being," for Aquinas is not an overarching category in which Creator and creatures equally share.) As for the analytical philosophers, they might well read Barth's own defense of an "analogy of faith"; if language for both God and creatures is univocal, then God does indeed seem to have been reduced to the level of the creature.

Was Aquinas a "virtue ethicist"? Yes, but one might well argue that this is a "feature," not a "bug." With the rediscovery of virtue ethics beginning with Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*, there has been a renewed appreciation for "virtue ethics," not only among Roman Catholics, but also for Protestant ethicists such as Stanley Hauerwas. When one reads a Reformed philosopher like James K. A. Smith writing about "spiritual formation," and Evangelical ethicist Oliver O'Donovan placing what would be the traditional theological virtues of faith, hope and charity at the center of his recent *magnum opus* on Christian ethics, one wonders what the fuss is about. Of course, it must also be insisted that Aquinas's "virtue ethics" is not simply a regurgitation of Aristotle.

For Aquinas, the theological virtues – which are entirely gifts of grace – are at the heart of Christian ethics. Aquinas claimed that humility was a virtue; Aristotle thought that it was a vice.

Finally, the last set of objections are not so much objections to Aquinas's theology as they are an affirmation of Reformation understandings of the doctrine of justification and grace against those formulated at the Roman Catholic Council of Trent, and Protestant objections to Catholic understandings of the relationship between Scripture and tradition. There is a certain amount of anachronism here. Aquinas wrote three hundred years before both Luther and Trent. He cannot rightly be accused of either holding or rejecting positions that he never explicitly encountered or addressed. However, a more careful reading of what Aquinas actually wrote about such issues as justification and grace or the relationship between Scripture and tradition might be surprising. Certainly Aquinas was no Protestant, but neither was he a Tridentine Catholic.

One of the reasons for the neglect of a careful reading of Thomas Aquinas's own theology was the Neoscholastic "manualist" tradition of Roman Catholic theology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Catholic theology was taught using "manuals" that consisted of series of set questions and answers to theological topics. The assumption behind the manuals was that Catholic theology was certain and unchanging, and there was thus no real need for careful historical investigation. The Bible, the writings of the Church Fathers, and even the writings of important Catholic theologians such as Thomas Aquinas, were not actually read for themselves, but rather presented through the "manuals." The "Thomism" of this manualist tradition was more influenced by late Medieval and Reformation era writers such as Thomas Cajetan, Francisco Suarez, Domingo Báñez, and John of St. Thomas than it was by Aquinas himself. In the mid-twentieth

century, manualist methodology was challenged by Roman Catholic thinkers such as Marie-Dominic Chenu, Jean Daniélou, Yves Congar, and Hans Urs von Balthasar, who insisted that a fundamental task of theology consisted of a careful reading of the historical sources, especially the Bible and the Church Fathers – a methodology they called “*Ressourcement*.” Perhaps most significant for the theological study of Aquinas in this movement was the work of the Jesuit theologian Henri de Lubac and what was known as the *Nouvelle Théologie* movement. De Lubac initiated a radical change in the reading of Aquinas’s doctrine of grace which was at least as critical of late Medieval theologies of grace as the Reformers had been.

Finally, equating Aquinas’s understanding of the relationship between Scripture and tradition with what later Roman Catholics embraced over against the Protestant Reformers is not only an anachronism, but also a simple misreading.

Thomas Aquinas as Theologian

As noted above, Thomas Aquinas was primarily a theologian, not a philosopher, and a clear shift has taken place in interpretation of his writing over the last half century. As noted, this happened in several stages. First was the move from an apologetic reading of Aquinas as an advocate of “natural theology” to a proponent of “Christian philosophy,” one whose philosophy was influenced by principles derived from biblical revelation. Next advocates of the “Christian philosophy” reading came to recognize that the doctrine of creation played a significant role in Aquinas’s thinking. Around the same period of time, Henri de Lubac and others associated with the *Nouvelle Théologie* began examining Aquinas’s doctrine of grace and contrasting it with the “extrinsicism” characteristic of the late Medieval Scholasticism that dominated the period of the Council of Trent. In response to criticisms flowing out of the recent Trinitarian revival, theologians have been more carefully reading Aquinas’s trinitarian theology. Similarly, the revival

of virtue ethics has led theologians to discover how central the theology of grace and Christian spirituality are to Aquinas's Christian ethics. Again, in recent years theologians have begun to study other areas of Aquinas's theology, e.g., his Christology and his doctrine of grace. Finally, translations of Aquinas's numerous commentaries on Scripture have begun to appear for the first time in recent years, and this has led to a new appreciation for the central role that Scripture plays in his theology.

A new consensus has arisen that Thomas Aquinas was primarily a theologian, not a philosopher. Aquinas's primary teaching duties consisted of lecturing on Scripture. He wrote commentaries on books of the Bible. He preached sermons. While Aquinas did use Aristotle (and Pseudo-Dionysius and Augustinian Platonism) to articulate theology, he transformed or even "baptized" them in the process. For example, the doctrine of creation from nothing is central to Thomas's theology; yet Aristotle believed that the universe was eternal, and Aristotle's Unmoved Mover was unaware that the universe existed. Friendship is important for Aristotle's understanding of ethics, but Aquinas went beyond Aristotle to say that the most important kind of friendship is friendship with the triune God. For Aristotle, not only could we not be friends with the Unmoved Mover, the Mover was not even aware that we exist. When Aquinas discussed Aristotle's notion of "happiness," he suggested that Aristotle was talking about the "happiness of this life," but Aristotle did not believe in any other kind of happiness since he did not believe in an afterlife. To the contrary, for Aquinas, to be created in the image of God means to be created for the eternal happiness that we will only have when we see God face to face in the beatific vision. Finally, at the heart of Thomas's theology is the incarnation of God in Christ for the redemption of sinful human beings – something Aristotle never imagined!

I hope in the following essays to shed some light on what

Aquinas actually wrote on these matters and why he might be helpful for Evangelicals.

My Response to the Response of Six Anglican Leaders to the ACNA Statement on Holy Orders

The following is my response to the *Response to Holy Orders Task Force Report – Six Anglican Leaders Reflect on ACNA Statement*, which I will refer to in what follows as the *Response*.



I begin by noting that there is nothing new introduced in the *Response*, but also that the *Response* contains a significant anomaly. The *Response* consists of arguments that have been used against women's ordinations for the last several decades. However, the *Response* also combines (without acknowledgment or clarification) the two very different arguments against women's ordination used by Protestant Evangelicals (Complementarians) and Sacramental Catholics (Liturgical symbolism). The *Response* presumes that

the arguments can be combined, but it is questionable whether they are even compatible. (If one takes seriously Complementarian disinterest in sacramental concerns and Catholic rejections of Complementarian positions, the two approaches cancel each other out.)

The first half of the *Response* assumes the position defended by Evangelical opponents of women's ordinations known as "Complementarians," a group whose beginnings are no earlier than the 1970s and 1980s. Complementarianism is a view associated primarily with Baptist Calvinists Wayne Grudem and John Piper. Throughout, the *Response* simply repeats arguments used over and over again by Grudem and Piper. Unfortunately, the writers of the *Response* seem either unaware of or choose not to address the serious weaknesses in Complementarian arguments that have been pointed out repeatedly. The *Response* does not acknowledge that Complementarianism represents a uniquely Protestant approach. Complementarianism is primarily concerned with masculine authority: women cannot be ordained because they cannot speak publicly in a worship setting, cannot teach men, and cannot exercise authority over men. The Catholic argument against women's ordination is a completely different argument connected to sacramental symbolism, and both modern Roman Catholics and the Orthodox have rejected complementarian arguments concerning authority. For Catholics, women can do all of the things complementarianism forbids: they can preach, they can teach, they can exercise authority over men; they just cannot celebrate the Eucharist. This point is crucial because it makes clear that the first half of the *Response* represents a one-sided Protestant approach that is at odds with the Catholic position.

On Complementarianism, see my essay "Concerning Women's Ordination: Hierarchy and Hermeneutics."

If the first half of the *Response* one-sidedly echoes Complementarianism, it is also unfortunate that throughout the *Response* quotes only from the ESV translation of the Bible, an

intentionally Complementarian translation that at times misleadingly translates passages to force complementarian readings. That the authors do not acknowledge the differences between the ESV and other translations is unfortunate.

The *Response* presents what it calls “clear biblical testimonies to a male-only presbyterate.” Unfortunately, the passages to which it refers are anything but “clear” on that issue.

The *Response* begins with the two key proof texts to which Complementarians regularly appeal because they restrict women from speaking or teaching.

1) *1 Cor. 14:33-35*.

The *Response* quotes the English translation of the ESV and claims that “this is not simply a local rule because [the text says] “As in all the churches of the saints . . .”

Unfortunately, the *Response* does not mention two significant textual problems.

First, a considerable number of biblical scholars make the case that this passage is an interpolation, not written by Paul at all. The Western mss. tradition places the passage after v. 40, while no non-Western mss. does so. The options are either that, at some unknown period, a copyist removed the passage from Paul’s original position and moved it elsewhere (for no apparent logical reason), or, alternatively, the passage was not in Paul’s original mss., but was inserted in the margin by a copyist. Later copyists inserted it into the text, but in different locations. It is easier to explain the origin as a gloss than to assume that a scribe later moved the passage from where Paul originally put it.

Second, assuming for argument’s sake that Paul did write the text, there was no punctuation when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. Linguistically, it makes more sense to place the phrase “as in

all the churches of the saints” with the preceding sentence, as in the KJV and the NIV: “For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.” The ESV creates an unnecessary redundancy. If Paul had already written, “as in all the churches,” why did he then need to write that “women should keep silent *in the churches*”? On the other hand, making the point that God is the author of peace, not of confusion “as in all the churches,” just makes sense. Paul is complaining throughout 1 Corinthians about disruptive worship practices. His statement about women is addressing another such disruptive practice. In being disruptive, the Corinthians are violating a practice of orderly worship that is normative in *all the churches*.

More important, the *Response* fails to address the question of what kind of speech Paul was prohibiting in 1 Cor. 14:33 ff. Everyone in the debate agrees that Paul was not advocating an absolute prohibition of women speaking because Paul allows women to prophesy in 1 Cor. 11, and even complementarians admit this. The context indicates that Paul is prohibiting some kind of disruptive speaking of women in a particular context in the Corinthian church, not all speaking. The issue of disagreement concerns what kind of speaking that was. Nothing in the context indicates that Paul was addressing a question concerning women holding church office or exercising authority. He is demanding that certain women (not all women) exercise some kind of silence in a particular worship setting (not everywhere and not at all times). There is nothing in the context that suggests that this is a universal prohibition against all women speaking in church under all circumstances.

See my essay, “Concerning Women’s Ordination: Speaking and Teaching.”

2) *1 Tim. 2:11-14*

Here again, the *Response* simply follows the Complementarian argument by claiming that “Paul argues from creation – before

the Fall and not after.” They then state that “male authority in the Church derives not from a fallen order but from the creation order.”

Again, the writers fail to acknowledge that this passage is beset with a number of interpretive difficulties. First, they presume that Paul is providing a warrant and not an example. That is, because Adam was formed first, therefore, women should not teach or exercise authority.

The *Response* necessarily assumes that the crucial word “because” (*gar*) is being used as a warrant in the sense of cause rather than a warrant in the sense of example. *Gar* can be used as a warrant, but it can also be a simple conjunction or used as an example. Elsewhere Paul always uses Adam and Eve as typological examples (2 Corinthians 11:3-4). That would seem to be what he is doing here: “Eve was deceived; do not be deceived as Eve was.”

Moreover, numerous scholars point out that Paul’s use of *epitrepō* should be translated “I am not permitting,” not “I do not permit.” Thus, Paul is referring to a present prohibition, not a permanent one.

Once more, the ESV misleadingly translates (*authentēin*) as the neutral “to exercise authority over.” However, biblical scholars point out that the word has a stronger and primarily negative connotation. As NT scholar Ben Witherington notes, “I conclude that the author means that women are not permitted to ‘rule over,’ master,’ or ‘play the despot’ over men.”

A more careful reading indicates that Paul’s admonition addressed a specific historical situation, that he was concerned about the danger of particular women who were being deceived, that he referred to Eve not as a warrant against women teaching rooted in creation, but as a typological example of someone who had been deceived, and that he was in this context currently prohibiting women from teaching until

they had been adequately informed – “Let them learn in quietness and full submission” (i.e., to what they were being taught; there is no reference to a submission to a person), and that women should not “usurp authority” or “play the despot” over men.

Again, see my essay, “Concerning Women’s Ordination: Speaking and Teaching.”

3) “Headship”

Further evidence that the *Response* is dependent on Complementarianism is indicated in the use of the word “headship” to describe their position. This is a term first introduced into the discussion by George W. Knight, III, *The Role Relationship of Men and Women: New Testament Teaching* (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1977, 1985), after which it became a regular way for Complementarians to describe their position.

1 Cor. 11:7-16

The response misleadingly quotes the ESV translation of v. 10 – “That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head . . .” This is one of the ESV’s most egregious mistranslations. The words “symbol of” do not occur in the original Greek. The NIV correctly translates the passage “It is for this reason that a woman ought to have authority over her own head, because of the angels.” That is, the authority referred to in the passage is not that of the man over the woman, but the woman’s own authority. This is the only reference to “authority” in the passage, and the ESV translation makes the passage say the opposite of what is actually in the text.

The point of the passage is not that the “man” is the “head of the family,” as the *Response* says later, but that man and woman are equally dependent on one another. The woman came from man in creation (the original Genesis story), but now all

men come from women (through childbirth). So the woman (in the original creation account of Genesis) is made "from man" (1 Cor. 11:8), but all men are now born "from woman" (1 Cor. 11:12). The passage is not about male authority over women at all – again, the only reference to authority in the passage is to the woman's own authority – but to mutuality between man and woman.

See my essay: "Concerning Women's Ordination: Women in Worship and 'Headship.'"

4) *Gen. 2*

The *Response* states that "God commanded the man and not the woman . . . suggesting that the man is head of the family."

This misses several key points in the exegesis of Genesis 2. First, God does not command the "man," but the "human being," *ha adam*, the generic Hebrew word for "human." It is not until v. 23 that sexuality is introduced into the passage when the man (*is*) recognizes the woman (*issa*) as one like himself. Up until this point there is nothing in the Hebrew text to indicate that *ha'adam* is a male. At no point in the passage is there any evidence for male authority over the woman. The man does not command the woman; nor does she obey him. It is only after the fall that the woman is told that "your husband will rule over you" (Gen. 3:16).

In this context, the *Response* states that as Adam names the animals, so "God brought Adam to Eve to give her a name." However, in the original Hebrew, it is clear that while *ha'adam* names the animals, he does not name the woman. The Hebrew formula for "naming" is absent. The man does not name the woman, but greets her with a cry of recognition: "This is woman (*issa*) because she was taken from man (*is*)." That the only difference between the man and the woman is the feminine ending makes clear that the man and woman are fundamentally the same. It is only after the fall into sin that the naming

formula appears in reference to the woman when she is “named” Eve – the “mother of all living” (Gen. 3:20).

The *Response* states that the man “takes the lead in marriage” because he leaves his father. Rather, that the man leaves his father and mother and “holds fast to” (clings to) his wife confirms the reading of the rest of the passage that the woman was created to satisfy the man’s need for companionship. On a hierarchical reading, the *woman* would rather leave her parents to cling to her husband. The passage makes clear that it is the man who needs the woman; she is the “helper” who relieves his loneliness. There is no hierarchy here, and certainly no authority of the man over the woman, at least not until the fall into sin.

See my essay “Concerning Women’s Ordination: Beginning with Genesis.”

5) *Ephesians 5*

The *Response* regularly uses the words “head” and “headship” in the sense of “authority over” as in the “headship of the husband in the nuclear family” and “male headship in the family.” There is no reference to nor acknowledgment of the several decades’ controversy concerning the meaning of the metaphor *kephalē* (translated “head”) in Paul’s theology. Granted, the metaphor does mean “authority” in modern English, but the current scholarly consensus is that it almost certainly did not mean that for the apostle Paul. Paul is the first in the ancient world to use the metaphor of “head” to describe the relationship between husband and wife, and what he means by the metaphor can only be discerned by his own context. He nowhere uses the language of authority (*exousia*) to describe the relationship between husband and wife in Ephesians 5, but rather uses “head” language to speak of the husband’s love and nourishment for his wife. Nowhere in Ephesians 5 is the man told to command his wife, nor the wife to obey the husband.

[Grudem tries to argue from Greek parallels that *kephalē* always means “authority over.” Unfortunately, almost all of his references are chronologically later than the NT, and all are examples of a one-to-many military leadership. This misses the significance of the uniqueness of Paul’s use of the metaphor within the context of marriage, and that Paul certainly did not understand Christian marriage along the lines of a general’s rule over his many soldiers. In addition, as other NT scholars point out, there are numerous instances of the use of the Greek *kephalē* as a metaphor where it cannot possibly mean “authority over.”]

The *Response* cites the misleading ESV translation of Eph. 5:22: “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.” However, there is no imperative “submit” in the original Greek. Rather, in v. 21, Paul uses a participial form to call for a mutual submission of all Christians to one another. The command in v. 22 is not a specific command for the wife to submit to her husband, but for the wife to engage in the same kind of submission to her husband that all Christians are expected to give to each other (and, accordingly, that her husband is expected to give to her). Similarly, the husband is commanded to “love his wife” in v. 25, but this, again, is simply an echo of the command given to all Christians in 5:2 to “walk in love as Christ loved us.”

There is nothing in Paul’s use of the metaphor *kephalē* in Ephesians 5 nor of the mutual submission demanded of all Christians in the same chapter to imply a hierarchy of authority between men and women, either in the home or in the church.

See my essay “Concerning Women’s Ordination: Mutual Submission.”

The passage refers to other passages, but these are discussed at length in my essay.

6) The Pastoral Epistles

The *Response* refers to the Pastoral Epistles concerning “instructions for the Church’s bishops/overseers and deacons.”

The *Response* incorrectly affirms that “all of the articles and pronouns designating the elders are masculine.” Although English translations of 1 Tim. 3 and Titus 1 regularly provide masculine pronouns, there are no masculine pronouns whatsoever in the original Greek text. Moreover, Paul uses the Greek word *tis* (anyone) to describe the overseer: “Whoever [*tis*] aspires to [the office of] overseer/bishop desires a good work.” Moreover, the requirements Paul lists are not a “job description,” but moral requirements. Paul lists the exact same requirements for the office of elder that he later lists for various women’s roles in the church.

Throughout the rest of the NT, references to those who hold church office are always in the plural, and not a single presbyter or overseer/ bishop is mentioned by name. Masculine pronouns are used in Acts 20 to refer to the Ephesian elders, but this is a matter of grammatical gender, not physical sex. (In NT Greek, any plural group that includes even a single male is referred to using masculine nouns and pronouns.) The *Response* acknowledges this, but states that “contexts strongly imply that Luke did not intend women to be included among the elders.” However, the only context to which the *Response* refers for justification is Jesus’ choice of male apostles. This misses the typological significance of Jesus’ choice of twelve male Jewish apostles, as well as key differences between the offices of *presbyter* and apostle. The elders in Ephesus were Gentile (not Jewish), presumably more in number than twelve, and were not eyewitnesses of Jesus’ resurrection. While the Ephesian elders might well have been all male, there is absolutely nothing in the passage itself to establish this one way or another.

The *Response* states “There is not one female priest or elder

in either the Old or New Testament.” However, because no elder (*presbyter*) or overseer/bishop (*episkopos*) is mentioned by name in the NT, we could as easily state that “There is not one male priest or elder in the New Testament.” The only office holder in the NT who is mentioned specifically by name is the deacon Phoebe (Rom. 16:1). (The OT situation is irrelevant because we are discussing NT office, not OT priesthood.)

The *Response* claims that Phoebe was a *diakonos* or servant, and also that “Scripture . . . limits the diaconate to men” (appealing to 1 Tim. 3:8, 12). Context makes clear that *diakonos* refers to an office, not a “servant.” Paul uses the exact same terminology referring to Phoebe that he uses in reference to other deacons (Phil. 1:1, 1 Tim. 3:8,12) and he uses the masculine *diakonos*, not the feminine. It is also surprising that the *Response* claims that 1 Tim. 3:8, 12 “limits the diaconate to men,” while ignoring the reference to “women” in verse 11, which context makes clear almost certainly refers to female deacons. Again, the ESV translation of “their wives” is misleading. The Greek simply says “women” and the “likewise” (*ōsautōs*) indicates that these women have the same relationship to the office of deacon as do the men. They are not “wives” of deacons, but women deacons.

See my essays “Concerning Women’s Ordination: Women’s Ministry in the New Testament (Office)” and “Concerning Women’s Ordination: Women’s Ministry in the New Testament (Bishops, Presbyters, Deacons) or a Presbytera is not a ‘Priestess’ (Part 2).”

7) Junia the Apostle (Rom. 16:7)

The *Response* suggests that “Junia” might well be the male “Junias,” but also quotes the unfortunate ESV translation “well known to the apostles.” It also suggests that “apostle” could mean “messenger.” No, no, and no.

Translators have gone back and forth over whether “Junia” was the male “Junias” (if she was an apostle) or “well known to the apostles” (if she was Junia). In recent decades, overwhelming historical research has made clear that Junia is a female name. There is no evidence for a single “Junias” in ancient literature, and so even complementarians (like the ESV) have had to acknowledge a female Junia. The ESV translation is unfortunately based on an essay by Burer and Wallace in *New Testament Studies* 47 (2001), arguing for the new translation “known to the apostles.” However, three independent definitive studies by Bauckham, Epp, and Belleville establish that Burer and Wallace’s essay used faulty methodology, including seriously mistranslating their primary reference source. Moreover, church fathers such as Chrysostom, who were native speakers of Greek, understood the passage to mean that Junia was a woman (not a man), and an apostle (not “known to the apostles”). Junia was a woman, she was herself an apostle (not known to the apostles), and she held the office of “apostle” (not merely a messenger).

See my essay “Concerning Women’s Ordination: Women’s Ministry in the New Testament (Office).”

8) The *Response* defends a recent argument used by Complementarians concerning the Trinity. Against the argument of the ACNA Task Force that the Complementarian claim of subordination within the Trinity is likely “heretical,” the *Response* affirms the historic position that the Trinity consists of three persons with one equal being. They also claim that the Son is eternally begotten, while the Spirit proceeds. They also deny that the Son sent the Father or that the Spirit sent the Son. The *Response* defends its position by referring to 1 Cor. 11:3 – “The head of Christ is God.”

It is not clear here whether the *Response* really understands the Complementarian position. The key distinction is that between an economic subordination and an eternal subordination of the Father to the Son. Certainly the entire Catholic

tradition affirms that the Son is subordinate to the Father in terms of his economic mission. Moreover, the risen Christ sends the Spirit, but again, we're talking about economic mission. Again, 1 Cor. 11:3 refers to the economy of salvation – it is not that the eternal Father is the head of the pre-existent Son, but that God (the Father) is the head of Christ (the incarnate Son).

To the contrary, the Complementarian position is that there is an eternal subordination of the Son to the Father so that the eternal pre-incarnate Son eternally obeys the Father, and the Father eternally commands the Son. This is not the historic position of the Catholic Church, and it is likely heretical. The historic patristic position (as found in figures such as Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria) is that the incarnate Son is subordinate to the Father insofar as he is human (i.e., within the economy of salvation), not that the eternally proceeding Son is subordinate to the Father in the divine nature (i.e., within the immanent Trinity). The complementarian position is an innovation, and, at the least, implies that within the divine nature, the Father and the Son have two distinct wills. However, the historic doctrine is that the triune God is three persons, but one nature, and that will is assigned to nature, not person. If the Complementarian position is not heretical, it is at least incoherent. If the Triune God has only one will, the Father cannot eternally command the Son. If the eternal Father eternally commands the eternal Son, then there must be two distinct wills in the Trinity, and thus two Gods. If not Arianism, it is hard to see how this is not tritheism.

See my essay “Concerning Women’s Ordination: Women in Worship and ‘Headship.’”

While the first half of the *Response* relies on Protestant complementarian arguments, the second half shifts (without acknowledgment) to Catholic sacramental objections. There is no hint of recognition that these approaches are not only

different, but mutually at odds.

Arguments from Masculine Symbolism

The *Response* states that Jesus “could have appointed a woman as one of the Twelve, but he did not. To ordain a woman to headship in the Church, representing Christ at the Eucharist, suggests not only that Christ was wrong to choose only male apostles but also that God was wrong to have chosen His Son to become a man and not a woman.” Two claims are made here:

1) Jesus “could have appointed a woman” as an apostle. This misses the symbolic and typological symbolism of Jesus having chosen twelve Jewish male apostles. Typologically, the church is the new Israel and Jesus’ twelve apostles correspond to the original twelve *sons* (not daughters) of Jacob who were the ancestors of Israel’s twelve tribes. For reasons of typology, Jesus could not have “appointed a woman” to this role, but neither could he have appointed a man who was a Buddhist or a man who was Swedish. In terms of typological symbolism, masculinity has the exact same significance for apostleship as the number twelve and Jewishness. Moreover, the role of the twelve is unique. Not only did the twelve represent the (Jewish) twelve tribes of Israel. They were also companions of Jesus and eyewitnesses of his resurrection. After the NT period, church office holders may be successors of the apostles, but they are not apostles. That there were twelve male Jewish apostles no more requires that subsequent Church office holders should be male than they would be required to be twelve in number, Jewish, companions to the earthly Jesus, or eyewitnesses of his resurrection.

2) The function of the ordained minister is to “represent Christ at the Eucharist.” This is a modern and indeed a Roman Catholic claim. It does not appear before Pope Paul VI’s encyclical *Inter Insigniores*, after which it was embraced by Orthodox and Anglo-Catholics as well.

This is not only a modern argument, but is contrary to the historic Orthodox (and Patristic) understanding of ordination. The historic position is not that the minister represents Christ (acts *in persona Christi*), but that he represents the church, i.e., the female Bride of Christ (acts *in persona Ecclesiae*). Orthodox clergy such as Bishop Kallistos Ware have pointed out that *Inter Insignories* is contrary to the historic Eastern Orthodox understanding; Roman Catholic liturgical theologians like Edward Kilmartin have pointed out that *Inter Insigniores* conflicts with the structure of the eucharistic prayer. In leading the eucharistic prayer, the priest is not an actor playing the role of Jesus Christ, but the leader of the liturgical celebration who is praying on behalf of the church (the bride of Christ). The eucharistic prayer begins and ends with the words “we” and “us.” Not only can a woman pray these words, but given that the presider prays on behalf of the church (the symbolically feminine bride of Christ), it might be more appropriate for a woman to do so.

Of course, there is a sense in which the Scriptures indicate that those who hold apostolic office resemble Christ – through self-abnegation (pointing away from the self to Christ) and through imitating Christ in suffering. Those holding church office represent Christ as “jars of clay” or “earthen vessels” who acknowledge that “this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us,” and “always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body” (2 Cor. 4:7-11). There is nothing gender specific about this way of “resembling Christ,” however. It is expected of all Christians (Phil. 2:1-11).

See my essays “Concerning Women’s Ordination: Women’s Ordination and the Priesthood of Christ (Biblical and Patristic Background)” and “Concerning Women’s Ordination: Women’s Ordination and the Priesthood of Christ (in persona Christi).”

3) The *Response* notes correctly that God is portrayed in

Scripture using male pronouns, that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are described using male language, that the Bible never refers to God as “mother” – to which the correct response is “yes.” There are, however, reasons for this male imagery that do not have anything to do with the issue of ordained ministry. Only if one presumes that ordained clergy are *representations* of a male deity rather than representatives or spokespersons is this masculine imagery relevant to the question of orders. The anti-iconic nature of Israel’s religion points against any notion that male office holders represent a male god.

The *Response* argues that the male Adam, not the female Eve, represents the human race, referring to Rom. 5. This argument misses the way in which typology functions in Paul’s writings. Paul could certainly use female typological symbols (Gal. 4). However, historically, Jesus was a male – he could not have been both male and female. Accordingly, it makes sense to refer to Jesus as the “second Adam” and not the “second Eve.” However, it is also significant that in making the Adam/Christ parallel, the apostle Paul uses the Greek word *anthropos* (human being) rather than the Greek word *aner* (male human being) to refer to both Jesus and Adam. If what was significant about Jesus and Adam was their masculinity, Paul could have made this clear by using the Greek word for *male* human being (*aner*). He did not.

For the above, see my essays “Concerning Women’s Ordination: The Argument From Symbolism Part 1 (God, Christ, Apostles)” and “Concerning Women’s Ordination: The Argument From Symbolism (Part 2: Transcendence, Immanence and Sexual Typology).”

4) The *Response* concludes with a discussion of a distinction between a “Petrine” charism and a “Marian” charism that is derived from the theology of Roman Catholic theologian Hans urs von Balthasar (not acknowledged). The distinction is based on a theory of a symbolic typology of the sexes, which modern

Roman Catholic theology has rejected. Sara Butler, author of what might be the best modern summary of the Roman Catholic argument against women's ordination is clear: "Undoubtedly, how one construes the difference between the sexes, and how much importance one accords to this difference, enters into speculation as to why the Lord chose men and not women. But it is imperative to grasp that this is not at the root of the magisterium's judgment. The complementarity of the sexes does not appear among the 'fundamental reasons' given for the Church's tradition." [Sara Butler, *The Catholic Priesthood and Women: A Guide to the Teaching of the Church* (Mundelin, IL: Hillenbrand Books, 2007), 47.] The modern Roman Catholic argument against women's ordination is based entirely on grounds of liturgical symbolism, not on a typology of the sexes.

At the same time, it is important to note a consistent theme in the differences between the "Petrine" and "Marian" charisms. The ministries associated with the Petrine charism mentioned in the *Response* all consist of the kinds of activities in which men would normally have engaged in pre-industrial societies: training, teaching, administering discipline, supervising. The ministries associated with the Marian charism are just the kinds of activities in which women normally would have engaged in pre-industrial societies: Women nurture adults and children. They witness to neighbors. They exercise hospitality. What makes these charisms distinctive is that they are necessarily tied to divisions of labor present in all pre-industrial societies. In pre-industrial societies, the activities of women are necessarily domestic and largely home-bound because of the need for large families; because women give birth to children and breast-feed, their activities necessarily take place near the home because they have to be able to take care of and watch over small children. In contrast, because men are not biologically tied to children in this manner, they (and they alone) are the ones whose tasks can largely take place outside the home: they are the

politicians, the civic leaders, the soldiers, the sailors, the merchants, the builders.

The rise of industrial culture has changed these phenomena irrevocably. In post-industrial cultures, both men and women work outside the home. Many of the activities that were necessarily done in and about the home in pre-industrial cultures are now done by industry: farming, food and clothing production, medicine, education of children, elder care. Because they are no longer needed as a source of domestic labor, large numbers of children are not an economic necessity and family sizes become smaller. Because children are normally educated outside the home, and thus absent for much of the day, there is no longer a biological necessity for women's activities to be restricted to the domestic sphere.

Given the biological basis of a division of labor in pre-industrial societies, it is, of course, no surprise that the writers of the *Response* can point to men who engaged in "Petrine" ministries and women who engaged in "Marian" ministries, both in the biblical period, and throughout the history of the pre-modern church. This is exactly how one would expect Christian men and women to have exercised their respective ministries in pre-industrial cultures where biological necessity limited the activities of women largely to the domestic sphere, while men, and men only, were able to work outside the home. However, the suggestion that men's and women's roles in the church should still be limited by a division of the sexes that is rooted in a connection between biological and economic necessities that no longer apply in the post-industrial world is not only short-sighted, but also likely impossible. Even if we could put the industrial genie back in the bottle, not even traditionalists would likely want to do so. (I note that the argument for a distinction between a Petrine charism and a Marian charism appeared on the internet. Presumably the writers would prefer not to go back to the pre-industrial economic conditions in which the

traditional divisions between men's and women's economic tasks are based, in which women would stay home to give birth to and nurse large numbers of children, and there was no internet on which men could distribute essays about why women should not be ordained.)

See the discussion of changes introduced by industrialism in my essay "Concerning Women's Ordination: Beginning with Genesis."

Conclusion

As noted above, there is nothing new in the arguments presented by the *Response*. I was not surprised that I had already addressed each one of these objections in essays I have been writing in the last several years. I am disappointed, however, that the *Response* either seems unaware that each one of these objections has long been addressed (not just by me), or, alternatively, chose to ignore them.

The *Response* is problematic for the following reasons:

- 1) The *Response* uncritically combines two different kinds of arguments against women's ordination (Evangelical Complementarian and Roman Catholic sacramentalist) without apparent awareness that these approaches are mutually at odds.
- 2) The *Response* uniformly relies on the Complementarian-leaning ESV with no acknowledgement that its translations are often tendentious.
- 3) The *Response* repeats Complementarian readings of standard proof texts without acknowledgment that Complementarian exegesis has been challenged repeatedly by some of the best contemporary biblical exegetes.
- 4) The *Response* endorses the new Complementarian understanding of the Trinity without acknowledgment of its departure from the historic Catholic doctrine.

5) The *Response* endorses the new Catholic argument based on sacramental resemblance between a male celebrant and a male Jesus Christ without acknowledgment that it is indeed a new argument and represents a distinctively Western Catholic eucharistic theology.

6) The *Response* appeals to a typology of male symbolism based on masculine metaphors for God, Jesus' male sex, and the male sex of the apostles without asking the fundamental question of how this masculine imagery actually functions in the Scriptures. In addition, the argument simply assumes that the ordained minister functions symbolically as a representation rather than a representative.

7) The *Response* appeals to a notion of Petrine and Marian charisms that simply reflects the traditional division of labor in pre-industrial societies in such a way as to make pre-industrial models of the relationship between the sexes normative.

Concerning Women's Ordination: A Response to the "Ordination Challenge"

The following presupposes some familiarity with two earlier essays: Concerning Women's Ordination: The Argument "From Tradition" is not the "Traditional" Argument and Concerning Women's Ordination: The "Tradition" Challenge



A gentleman named Michael Joseph has responded to my “ordination” challenge.

1) C. S. Lewis once responded to an unsympathetic critic who had clearly gotten his views wrong: “[W]e all know too well how difficult it is to grasp or retain the substance of a book one finds antipathetic.” I suppose I should not be surprised if a response to my essay seems rather seriously to miss much of the point of my argument. A key point in the misreading seems to be the presumption that I assume that the Church Fathers were simply irremediable sexists and had nothing good to say about women. Accordingly, the author presumes it sufficient to point out that if Tertullian says some good things about women or that Chrysostom speaks positively about women in marriage, or if Augustine does not believe that “Eve is by nature more a sinner” that this somehow invalidates my argument.

A single paragraph in my earlier essay should set straight that misunderstanding:

In making this point, it is not my intention to embrace the kind of diatribe that one occasionally encounters in revisionist feminist scholarship that portrays the entire history of the church as nothing but an unmitigated practice of oppressive subjugation and patriarchal abuse of women. Such one-sided readings can find their counterparts in equally one-sided accounts of how Christianity remarkably improved the status of women in the pagan world, and was, on the whole, a remarkably good thing for women. Nonetheless, it is not difficult to trace a consistent pattern in the history

of the church that explains why the church has not ordained women. Some selective examples follow. (These are typical, but not exhaustive.)

So no, I do not at all believe that pre-modern church tradition is simply uniformly negative toward women. To the contrary, I state concerning Aquinas:

Thomas could speak in almost glowing terms of the relations between men and women. Asking whether woman should have been made of the rib of man, he responds with an illustration that points to the partnership and companionship of men and women, an adapted form of which has been used in countless wedding services . . .

Moreover, in my recent challenge I state: "It is not enough to provide some individual positive statement about women mentioned by a Patristic, Medieval, or Reformation author."

And indeed it is not. The same Aquinas who could speak so positively about Christian marriage could also write: "So by such a kind of subjection woman is naturally subject to man, because in man the discretion of reason predominates."

The same Richard Hooker who could glowingly write about marriage – "The bond of wedlock hath been always more or less esteemed of as a thing religious and sacred." (Laws 5.73.3) – could also write: "And for this cause they were in marriage delivered unto their husbands by others. Which custom retained hath still this use, that it putteth women in mind of a duty whereunto the very imbecility of their nature and sex doth bind them, namely to be always directed, guided and ordered by others" (Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, Book 5, 43.5)

So much of what Mr. Joseph says is simply beside the point of my argument. Tertullian, Chryostom and others could simultaneously say very positive things about women in some

respects, while simultaneously agreeing that women could not exercise church office for the very reasons I mentioned – that in comparison to men they are less intelligent, more emotionally unstable, and more subject to temptation. Mr. Joseph's assumption seems to be that it is impossible for a single person to hold both opinions. Since the church fathers say many positive things about women, he assumes that they could not simultaneously believe that women are ontologically inferior in certain respects. I agree that there should be a logical inconsistency here, but the inconsistency is not on the part of the one recognizing the inconsistency.

And it is this presumption that makes up almost the whole of Mr. Joseph's argument. Over and over he follows the pattern:

Witt quotes A affirming X which Witt interprets to mean Y.

However, X cannot possibly mean Y because A also says Z, and no one who says Z could also believe Y.

Therefore, Witt has to be mistaken when he says that A affirms X, and whatever it sounds like A is affirming, A cannot mean Y.

However, the argument fails if it is possible that A might possibly affirm both Y and Z simultaneously. That the simultaneous affirmation Y and Z seem incoherent from our point of view does not give us permission to conclude that no one could ever have thought differently.

And, of course, the key point of my argument concerning the new tradition concerning women's ordination is that all sides now agree that it really does not make sense to affirm both Y and Z simultaneously. Since the church really wants to affirm Z, it quietly quit affirming Y.

2) Joseph makes things easier for himself, but also concedes a central point in my argument by restricting the allowed time

of discussion to the “first five centuries” of church history. To my claim that “a sizeable body of Patristic, Medieval, and Reformation” authors was presented, he responds: “A sizable body of early church writing was certainly not presented,” and “Only nine quotes were provided . . . from the period from before 500 AD.”

However, it was never my intention to provide an exhaustive discussion and I certainly never intended to restrict myself to the patristic era. I did not claim to be presenting a sizeable body of any single period, but a sizeable body of selective writers from the entire history of the pre-modern church. My intention was to be both representative and comprehensive – to include writers who were patristic, Medieval, Reformation, Eastern , Catholic, Protestant. Given that this was a blog essay (not an entire book), it could not be exhaustive. I wrote:

Nonetheless, it is not difficult to trace a consistent pattern in the history of the church that explains why the church has not ordained women. Some selective examples follow. (These are typical, but not exhaustive.)

However, by restricting the discussion to the patristic era, Mr. Joseph actually makes a major concession. The later writers that Joseph excludes from the discussion necessarily have to be excluded since they so inarguably confirm my claim.

At the same time, however, Mr. Joseph (perhaps unwittingly) makes things more difficult for himself because he is trying to make a case for a theology of ordination for which there is no evidence in the patristic period. There is almost no discussion of such notions as clerical priesthood, eucharistic sacrifice, or priestly representation in the patristic period because there is very little discussion about the priesthood of Christ. As I write elsewhere, “What is missing from the writings of the church fathers is any detailed discussion of

this relationship between Christ's priesthood and the priesthood of the ordained clergy."

If the discussion is to be kept to the first five centuries, it will be a very short discussion.

Now to the discussion of the specific texts:

3) Tertullian

Joseph tries to soften Tertullian's claim concerning women being the "devil's gateway" by claiming that Tertullian is simply following Scripture: "Is Tertullian not allowed to make this observation?" He then follows the pattern I mentioned above. Tertullian exhorts women to holiness. He calls them "fellow servants and sisters." Then the key quote: "Tertullian's tone dramatically shifts, doesn't it!" That is, because Tertullian affirms Z, he could not possibly have meant Y when he said X. (Oh, yes, Tertullian also says some critical things about men, so it all evens out.)

However, what if Tertullian could affirm both Z and Y, whether we ourselves find that consistent or not?

I included Tertullian as affirming "Statements that women are more susceptible to temptation than men:" Tertullian does not simply warn women against following Eve's example. He states that they too are Eve, and they are personally responsible for Eve's sin, and thus share her guilt. Because Eve yielded to temptation, the women Tertullian addresses yield to temptation. Because they yield to temptation, they are "the devil's gateway." According to Tertullian, women (not men) are the "first deserter of the divine law." And the women to whom Tertullian is speaking (not men) are those who persuaded "him (men) whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack."

This goes beyond simply affirming the teaching of Scripture. Does Tertullian claim that women are more susceptible to temptation than men? Yes. (The devil was not valiant enough to

attack the man because he would not have yielded.) Do women lead men into temptation? Again. Yes.

4) Epiphanius

Mr. Joseph selectively reads Epiphanius, whom I discussed at some length in my earlier essay. I acknowledged that Epiphanius refers positively to both the virgin Mary and the four daughters of Philip the Evangelist. But I then made the following points: 1) Epiphanius does not actually make any argument beyond appealing to historical precedent: Eve, Mary, and Philip's daughters were not ordained. 2) At no point does Epiphanius make a connection between male ordination and the celebration of the sacraments. At no point does he suggest that the male apostles resemble a male Christ, or that there is a correlation between masculine priesthood and the eucharistic presidency.

Epiphanius does provide an explicit warrant against women's ordination, however: "Women are unstable, prone to error, and mean-spirited."

So what is the point of the appeal to Mary and Philip's daughters? They provide a negative example against ordinary women. If Mary and Philip's daughters were not ordained, then *a fortiori* we cannot ordain women who are "unstable, prone to error, and mean-spirited."

5) I'm not sure what point Joseph is making in reference to the Augustine quote. In my challenge essay, I had included Augustine as an example of "Claims that women are subordinate to men." In my original essay, I had written that Augustine was "typical" of the claim that even before sin, women had been subject to their husbands. This claim is certainly correct. Joseph asks "Is Augustine's argument that Eve is by nature more a sinner?" Well, no. But I had affirmed no such thing.

6) Chrysostom

Joseph seems to have completely missed the point of my Chrysostom citation. Again, he follows his predictable pattern. Chrysostom says lots of good things about how men should love their wives. Joseph then makes much of a sentence I quoted that “the modest woman pierces and disturbs the mind.”

However, he completely ignores two more crucial quotes:

First that the bishop must have more care for the “female, [in the congregation], which needs more particular forethought, because of its propensity to sins.”

Second, Joseph insists that Chrysostom’s claim that women are more adept at household management while men are better at wordly affairs is simply an affirmation of what he calls a “complementarian” outlook. He misses, however, that in an agrarian society, management of worldly affairs would certainly have been associated with greater intelligence. To the extent that women could not be ordained because they presumably lack these skills, there would certainly be an understanding of not just difference but deficiency. Moreover, Joseph ignores Chrysostom’s explicit statement about why women cannot teach: “Why not? Because she taught Adam once and for all, and taught him badly. . . . Therefore let her descend from the professor’s chair! Those who know not how to teach, let them learn. . . .” This is not simply an affirmation of gentle love and complementarity. And, again, given that Chrysostom’s position is a kind of “complementarianism,” restrictions on women’s teaching “because they taught Adam badly” points to an ontological incapacity.

And, finally, even if Chrysostom’s argument is that women cannot be ordained because of different kind of intelligence related to household management, this corresponds to no contemporary argument against W0. Contemporary complementarians studiously avoid making those kinds of claims. Contemporary sacramentalist arguments are not

interested in gender differences at all except insofar as they relate to an ability to resemble a male Christ.

7) The Obsession with Complementarianism

Joseph anachronistically describes the position of Chrysostom and others as “complementarianism” and “headship” and also refers positively to the organization CBMS and the Danvers Statement. In so doing, he ignores a crucial point of both of my earlier essays. The “complementarian” position has been explicitly repudiated by both the magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. It is because of this explicit repudiation that new arguments have had to be embraced concerning masculine sacramental representation.

To the extent that Joseph repeatedly characterizes the church fathers as “complementarians,” he confirms my point. Insofar as the contemporary Catholic position repudiates complementarianism, it is at odds with the historic position.

At the same time, there is something odd about appealing to the church fathers to support what is actually a Protestant argument. However, even here, as I’ve again made clear, Tertullian, Chrysostom et al, do not simply affirm the contemporary complementarian argument. They do indeed claim that women are less intelligent, more subject to temptation, etc., which is contrary to the complementarian position. That they can also say nice things about women does not somehow undo this.

8) Apostolic Constitutions

Joseph claims that my quote from The Apostolic Constitutions is simply another example of “complementarianism.” However, the connection between the man being the “head” to the “unreasonableness” of the body (the woman) governing the head indicates not merely a subordination, but a subordination rooted in a difference in intelligence. According to AC, it is only “reasonable” that the “head” (the thinking and talking

part) governs the body (the irrational part).

Joseph appeals to the Apostolic Constitutions speaking positively about women (there's the standard argument again) and to the claim (as in Epiphanius) that Jesus did not ordain women. Actually, the claim is that Jesus was not *baptized* by his mother. (Of course, contrary to AC, the modern church does allow women to baptize.) But again, the historic argument is rooted in hierarchical authority of men over women, specifically including teaching. There is nothing here of the modern Catholic argument concerning sacramental resemblance to a male Christ, and, again, as noted above, the most straightforward reading has to do with rationality: it is not "rational" for the body to govern the "head."

Joseph also makes the odd claim that because the *Didascalia Apostolorum* is essentially contained in the *Apostolic Constitutions*, it is "not really a separate quote." However it says something about the transmission of a tradition that a distinct community takes up an earlier writing and incorporates it again as a new text. We would not argue that Luke's gospel is not really a separate witness because Luke incorporates material from Mark's gospel.

In the end, my reading of the texts still stands.

Some final observations. I stand by my claim that the new complementarian and sacramentalist arguments against WO represent new traditions insofar as they depart from the logic of the earlier tradition.

I find it ironic that I was challenged for providing insufficient patristic evidence for my argument – "A sizable body of early church writing was certainly not presented – and then Mr. Joseph concludes with a series of suggestions about early church history that are entirely speculative, and without any patristic textual evidence whatsoever. The advantage of my argument is that it is at least based on

actual textual citations. It is also confirmed by the readings of other scholars who may not agree with my position concerning W0, but who acknowledge that a genuine change has taken place. Sara Butler, whom I cite as the preeminent advocate for the new Roman Catholic position, acknowledges that the position introduced by Pope Paul VI is not the historic position, and the the historic arguments are no longer considered tenable.

I also find it ironic that Joseph appeals to a Protestant “complementarian” reading of the patristic tradition to justify what is actually a “Catholic” position concerning the normativity of church tradition. He does not acknowledge that the Evangelical “complementarian” position is at odds with the new Catholic sacramental position. Both the Roman Catholic Church as well as the Orthodox Church have rejected complementarian understandings of the relationship between men and women, and are emphatically clear that they do not base their opposition to W0 on complementarian grounds. So to the extent that Joseph affirms a complementarian reading of the patristic tradition, the more difficult it becomes to make the claim that the current Catholic position is not a departure from that tradition.

Finally, Joseph repeatedly makes reference to an “apostolic tradition” based more on speculation than textual evidence. He refers to a “mind of the early church” and an “apostolic consensus.” But we know that “mind” only from actual texts, which don’t say a whole lot about ordination, and even less about women’s ordination. Insofar as they address women’s ordination at all, they provide problematic arguments against it. Moreover, the primary concern in these patristic arguments has nothing to do with sacramental practice (the Catholic concern), but is entirely about authority of men over women. Insofar as the question is raised as to why women cannot exercise authority over men, there is a consistent answer – which I’ve documented, and which appears again and again in

the later history of the church.

Joseph states that “Jesus Christ, the GodMan, apparently had compelling reason(s) to not clearly ordain women . . .” To the contrary, Jesus Christ did not ordain anyone. Jesus did call twelve Jewish male apostles, but the typologically symbolic reasons for that are obvious. Jesus could not have called women apostles for the same reason that he could not have called Chinese apostles or fifty-seven apostles. Although it can be argued that clergy are successors to the apostles, there is no more reason that they would have to be male than that they would have to be Jewish or that their numbers would be restricted to twelve.

Finally, I note that Joseph responded to my challenge by addressing a different issue instead – that I was mistaken in my reading of certain of the church fathers. He did not make the case for explicit parallels to either the modern Complementarian nor the modern Catholic sacramentalist position. (Pointing out that the fathers say some nice things about women does not cancel out what they also say about why women cannot teach or exercise authority – which is the crucial patristic argument against W0). Interestingly, although his appeal to “tradition” presupposes a “Catholic” position, he argued instead that the patristic tradition actually has affinities with the Protestant Complementarian position. He quietly avoided discussing the issue of sacramental resemblance to a male Christ, but that would be an extremely hard argument to make insofar as the fathers simply do not make that argument.

Concerning Women's Ordination: The "Tradition" Challenge



Recently, I posted the following on Facebook in response to the recent ACNA College of Bishops Statement on Women's Ordination:

As a member of the ACNA, I was a consultant to the ACNA Women's Orders Task Force. When the ACNA was founded, it was decided that we would be a "large tent" representative of orthodox Anglicanism, extending hospitality to those Anglicans who could not affirm women's orders, even though they held a minority opinion within worldwide Anglicanism. I am happy that the ACNA has continued to recognize that there is room for disagreement on this issue.

However, I am unhappy with this statement in particular, which does not tell the whole story: "However, we also acknowledge that this practice is a recent innovation to Apostolic Tradition and Catholic Order."

Yes, the practice is recent, but so is the recognition that women are of equal moral, intellectual, and spiritual status with men. The historic argument against women's ordination was that women lacked intelligence, were emotionally

unstable, and were more subject to temptation than men. Given that the current arguments against WO are NOT this argument, the continuing opponents of WO are as much endorsing a “recent innovation” as those of us who favor it.

I accompanied the post with a link to this page:

Concerning Women’s Ordination: The Argument “From Tradition” is not the “Traditional” Argument.

I quickly discovered that posting this was a mistake, as I received responses like the following that made clear that people read my statement, but had not actually read my essay:

Who has made this “historic argument”?

To make matters worse, my statement was shared elsewhere without the link to my accompanying essay, where it received responses such as the following:

I would truly love for someone to post even one demonstration of the Early Church arguing specifically that women cannot be ordained due to their inferior intellectual, moral, or spiritual state, or even an inferior ontology. Just a quote from them that speaks for itself.

The substance would be giving a quote from the Early Church that shows – rather than assumes – that they argued from a view that women are inferior:

– not merely subordinate, but inferior, for assuming that subordinate implies inferior merely assumes what Witt needs to demonstrate,

– not merely that a writer or several made an observation or rebuke or rhetorical flourish against the female sex (for they did that against men, too)

Basically, just someone, provide something from the early church that clearly shows that they said, basically, “the mind of the Church is that women can’t be priests because

women are without exception intellectually incapable/wanton/etc."

Lots of words, lots of assertions, lots of analogies, lots of debate over whether the analogies are valid... but no early church quotes, viz, no actual evidence.

I am tempted to respond by again referring back to my earlier essay, but that would be too easy. I'm more than willing to accept a challenge, and will raise the challenge with one of my own.

So first a response to the above challenge.

My argument consists of the following two assertions:

First,

The historic argument against women's ordination was that women lacked intelligence, were emotionally unstable, and were more subject to temptation than men.

This can be broken down as follows.

First is what I will call the "ontological deficiency" claim. Writers in the tradition claimed (all quotations are from my original essay):

(A) Women are less intelligent, more emotionally unstable, and more subject to temptation than men.

Claims that women are less intelligent than men:

"To woman is assigned the presidency of the household; to man all the business of state, the marketplace, the administration of government . . . She cannot handle state business well, but she can raise children correctly . . ."
John Chrysostom

“[T]he female is more prudent, that is, cleverer, than the male with respect to evil and perverse deeds, because the more nature departs from the one operation, the more it inclines to the other. In this way, the woman falls short in intellectual operations, which consist in the apprehension of the good and in knowledge of truth and flight from evil. . . . Therefore sense moves the female to every evil, just as intellect moves a man to every good.” Albert the Great

“For good order would have been wanting in the human family if some were not governed by others wiser than themselves. So by such a kind of subjection woman is naturally subject to man, because in man the discretion of reason predominates.” Thomas Aquinas

Their [women’s] “judgments are commonly weakest because of their sex.” Richard Hooker

“And for this cause they were in marriage delivered unto their husbands by others. Which custom retained hath still this use, that it putteth women in mind of a duty whereunto the very imbecility of their nature and sex doth bind them, namely to be always directed, guided and ordered by others” Richard Hooker

Statements that women are emotionally unstable compared to men:

“[G]enerally, proverbially, and commonly it is affirmed that women are more mendacious and fragile, more diffident, more shameless, more deceptively eloquent, and, in brief, a woman is nothing but a devil fashioned into a human appearance” Albert the Great

“Nature I say, doth paynt them furthe to be weake, fraile, impatient, feble and foolishe.” John Knox

Statements that women are more susceptible to temptation than

men:

“And do you not know that you are (each) an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too. You are the devil’s gateway: you are the unsealer of that (forbidden) tree: you are the first deserter of the divine law: you are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack.” Tertullian

“For it is not possible for the Bishop, and one who is concerned with the whole flock, to have a care for the male portion of it, but to pass over the female, which needs more particular forethought, because of its propensity to sins.” John Chrysostom

“Therefore there is no faithfulness in a woman. . . . Moreover, an indication of this is that wise men almost never disclose their plans and their doings with their wives. For a woman is a flawed male and in comparison to the male, has the nature of defect and privation, and this is why naturally she mistrusts herself. And this is why whatever she cannot acquire on her own she strives to acquire through mendacity and diabolical deceptions.” Albert the Great

“Women are unstable, prone to error, and mean-spirited.” Epiphanius

Second is what I will call the “exclusion by nature of subordination” claim:

(B) Ordination necessitates exercising authority over others, particularly teaching and speaking in an authoritative manner. Women cannot be ordained because they are necessarily subordinate to men, and therefore cannot exercise authority in this manner. This is primarily an exclusion from women exercising any authority whatsoever over men, and only secondarily a specific exclusion from ordination.

Claims that women are subordinate to men:

“Even before her sin, woman had been made to be ruled by her husband and to be submissive and subject to him. But . . . the servitude meant in [Genesis 3:16] denotes a condition similar to that of slavery rather than a bond of love.”
Augustine

“For good order would have been wanting in the human family if some were not governed by others wiser than themselves. So by such a kind of subjection woman is naturally subject to man, because in man the discretion of reason predominates.”
Thomas Aquinas

Eve “had previously been subject to her husband, but that was a liberal and gentle subjection. Now, however, she is cast into servitude.” John Calvin

“He [the man] will dominate you [the woman], that is, you will decide nothing by your private inclination but will act in everything by the inclination of your husband.” Heinrich Bullinger

“And for this cause they were in marriage delivered unto their husbands by others. Which custom retained hath still this use, that it putteth women in mind of a duty whereunto the very imbecility of their nature and sex doth bind them, namely to be always directed, guided and ordered by others” Richard Hooker

“So, I say, that in her greatest perfection woman was created to be subject to man.” John Knox

Claims that women cannot be ordained because they are in a state of subjection to men, and therefore cannot teach or exercise authority over men:

“It is neither right nor necessary that women should be teachers, and especially concerning the name of Christ and

the redemption of his passion. . .” Didascalia apostolorum

“But if in the foregoing constitutions we have not permitted them to teach, how will any one allow them, contrary to nature, to perform the office of a priest?” Apostolic Constitutions

“Why not? Because she taught Adam once and for all, and taught him badly. . . . Therefore let her descend from the professor’s chair! Those who know not how to teach, let them learn. . . . If they don’t want to learn but rather want to teach, they destroy both themselves and those who learn from them. . . .” John Chrysostom

“Accordingly, since it is not possible in the female sex to signify eminence of degree, for a woman is in the state of subjection, it follows that she cannot receive the sacrament of Order.” Thomas Aquinas

“To make women teachers in the house of God were a gross absurdity, seeing the Apostle hath said, ‘I permit not a woman to teach.’” Richard Hooker

“I am assured that GOD hath revealed unto some in this our age, that it is more than a monster in nature that a Woman shall reign and have empire above Man.” John Knox

“The apostle taketh power frome all woman to speake in the assemblie. Ergo he permitteth no woman to rule aboue man.” John Knox

Third is what I will call the “inherent correlation” claim.

(C) Proposition (B) is a direct corollary or consequence of Proposition (A). Women are necessarily subordinate to men, and cannot exercise authority over them because of an ontological incapacity located in a deficiency in reason, emotional instability, and susceptibility to temptation. Because of this ontological deficiency, they cannot exercise authority over or

teach men, and so cannot be ordained.

Claims that women cannot exercise authority over men because of an intellectual, emotional, or moral incapacity (which necessarily implies that they cannot be ordained):

“To woman is assigned the presidency of the household; to man all the business of state, the marketplace, the administration of government . . . She cannot handle state business well, but she can raise children correctly . . .”

John Chrysostom

“Nature I say, doth paynt them furthe to be weake, fraile, impacient, feble and foolishe: and experience hath declared them to be vnconstant, variable, cruell and lacking the spirit of counsel and regiment. And these notable faultes haue men in all ages espied in that kinde, for the whiche not onlie they haue remoued women from rule and authoritie, but also some haue thoght that men subiect to the counsel or empire of their wyues were vn worthie of all publike office.”

John Knox

Actual claims that women cannot be ordained because of such an incapacity:

“Never at any time has a woman been a priest. . . . And who but women are the teachers of this [that women can be ordained]? Women are unstable, prone to error, and mean-spirited.” Epiphanius

“For if the ‘man be the head of the woman,’ and he be originally ordained for the priesthood, it is not just to abrogate the order of the creation, and leave the principal to come to the extreme part of the body. For the woman is the body of the man, taken from his side, and subject to him, from whom she was separated for the procreation of children. For says He, ‘He shall rule over thee.” Apostolic Constitutions

*“For ‘if the head of the wife be the man,’ it is not reasonable that the rest of the body should govern the head.”
Apostolic Constitutions*

“So by such a kind of subjection woman is naturally subject to man, because in man the discretion of reason predominates. . . . Accordingly, since it is not possible in the female sex to signify eminence of degree, for a woman is in the state of subjection, it follows that she cannot receive the sacrament of Order.” Thomas Aquinas

“Sir, a woman’s preaching is like a dog’s walking on his hinder legs. It is not done well; but you are surprized to find it done at all.” Boswell’s Johnson

*“The apostle taketh power frome all woman to speake in the assemblie. Ergo he permitteth no woman to rule aboue man.”
John Knox (compare with the above statement by Knox)*

The above should be enough to make clear that there is a traditional understanding of why women cannot be ordained which can be expressed in terms of the inherent connection between propositions (A), (B), and (C). Any argument against women’s ordination that does not include all three propositions is not the traditional argument, but an innovation.

This leads to my second affirmation:

Given that the current arguments against WO are NOT this argument, the continuing opponents of WO are as much endorsing a “recent innovation” as those of us who favor it.

To elaborate this claim, there are three new positions concerning women’s ordination: (1) The Egalitarian position that women can and should be ordained; (2) The Protestant “Complementarian” position that women cannot be ordained. (3) The Catholic “Sacramental” argument that women cannot be

ordained. All are innovations insofar as they reject some element of the traditional argument. This can be illustrated by the following propositions.

(A1) Women share an equal intellectual, moral, and spiritual capacity with men. They are not less intelligent, emotionally unstable, or more subject to temptation than men.

Egalitarians, Evangelical Complementarians, and Catholic Sacramentalists equally affirm (A1).

But (A1) is directly contrary to (A).

I have yet to find a contemporary opponent of W0 who will acknowledge that (A) is inherent to the traditional position, but the above citations clearly demonstrate that it is.

The (1) Egalitarian position is that in light of (A1), there is no valid argument against W0, and therefore women should be ordained. The (2) Complementarian and (3) Sacramentalist positions argue that despite (A1), women should still not be ordained.

The (2) Protestant Complementarian affirms (A1), but also continues to affirm (B). However, because the Complementarian does not affirm (A), he (or she?) cannot affirm (C). Rather, the Complementarian affirms:

(C1) Although (A1), women still cannot be ordained because God has created different "gender roles" rooted in "male headship."

For Complementarians, men can exercise any role in the church that women can fulfil, but women have the exclusive role of always being in submission to male authority. In a religious setting, women cannot teach, speak publicly where men might be present, or exercise authority over men.

Complementarians do affirm (B), but rather than affirm (A) and (C), they affirm (A1), and (C1), and are thus an innovation in

relation to the previous tradition.

The (3) Catholic sacramentalist also affirms (A1), but differs from the (2) Complementarian in the following:

(B1) The argument from authority no longer applies. Women can exercise any role of teaching, exercising authority, and speaking, and even preaching within the church. (There are no "gender roles" rooted in "headship.")

Rather, the sacramentalist affirms:

(B2) The distinct function of ordination has to do with presiding at the sacraments. The presiding minister (the priest) represents Jesus Christ, that is, acts in the "person of Christ" (*in persona Christi*) when presiding at the sacraments. Because Jesus Christ is a male, only a male priest can represent a male Christ.

(B1) and (B2) are decided departures from the historic traditional arguments against women's ordination. To the best of my knowledge, no traditional theologian raises this sacramental argument against WO. It does not appear until the 20th century, first in essays like C.S. Lewis's "On Priestesses," but most definitively in Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Inter Insigniores*. Non-Roman Catholics (Orthodox and Anglo-Catholics) borrow the argument from Roman Catholics.

(B1) and (B) are also in opposition. Complementarians continue to affirm (B), but Sacramentalists do not.

(C2) Because women do not resemble a male Christ, women cannot be ordained.

(There is a variation of the above argument that does not strictly follow the Roman Catholic position that the priest acts *in persona Christi*, but still appears to "male/female" symbolism. Because only a male priest can symbolize a male Christ, only males can be ordained. The substance of the

argument is still the same.)

Thus, (1) Egalitarianism, (2) Evangelical Complementarianism, and (3) Catholic Sacramentalism equally represent innovations to the tradition.

In light of (A1), (1) Egalitarians are an innovation in advocating the ordination of women, but only in the sense of recognizing the implications of what Scripture teaches about the intellectual, moral, and spiritual equality of men and women. Women's ordination is the logical consequence of a Christian doctrine of vocation.

In addition to (A1), the Egalitarian would affirm:

(B3) The primary call of the ordained minister is to service (Matt. 20:26-28; 1 Pet. 5:1-14). Insofar as the ordained minister has a representative function, the minister first represents the church as the body of Christ, and the (female) bride of Christ. Insofar as the minister represents Jesus Christ, the minister represents Christ as the head of the church which is his bride, but most significantly through cruciformity, by pointing away from him- or herself to the crucified and risen Christ, and through following Christ in suffering. The ordained minister represents Jesus Christ as a "jar of clay." This sort of Christocentric representation is not gender-specific, not unique to men or women, to clergy or laity, but is at the heart of discipleship for all Christians (Eph. 5:1, 2; Phil. 2:1-11; 2 Cor. 4:5-12).

(C3) Insofar as the call to ministry is primarily a call to service, and the minister represents first the female Church (as the bride of Christ), and, second, Jesus Christ in terms of the cruciform pattern to which all Christians are called, ministry qualification is determined by Spirit-gifting and vocation, not by gender.

However, (2) Evangelical Complementarians and (3) Catholic sacramentalists are just as much positions of innovations as

are Egalitarians. No one holds to the traditional position.

Rather than affirming (A), (B), (C), (2) Complementarians affirm (A1), (B), and (C1). Complementarians reject two of the original three indispensable premises of the traditional position.

Rather than affirming (A), (B), (C), (3) Catholic sacramentalists affirm (A1), (B1), (B2), and (C2). They reject all three of the original indispensable premises of the traditional position.

Moreover, the only position of agreement shared between (2) Complementarians and (3) Sacramentalists is (A1), not only a departure from the tradition, but also an agreement with (1) Egalitarians. Evangelical Complementarians continue to affirm only one of the original premises (B), while Catholic Sacramentalists affirm none, and Complementarians and Sacramentalists disagree not only with the tradition, but with each other concerning (B) (which Sacramentalists reject), (B1) and (B2) (which Complementarians reject), and (C1) and (C2), about which Complementarians and Sacramentalists disagree.

I think the above adequately addresses the original challenge. However, I conclude with a challenge of my own. I have argued that Evangelical Complementarians and Catholic Sacramentalist opponents to women's ordination represent innovations to the historic tradition. Their advocates insist that they do not, and are simply following the historic tradition. My challenge:

Provide an actual historical reference from the Christian tradition that corresponds to what I have called the Complementarian or Sacramentalist positions. It is not enough to provide some individual positive statement about women mentioned by a Patristic, Medieval, or Reformation author.

Rather, from a discussion that specifically deals with the issue of women's ordination and opposes it, provide an example from a Patristic, Medieval, or Reformation author (or authors)

that clearly endorses either (A1), (B), and (C1), or (A1), (B1), (B2), and (C2) as a coherent and integrated position. It is not enough to find individual quotations from an author that can be read to endorse any single one of the above propositions. Rather, in the same way that I have shown through detailed quotations that there is a sizeable body of Patristic, Medieval, and Reformation writers who endorse (A), (B), and (C) and bring them together to form a coherent argument against women's ordination based on female ontological incapacity, an adequate demonstration that what I have called the (2) Protestant Complementarian or (3) Catholic Sacramentalist positions are not innovations to the tradition would have to substantiate with actual textual references that one or the other of these two was an actual position that was held by someone in the history of the church before the mid-twentieth century.

I do not think that this challenge can be met, and so I stand by my initial claim: *Given that the current arguments against WO are NOT this argument, the continuing opponents of WO are as much endorsing a "recent innovation" as those of us who favor it.*