

Announcing My Forthcoming Book



Friends,

Several years ago, I began publishing a series of essays on women's ordination. Over time, these expanded into a book. Baylor University Press has now agreed to publish this book as [Icons of Christ: A Biblical and Systematic Theology for Women's Ordination](#). It is scheduled to be available for purchase on Nov. 1, 2020, and may be pre-purchased at either [Barnes and Noble](#) or [Amazon](#).

Unfortunately for readers of my blog, that means that the original essays are no longer available. Fortunately, for all of those who have asked me over the last several years, "When will these ever be published as a book?," there is now an answer.

Thank you to all of those who have encouraged me in this project over the last several years. Blessings especially to those women who have been encouraged by what I have written to pursue your own vocations, and to those men who have encouraged them.

Grace and Peace,

Bill

Response to the Diocese of the Anglican Diocese of the Living Word: The False Dilemma Fallacy and the Catholic Argument Against Women's Ordination



The Logical Fallacy of the False Dilemma has a number of other names: the false dichotomy fallacy, the either-or-fallacy, the fallacy of false alternatives, the fallacy of exhaustive hypotheses. The fallacy presumes that a particular situation or problem has only two exhaustive solutions or possible options, and that one must choose between them. The fallacy is endemic to political discussion: Either build a wall or be in

favor of open borders! Allow no restrictions on the ownership of firearms or risk imminent death by home invasion, mass shooters, or government tyranny! If you don't approve of gay marriage, you're homophobic! If you allow "special rights" for gays, you'll destroy the traditional family!

In theology, the fallacy of the false dichotomy has often been accompanied by conflation. In the case of the choice between the three options of historic Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, or Liberal Protestantism, advocates of each position have reduced the theological alternatives to only two options. For all his brilliance otherwise, Karl Barth infamously claimed that "natural theology" was the inevitable link between Roman Catholicism and liberal Protestantism, and that "natural theology" eventually led to the Third Reich. (Embrace the Reformation and reject "natural theology" or be a Nazi!) John Henry Newman claimed that "private judgment" was the common link between Protestantism and liberal theology, and that without a magisterium, one inevitably led to the other. (Accept the papacy or end up with subjectivity uncertainty!) In book after book, liberal Episcopal Bishop John Spong has repeatedly claimed that "fundamentalism" is the common link between historic Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. (Embrace liberal Protestantism or be a Fundamentalist!)

In the [previous essay](#), I pointed out that the writers who wrote the *Response* endorsed a complementarian hermeneutic. In this essay, I will make the case that they also engage in the fallacy of the false dichotomy, and that this is illustrated by repeated conflation of alternative positions concerning women's ordination.

In our [original essay](#), Bishop Grant LeMarquand and myself distinguished between four positions concerning women's ordination: (1) the historic position based on an ontology of inequality between men and women, and three contemporary positions that departed from the traditional position in

embracing women's equality: (2) egalitarianism, (3) Evangelical complementarianism, and (4) Roman Catholic sacramentalism.

We pointed out that all three of the contemporary positions depart from the historic position insofar as all three endorse equality between men and women; the second position also departs insofar as it approves of women's ordination. The third and fourth positions do not ordain women, but they still depart from the traditional position insofar as they affirm ontological equality of the sexes. The two positions also are in tension with one another insofar as they reject women's ordination for different reasons: Evangelical complementarians continue to claim hierarchy and authority as the fundamental obstacles to women's ordination but not sacramental representation, while Catholics appeal to sacramental theology instead – a female priest cannot represent a male Christ – but do not endorse a fundamental hierarchy of authority between the sexes.

The *Response* conflated the original four positions by reducing them to two. The *Responders* insisted that positions (3) and (4) are *not* new positions because the historic reason for opposition to women's ordination was *not* based on inequality, and that (3) and (4) are really different versions of the same (complementarian) position. According to the *The Reponse*, the only new position is position (2), which is a departure from the historic position of the church, and which the *Responders* identified with the affirmation of a (post-modern) subjectivist epistemology and a rejection of the authority of Scripture, as well as a functionalist and individualist position on ordination. The *Response* thus responded to our claims by conflating positions (1), (3), and (4), and offering their complementarian position as the only viable alternative to position (2), which they conflated with post-modernism. Thus the stark alternative of the *Response*: (1) Accept the authority of Scripture, accept complementarianism as the

correct interpretation of Scripture and the historic position of the church, and reject women's ordination, or else: (2) Endorse women's ordination, reject the authority of Scripture and church tradition, and be a post-modern individualist subjectivist!

In a [previous essay](#), I made the case that the *Response* was mistaken in its claim that the traditional position was not based on the ontological inequality of women. It was. In this essay I will argue that the *Response* is equally mistaken in reducing the Catholic sacramental position to the complementarian position. In a future essay I will argue that the *Response* makes an even more radical error in reducing our own position to that of post-modernism subjectivist individualism.

The Response Gets the Catholic Position Wrong

In an essay on the "[Tradition Challenge](#)," I identified the traditional argument against women's ordination as follows:

(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.

(C) There is a direct correlation between (A) and (B). Because of ontological deficiency (A), women cannot exercise authority over or teach men (B), and so cannot be ordained (C).

The Complementarian position departs from the traditional position insofar as it affirms:

(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.

(B) Still affirmed.

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

The Catholic position departs from the traditional position insofar as it affirms:

(A1) Affirmed.

(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.") 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.

The above should make clear that both the Complementarian and Catholic positions are departures from the historic position, but also that they are odds with one another. The issues of hierarchy and authority that are so important to the Complementarian position do not appear in the Catholic position. The argument that the priest must resemble a male Christ in order to act *in persona Christi* does not appear in the Complementarian position.

However, in a manner similar to their challenge of the historic position, the *Response* challenged our summary of the Catholic position, and attempted to conflate it with the Complementarian position:

The authors [LeMarquand and Witt] especially misrepresent the Catholic position in their attempt to characterize it as novel. First, they overstate the contrast with the Protestant position, insisting that Catholics are not concerned with the same matters of authority and teaching. . . . As has already been demonstrated, the authors seriously misrepresent the Catholic argument against the ordination of women. . . . The same concerns about pastoral and teaching authority that we see in Protestant practice are also shared in Roman Catholic practice. . . . the most important agreement of all is common to both. Women should not be ordained because the Bible teaches that women should not be ordained.

In what follows, I will show that our assessment of the Catholic position is correct, and that the *Response* position gets it wrong. First, however, I will show how they got it wrong.

How the Response Got the Catholic Position Wrong

As I demonstrated in my discussion of the *Response's* attempt to claim identity with the traditional argument against women's ordination, the authors had to admit that the tradition really does claim that women are less intelligent than men, more susceptible to temptation, and emotionally unstable. Since they were not able to deny this, the *Responders* attempted to distinguish between those parts of the tradition with which they disagreed and of which they disapproved (the inferiority of women), and those parts of which they approved because they were perceived as in agreement with the complementarian position (women should not be ordained combined with an appeal to a common proof-text), claiming that the disagreements are irrelevant to the traditional position, and only the agreements really matter. The problem with this attempt (as I demonstrated) is that the area of disagreement was actually crucial to the traditional position, while the agreements were incidental, and, on closer

examination of how the tradition appealed to the common proof-texts as warrants were not actually agreements after all.

The authors of the *Response* use the same approach to conflate the Catholic position with the Complementarian position. They cannot deny the presence of sacramental representation (only a male priest can act *in persona Christi*) in the Catholic argument, but *they do not actually agree with this position!* At one point, they try to downplay the disagreement: "It is true that Protestants prioritize issues of authority, but it is incorrect to claim that Protestants are unconcerned about sacramental theology and its implications . . . questions of how the sacraments should be administered in a biblical manner are very important concerns for such Protestants."

Whether Protestants are "concerned" about sacraments is not the point, however. As we wrote in our initial essay, "There are no traditional arguments against the ordination of women based on the inability of women to represent a male Christ when presiding at the Eucharist"; nor would this be the argument raised by those Protestants who are "concerned" about sacramental theology. The authors of the *Response* are clear that they themselves do not believe that the celebrant of the Eucharist represents a male Christ. They state: "Protestants reject the sacerdotal notions of the priesthood and deny that the presbyter acts *in persona Christi*."

The authors of the *Response* thus reject the main Catholic argument against the ordination of women! How then are they able to claim an essential agreement with the Catholic position?

First, as they did with their discussion of the traditional argument against women's ordination (inferiority), they make the claim that the *in persona Christi* sacramental argument is not actually central to the Catholic position: "[I]t is questionable whether or not the 'in persona Christ' argument is even treated as the most fundamental argument against the

ordination of women in Catholic theology and practice. . . . the 'in persona Christi' argument is not the only argument, and is, arguably, not even the key Catholic argument."

Second, as they did with their discussion of the traditional patristic and medieval position, they point to Catholic appeals to Scripture and tradition and claim that these represent *different* and *distinct* arguments against women's ordination. They note that "Catholics share many of the same objections raised by Protestants on exegetical grounds." For example, *Inter Insigniores* cites 1 Cor. 14:34-35 and 1 Tim. 2:12, the Complementarians' favorite proof-texts. They note that the Catholic position prioritizes "the historical argument that Jesus only called men to exercise sacramental *authority*." (My emphasis; note that the *Response* plays the focus of sacramental ministry on "authority"!)

Third, they try to conflate the Catholic and Complementarian positions by claiming that the real logic behind the Catholic position has to do with male authority over women: ". . . they overstate the contrast with the Protestant position, insisting that Catholics are not concerned with the same matters of authority and teaching. . . . The authors also inaccurately characterize the Catholic position as being relatively unconcerned about authority and teaching. That is not the case . . . The same concerns about pastoral and teaching authority that we see in Protestant practice [are] also shared in Roman Catholic practice."

It is perhaps not surprising that the writers of the *Response* would not be familiar with or sympathetic to Catholic position. Also, as noted above, the fallacy of false alternatives would tempt the writers to conflate the Catholic position with their own in order to preserve the fundamental either-or dichotomy. If there are only two positions in response to the question of women's ordination, and one position agrees with Scripture and church tradition, and is embraced by both Protestants and Catholics, and the other

position rejects the “plain teaching of the Bible,” the universal tradition of the church, and really gets its marching orders from secular post-modernism, the choice between the two alternatives is self-evident.

Unfortunately the writers of the *Response* are mistaken in all three of their claims as can be shown by an examination of key Catholic texts on the subject.

Is the *in persona Christi* argument central to the Catholic position?

The *in persona Christi* argument is not only central to the anti-ordination Catholic position, it is the key argument. *Inter Insigniores*, the first Catholic document to address the question at length, breaks down into two clear sections. The first part of the document (sections 1-4) provides biblical and historical background leading up to the central theological claim. These constitute what I referred to in my previous essay on the traditional position as “warrants.” The actual theological claim comes in section 5: “The Church’s constant teaching, repeated and clarified by the Second Vatican Council and again recalled by the 1971 Synod of Bishops and by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in its Declaration of 24th. June 1973, declares that the bishop or the priest in the exercise of his ministry, does not act in his own name, *in persona propria*: he represents Christ . . . the priest, who alone has the power to perform it, then acts not only through the effective power conferred on him by Christ, but *in persona Christi*, taking the role of Christ, to the point of being his very image, when he pronounces the words of consecration.”

In *Mulieris Dignitatem* 26, Pope John Paul II wrote:

It is the Eucharist above all that expresses the redemptive act of Christ the Bridegroom towards the Church the Bride. This is clear and unambiguous when the sacramental ministry

of the Eucharist, in which the priest acts "in persona Christi," is performed by a man. This explanation confirms the teaching of the Declaration Inter Insigniores, published at the behest of Paul VI in response to the question concerning the admission of women to the ministerial priesthood.

As I noted in a [previous essay](#), a mere appeal to Scripture or tradition alone will not resolve the question of women's ordination. One has to ask the "Why" question. Sara Butler, author of the definitive text on *The Catholic Priesthood and Women: A Guide to the Teaching of the Church* (Chicago: Hillenbrand Books, 2007) writes: "The answer to the question 'Why?' is bound up with the belief that Holy Orders is a sacrament instituted by Christ, that this intention for the priesthood is shown by way of the mission he gave to the Twelve, and that this office is passed on in apostolic succession" (3). She clarifies the answer to the question "Why?": "Christ chose men as his apostles because it is fitting for a man to take his part, the part of the Bridegroom, in the celebration of the Eucharist, the New Covenant into which he enters with his Bride, the Church" (83). (My emphasis)

Butler summarizes the Catholic position concisely: "The 'theological argument' advanced by the magisterium takes its force from the conviction that the priest *is an image of Christ* face to face with the Church, and this, preeminently in the celebration of the Eucharist, the sacrifice of the New Covenant" (90) (My emphasis). Note that "take his part" and "is an image of Christ" in the above quotations refer to the priest representing Christ the bridegroom by acting *in persona Christi*.

The *in persona Christi* argument is thus not only central to the Catholic position. It is the *fundamental* theological reason why Catholic opponents of women's ordination claim that

women cannot be ordained. In celebrating the Eucharist, a male priest represents a male Christ by acting *in persona Christi*.

Do Catholic appeals to Scripture and tradition represent separate or additional arguments?

As noted in a previous essay, the claim that appeals to Scripture or to the tradition of the church are separate or additional arguments (also used in the *Response's* discussion of the traditional position) misses the crucial difference between a warrant and a theological position. Yes, the Catholic position prioritizes "the historical argument that Jesus only called men to exercise sacramental authority." This is not, however, a separate and distinct argument from the *in persona Christi* argument, but the biblical and historical warrant used to justify that argument. This becomes especially clear in John Paul II's *Mulieris Dignitatem*. First, Christ called only male apostles: "Against the broad background of the 'great mystery' expressed in the spousal relationship between Christ and the Church, it is possible to understand adequately the calling of the 'Twelve.' In calling only men as his Apostles, Christ acted in a completely free and sovereign manner." Second, there is a direct connection between the office of apostle and the celebration of the Eucharist: "Since Christ, in instituting the Eucharist, linked it in such an explicit way to the priestly service of the Apostles, it is legitimate to conclude that he thereby wished to express the relationship between man and woman, between what is 'feminine' and what is 'masculine.'" Third, because the apostles were male, the priest must be male as well in order to represent Christ in the celebration of the Eucharist: "This is clear and unambiguous when the sacramental ministry of the Eucharist, in which the priest acts 'in persona Christi,' is performed by a man."

As Butler writes: "[T]he Church's traditional doctrine regarding Holy Orders . . . has its origin in *Christ's gift to the Twelve* and is handed on by apostolic succession . . . that

the mission entrusted to the ordained includes that of *representing* the Lord" (14). (my emphasis)

The argument from the masculinity of the twelve apostles is not then a distinct argument from the *in persona Christi* argument. For the Catholic position, the first is warrant, the second is theological position, and the two are inseparably linked.

Does the Catholic position agree with Complementarianism in affirming a hierarchical relationship between men and women rooted in authority?

The *Response* claims that the Catholic position agrees with complementarianism based on (1) an appeal to the favorite complementarian proof-text (1 Tim. 2:12) in *Inter Insigniores*, and (2) on two examples from canon law: a priest must be appointed to provide pastoral care of a church without a pastor. Deacons must be male although deacons do not celebrate the Eucharist.

The first objection again misses the crucial distinction between warrant and position. *Inter Insigniores* does have single mention of 1 Tim. 2:12, which states the "prohibition solely concerns the official function of teaching in the Christian assembly." As stated above, however, this occurs in the first part of the document that provides "warrant," not reason. The crucial theological sections of the document (5 & 6) focus exclusively on sacramental theology, and nowhere in this section is there a mention either of a hierarchy of men over women or of an authority of men over women. The word "authority" appears only three times in the document, only two of which are relevant. The first states that the sacrament of orders is not comparable to "modes of authority found in the States." A footnote quotes Vatican II to state that priests "[E]xercising within the limits of their authority the function of Christ as Shepherd and Head . . . the minister of the altar represents the person of Christ as the Head,

offering in the name of all his members.” The focus here is again the *in persona Christi* argument that the priest represents Christ in celebrating the Eucharist. It does not state that the priest’s authority is tied to a hierarchical authority of men over women. (The word “hierarchy” appears not even once in the document. Compare this to the number of references to “authority” and “hierarchy” in the *Response*.)

More revealing of the Catholic position is John Paul II’s *Mulieris Dignitatem*, which endorses an egalitarian interpretation of the passages central to the complementarian case. The Pope points out that the woman’s being taken from the side of the man (Gen. 2:18-25) points to “essential equality of man and woman from the point of view of their humanity.” The woman is a “helper fit for the man” as a “mutual ‘help,’” to which both are called. The Pope interprets Gen. 3: 16 (“Your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you”) as a “break” of original unity,” which “indicates the disturbance and loss of the stability of that fundamental equality which the man and the woman possess in the ‘unity of the two’,” and a “violation” of an original “equality.” In other words, the subordination of the woman to the man is viewed not as part of the creation order, but a consequence of original sin.

John Paul II interprets the commands for wives to submit to their husbands in Eph. 5:22 in light of 5:21 to refer to a “mutual submission out of reverence for Christ . . . However, whereas in the relationship between Christ and the Church the subjection is only on the part of the Church, in the relationship between husband and wife the “subjection” is not one-sided but mutual.”

It is in the next few paragraphs that John Paul II then summarizes the Catholic argument for the ordination of men in terms of the sacramental *in persona Christi* argument. The notion of an authority of men over women appears nowhere in the argument, and would indeed violate the earlier statements

about the subordination of women to men being a consequence of the fall and of "mutual submission" of husband and wife in marriage. Note that the Pope says that the relationship of Christ and the church is not entirely parallel to the relationship between husband and wife because that "subjection is only on the part of the Church," but subjection between husband and wife is "mutual."

Butler actually uses the expression "egalitarian understanding of marriage" to describe the current Catholic position. She states that the "the Pauline teaching of male headship and female subordination and New Testament texts such as Ephesians 5:21-23 "had to be reconsidered" (34). Referring to John Paul II's discussion of Ephesians 5, she writes: "In Christ, the submission is not unilateral but mutual" (37).

Butler's book makes clear that the current Catholic position has nothing to do with a hierarchy of men over women: "Women, as members of the Christian faithful, have acquired new opportunities to exercise leadership; they have access to virtually the same roles as non-ordained men, and on the same basis" (43). She acknowledges that "until quite recently Catholic theologians generally *did* explain the Church's practice, at least in part, by appealing to the differences and the 'hierarchical' ordering of the sexes," and that they appealed to the Pauline texts 1 Cor. 14:34 and 1 Tim. 2:12 (46). Butler refers to Aquinas's position based on his interpretation of 1 Tim. 2:12, stating "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" (47) Concerning the new 1983 Code of Canon Law, she states, "For the most part, the new roles open to women after the Council are identical with the new roles open to non-ordained men . . ." (29) As a result of the revision of the 1983 Code of Canon Law, "women now have essentially the same juridical status as men in the Catholic Church . . . In fact, non-ordained women and men are now

eligible to participate in diocesan synods . . . to serve as diocesan chancellors, professors of philosophy, theology, and canon law in seminaries . . . They can be deputed, in the case of genuine need and on a temporary basis, to supply certain tasks proper to the ordained such as preaching, administering Baptism, witnessing marriages, and assisting in the care of a parish” (31). The office of “[Lay Ecclesial Minister](#)” in the Roman Catholic Church performs many of the same functions that ordained ministers would perform in Protestant Churches, and the majority of lay ecclesial ministers are [women](#).

What then of the two restrictions mentioned in the *Response*? Theologically, given that deacons do not celebrate the Eucharist, there should be no reason in Roman Catholic theology that women could not be deacons. However, historically, the diaconate has always been a transitional stage to the presbyterate. Only in recent decades have married men who do not intend to advance to the priesthood been allowed to become deacons in the Roman Church. Significantly, Pope Francis has recently created a commission to study the question of the possibility of [female deacons](#).

As to the Canon Law that stipulates that pastors of parishes must be priests, based on current Catholic theology of ordination this could *not be* because of a hierarchical understanding of *male* authority over women, since under the restriction, married *male* deacons cannot be pastors of parishes either. Clearly the restriction has to do with the centrality of the Eucharist in Catholic worship. Without a priest to celebrate the Eucharist, there would be no way to celebrate the central mystery of the Catholic liturgy. Anglican churches that ordain women would have the same canonical practice.

Do the Writers of the Response Actually Agree with the Catholic Position?

In light of the above, it should be clear that our own summary

of the Catholic argument against women's ordination was correct, and that the writers of the *Response* were mistaken when they claimed that we "misrepresent the Catholic position" as "being relatively unconcerned about authority and teaching." If we were right, they claim, "a woman would be able to do everything a man can do, short of celebrating the Eucharist." But, as noted above, this is essentially what Sara Butler, the foremost advocate of the Catholic positions claims to be the case: "For the most part, the new roles open to men after the Council are identical with the new roles open to non-ordained men" (29).

Moreover, the writers of the *Response* do not actually agree with the *central argument* of the Catholic position. Although the *in persona Christi* argument is the essential reason Roman Catholic opponents claim that women cannot be ordained, the writers of the *Response* reject a sacramental theology of the priest representing Christ as "sacerdotal."

The current Roman Catholic position on marriage and ministry is, in the words of Butler, "egalitarian." *Mulieris Dignitatem* states that the subordination of women is a consequence of original sin, that is, something to be overcome. To the contrary, the *Response* affirms the complementarian position that female subordination is a permanent "role" established in creation order. Pope John Paul II reads Ephesians 5 to be referring to a "mutual submission" of husband and wife, contrasting the one-sided submission of the Church to Christ with the mutual submission of husband and wife in marriage. The authors of the *Response* to the contrary see the parallel between Christ and the church and the husband and wife as *identical*: "Does Jesus submit to his Church? No. . . Does the Church submit to Jesus? Yes." The implied corollary: "Does the husband submit to his wife? No. Does the wife submit to her husband? Yes.

The initial claim of our essay was that there are actually four positions concerning women's ordination. The traditional

argument against women's ordination was based on a notion of ontological inferiority: (A) above. Insofar as all current positions affirm the ontological equality of men and women and embrace (A1), all of the current positions are *new* positions. In addition, however, the *new* positions do not agree with one another; the Evangelical complementarian position endorses (A1),(B),(C1), while the Catholic position endorses (A1),(B1),C2). Thus, not only are the current arguments against women's ordinations in conflict with the historical position insofar as they reject (A1), they are also in conflict with one another. The Catholic position rejects both (B) and (C1), while the Evangelical Complementarian position rejects (B1) and (C2). Both the Evangelical Complementarian Position and the Catholic Sacramentalist position are just as much innovations as the ordination of women that they oppose, but they disagree with each other as well.

Given what is clearly a discontinuity between the Complementarian position and not only the historic position, but also with the *new* Catholic position, why did the *Response* work so hard to erase the differences – to argue that traditional opposition to women's ordination was really not about the inferiority of women (it was) and that the current Catholic position in opposition to women is not primarily about sacramental representation (it is), but is really about the authority of men over women (it is not)? It seems clear that the primary factors here are not theological so much as rhetorical, and specifically tied to the fallacy of the false dilemma. If the complementarian position is simply *one* position among three contemporary alternatives (it is), if the complementarian position is in fundamental disagreement with the historical reason for ordaining women (it is), if complementarianism is just as much a novelty as is the argument in favor of ordaining women (it is), and if neither of the two contemporary arguments against ordaining women even agree with each other about their reasons for doing so (they don't), then where one comes down on the question of

ordaining women is not so straightforward. One needs to engage in a genuine conversation. However, by conflating the three positions against ordaining women to a single position, by identifying that position with complementarianism, by characterizing the position in favor of ordaining women as the single *new* position, and then caricaturing that position as a rejection of the “plain teaching of the Bible,” of reading 21st century notions of gender equality “into the Bible,” and of believing that an “authoritative interpretation” of texts is not possible, the *Response* is able to identify our own position with the epistemological uncertainties of post-modernism and, in their own words, “progressive theologians,” who “read “a dualistic, detrimentally hierarchical and patriarchal structure into the text.”

Rhetorically, the “fallacy of the false dilemma” lies close at hand. If, however, the choice is not between two false dilemmas, if neither the traditional position nor the Catholic position can be conflated with complementarianism, then perhaps neither can the argument for ordaining women be conflated with post-modern subjectivism after all. Perhaps there is an orthodox Evangelical Catholic argument for the ordination of women that is not a rejection of the “plain teaching of the Bible.” In a future essay, I will discuss an alternative to the false dilemma.

Response to the Anglican Diocese of the Living Word:

Hermeneutics and Complementaryism



I

In previous essays responding to the Anglican Diocese of the Living Word's *Response to Women in Holy Orders*, I have claimed that the dividing issue has primarily to do with hermeneutics, not biblical interpretation. In this essay, I intend to have a more detailed discussion of the hermeneutical process itself, and how it functions in the *Response*, and why I find that problematic. In a later essay, I will discuss an alternative hermeneutic.

Oliver O'Donovan has a helpful discussion of the hermeneutical process in his book *Self, World and Time: Ethics as Theology 1*.¹ The context of the discussion is Christian ethics, but insofar as the issue of women's ordination is a concern about the practical application of Scripture – in light of what the Bible teaches, what should we do? – the concern is the same:

1) "A biblical story, command, or counsel presents us with a train of moral thought, a discursive argument that runs,

though sometimes we need exegetical insight to make it explicit, from some A to some B, led by its practical question . . . and reaching some resolution." That is, at the time the Bible was written, there was some particular reality or situation A; in light of A, the Biblical authors concluded that some action B is the appropriate form of response to this reality (discerning and obeying God's will in this situation).

2) "That whole course of thinking, from A to B, is laid before our attention as we seek to fashion a course of thinking of our own, from some X to some Y, led by our own practical question, observing our own contextual restraints, and finally reaching our resolution to the matter that is our own view." That is, given our own moral or practical issue that needs to be addressed (X), how does the Biblical process from A to B give us guidance to discern what is the proper Y in response to X?

3) O'Donovan is clear that the biblical path from A to B is not negotiable; it is fixed in the text. Nonetheless, "[i]nterpretation has to do with what is already the case about the meaning of Scripture; moral thinking [and other decisions of practical reason such as church order] is not about what is already the case, but about what to do next." That is, exegesis is not hermeneutics; interpretation is not application.

4) "Obedience is a matter of how our own confession is to harmonize with the testimony of Scripture, and it is concerned to achieve a correspondence between the *whole train of thought* of the text from A to B and the *whole train of thought* from X to Y." O'Donovan suggests that we express this in the formula $[A \rightarrow B] \rightarrow [X \rightarrow Y]$. However, obedience is not simply a matter of taking up a conclusion in the manner of $A \rightarrow B \rightarrow Y$, which would shortcut the process of $X \rightarrow Y$; nor is it a simple matter of $A \rightarrow X \rightarrow Y$, working from some general principle or command overlooking how Scripture engages in its own process of what actions A might imply.

O'Donovan gives the example of divorce and remarriage. It is not good enough to proceed from some general principle such as "God approves of lifelong marriage" ($A \rightarrow X \rightarrow Y$) or some command such as "Divorce and remarriage is forbidden by Jesus, and that is the end of the matter" ($B \rightarrow Y$). We must ask the questions: Why is it forbidden? How is it forbidden? What is open and closed by the prohibition? Scripture addresses these questions within the parameters of the ancient world, but we have to ask the same questions within our own pastoral situation: "Nothing will count as 'biblical thinking' but a careful correlation of the complexities of the one situation with the complexities of the other" (79-80).

O'Donovan and others have contrasted the different principles of biblical interpretation used by Anglican Richard Hooker and his Puritan opponents. The Puritans held to what is called the "regulative" principle of interpretation; whatever is not explicitly commanded in Scripture is forbidden. For the Puritans, hermeneutics was a straightforward connection from $A \rightarrow B \rightarrow Y$, or even perhaps $B \rightarrow Y$. Hooker held to what is sometimes called a "normative" or perhaps "permissive" hermeneutic. Whatever the Bible does not prohibit is allowed as long as it is consistent with biblical theological principles. More than that, Hooker insisted that biblical interpretation involved the use of "reason," making crucial distinctions between "natural," "moral" and "positive" laws: "Hooker's advocacy of 'reason' . . . saw it as a hermeneutical servant of the text" (O'Donovan, 77) That is, for Hooker, moral and ecclesial application of Scripture was not a straightforward matter of "Scripture says A; therefore Y."

According to Hooker, not every "positive" law in Scripture is a matter for permanent observance. The interpreter had to discern the purpose of the positive law in its original context, whether it was rooted in "natural" or "moral" law, or was rather of merely historical relevance, and where it fits within the context of both creation and redemption. For

example, the civil laws of the Old Testament would not be binding on modern states, although the moral principles behind them are. Hooker insisted against both Puritans and Roman Catholics that the way in which church order was structured even *in the New Testament* was *not* necessarily binding on the later church. The Puritans insisted that because episcopacy is not explicitly commanded in Scripture, it is *forbidden*; Roman Catholics insisted that episcopacy [including the papacy] is of the *esse* of the church, and therefore *necessary*. Hooker insisted to the contrary (against Puritans) that while episcopacy is not taught explicitly in Scripture, the ecclesial structures that led to episcopacy were present in the New Testament church, and (against Roman Catholics), that although episcopacy is for the good order of the church (*bene esse*), it is not absolutely required.

In addition, the Puritans and Hooker had different notions of how to interpret biblical law. Puritans understood law as “divine command” in line with the “voluntarist” theologies of the late Middle Ages, what is now termed “deontological” ethics. Hooker echoed Thomas Aquinas in endorsing an ontological and teleological notion of biblical law: “virtue ethics.” Law is not simply “divine command,” but reflects both divine and created order. One has not understood the logic of any biblical command until one has understood how the moral principle of the law is rooted in the ontology of creation and redemption, and the teleological goal or purpose behind the law. How does the law lead to human flourishing and salvation? For Hooker, “because the Bible says so” is not an adequate theological hermeneutic.

I would add two additional hermeneutical observations to O'Donovan's discussion. When later generations attempt to read Scripture to help address their own contemporary issues ([A→B]→[X→Y]), a particular biblical text or texts will provide the canonical center that guides interpretation of other passages, what Michael Gorman calls the “master story,”

or what I referred to as “warrant” in a previous essay. In addition, since no interpretation can take place without some kind of interpretive pattern to draw connections, some kind of hermeneutical “paradigm” will operate to provide the key to the interpretation of the “master story” passage. For Gorman, Phil. 2:1-11 is the “master story” for the apostle Paul’s spirituality, and “cruciformity” is the paradigm that Gorman not only draws from the “master story,” but also through which he interprets the rest of Paul’s theology.²

In our original essay, Bishop Grant LeMarquand and myself distinguished between four different hermeneutical responses to the question of women’s ordination: the traditional position of opposition to women’s ordination, which we claimed was based on an ontology of inequality, and three modern positions – egalitarian, Evangelical complementarian, and Catholic sacramentalists – the latter three of which we insisted were all “new” positions insofar as they rejected the presumption of ontological inferiority that lay behind the traditional position. How does each position move from [A→B]→[X→Y], what is its master story (primary biblical resource), and what is its paradigm (key to interpretation)?

Despite the protestations of the *Response*, I demonstrated in the [previous essay](#) that the traditional position opposed the ordination of women because of a perception of ontological inferiority. As I also claimed, the traditional position reflected the economic social structures of all pre-industrial societies.³ Pre-industrial societies are characterized by the following divisions of labor and social structures based in the biological realities that women give birth and breastfeed and men are physically stronger than women:

1) Distinction between public and private spheres of activity: In pre-industrial societies, the home was the primary location of economic activity, and the extended family is the primary source of economic activity. Large families are normative

insofar as children provide labor in agricultural societies. Women's work is necessarily confined to the private sphere because they are often pregnant, but also have to be near children in order to breastfeed and care for children. The public sphere is reserved for men because only men have the freedom to not be near children. Because men are physically stronger, they also do most manual work. Most people are illiterate, but those who are educated tend to be men. In a society in which women were seldom educated and spent little time in the public sphere, men would have tended to think of women as less intelligent.

2) Hierarchy: traditional societies were not so much "patriarchal" (men rule women) as hierarchical. A handful of men rule over every one else: men, women, children, and slaves. There are few "patriarchs," but many slaves.

3) Shame/honor culture. Traditional societies were "group oriented," and behavior was often determined by concerns not to "shame" or "dishonor" one's particular family or social group.

The traditional argument against the ordination of women reflects this division of labor and pre-industrial social structures, as evidenced by John Chrysostom: "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 . . ." (The Kind of Women Who Ought to be Taken as Wives 4).

In the traditional opposition to women's ordination, women cannot be ordained for the following reasons, rooted in traditional pre-industrial culture:

1) Ordination is an activity that takes place in the public sphere; however, the work of women is confined to the private sphere.

2) The ordination of women would disrupt the hierarchy in which some men rule over other men, women, and slaves. Moreover, women cannot exercise authority over men because they are less intelligent than men. (Again, very few women would have been educated).

3) Women cannot be ordained because this would shame the church as a social group within a larger society in which women did not engage in activities in the public sphere.

In terms of theological rationale, the traditional argument against women's ordination was expressed this way:

(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.

(C) There is a direct correlation between (A) and (B). Because of ontological deficiency (A), women cannot exercise authority over or teach men (B), and so cannot be ordained (C).

In this context, what would be the "master story" or biblical text to which male opponents would appeal? And what would be the paradigm? 1 Timothy 2:12 has been the standard proof-text, but as I made clear in the previous essay, this passage was interpreted through the paradigm of points (A) to (C) above.

What is Complementarianism?

As we mentioned in our original essay, following the recognition of the equality of women that followed the industrial revolution, a shift took place in all mainline churches "as churches came to recognize essential equality between men and women, including intellectual and moral

equality.” This meant that the traditional arguments based on women’s intellectual and moral incapacities disappeared. This also meant that all in the discussion now 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.

Two new arguments now appeared against women’s ordination – an Evangelical position designated “complementarianism” and a Catholic sacramental argument. We summarized Protestant “complementarianism” as follows:

Protestant opposition has focused on issues of authority, with preaching and teaching, and arguments focus on the exegesis of scripture. While strongly affirming the intellectual and moral equality of men and women, Protestant “complementarians” insist nonetheless that men and women have different “roles” to play in the church. All “roles” are available to men, but women are denied any “role” that would involve teaching or exercising authority over men. Protestant arguments appeal to biblical passages that seem to affirm (1) a hierarchical understanding of the relation between men and women; (2) forbid women to speak in church; (3) forbid women to teach.

A more detailed outline appeared in my [“Tradition Challenge”](#):

The 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 fulfill, 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.

Note that Complementarians affirm two of the traditional positions originally grounded in traditional pre-industrial social structures: (1) a hierarchical relationship between men and women, and (2) a distinction between private and public "roles."

Complementarianism is also a movement that arose in the mid-twentieth century among traditionalist Calvinist Evangelicals. It thus tends to share three characteristics of Puritan exegesis: (1) a regulative hermeneutic; (2) a deontological "divine command" ethic; (3) a tendency to make a straight hermeneutic move from O'Donovan's A to Y or perhaps B to Y, conflating the exegetical process from A to B, and then jumping from there straight to Y. Complementarians also tend to make the straight move from historical account to hermeneutical normativity: A: there were no women priests in the OT; Jesus had no women apostles; Paul commanded women to be silent, and Paul said that he was not allowing women to teach or exercise authority over men; ergo, → Y: Women cannot hold church office today.

What are the biblical "master story" texts for complementarians, the specific texts in light of which all other texts are interpreted? 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Cor. 14:34b-35 as well as Paul's use of the metaphor "head" in Ephesians 5 and 1 Corinthians 11 interpreted to mean "authority over."

What is the paradigm in light of which the texts are interpreted? The double notions of “hierarchy” and “authority”: There is a hierarchy of relations of authority between the Father and the Son in the Trinity, between God and creation, between Christ and the church, and between men and women, and parents and children. Because men are higher in the hierarchy than women, they exercise authority over women, and the relationship cannot be reversed. Because women cannot exercise authority over men, they cannot be engaged in any authoritative public speaking or teaching (at least in the church), and so cannot be ordained.

Where does the *Response* fit into this discussion? The hermeneutic of the *Response* is boiler-plate complementarianism. This can be seen in the following ways:

1) The master story texts for the *Response* are the same complementarian proof-texts:

1 Tim. 2:18-15 and 1 Cor. 14:34b-35: “These two passages are the major New Testament texts on the relationship between men and women and their respective roles in the corporate or communal life of the church” (74).

Ephesians 5 and 1 Corinthians 11 interpreted in terms of hierarchical “headship” (14, 51-69, 72).

2) The fundamental paradigm is the same: authority and hierarchy. “The presbyter is not primarily an office which corresponds to a skill set but as one called by Christ Himself. In other words, it is constitutive of God’s gracious vocation that the local Church confirms . . . in submission to Christ, according to *His* specific structure of authority” (4). The word “authority” is probably the single most used word in the document. “The relational hierarchy between male and female, established in creation, is crucial for the theology of redemption in the New Testament” (32).

3) The notion of gender “roles,” understood as meaning the

subordination of women to male authority and the distinction between “public” and “private” is the same: “The order of creation, and the responsibilities, conferred on Adam, both indicate a subordinate role for Eve” (28; cf. 13, 14-15, 22, 31, 45, etc.)

4) The authorities cited repeatedly within the document are almost without exception, standard complementarian authors (Wayne Grudem, Douglas Moo, Thomas Schreiner, a commentary series edited by D. A. Carson). Grudem is the most frequently cited author. In contrast, although the authors occasionally cite egalitarian authors, e.g., Richard Bauckham (39), at no point do they actually acknowledge or engage the arguments of these authors. The arguments used in response to our essay are the standard complementarian tropes found particularly in authors such as Grudem, with no acknowledgment that every single one of them has been addressed somewhere in the literature. In reference to the discussion of whether *kephalē* should be interpreted as “authority over,” the authors cite Richard S. Cervin and Alan Johnson, but quite selectively. Cervin and Johnson argue persuasively that Grudem is simply mistaken. Nowhere in the essay is there any mention of standard biblical interpreters such as Ben Witherington III, Anthony Thiselton, Philip B. Payne, Craig Keener, Michael Gorman, Kenneth Bailey, Linda Belleville, and Gordon Fee, all of whom have argued against the complementarian interpretation in numerous commentaries, theological texts, and essays. Our essay included an extensive bibliography. The writers of the *Response* do not interact with any of these sources in our bibliography, and there is no evidence of familiarity with their work. Grudem’s standard arguments are echoed repeatedly in the *Response* with apparently no curiosity about whether they have ever been addressed. They have.

5) Perhaps most telling, when the authors of the text cite studies produced by Protestant churches that have addressed the question of women’s ordination, two of the studies are by

very conservative Presbyterian churches in which a regulative hermeneutic would be normative. The third church is the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. All three of the churches would be at the “far right” of Protestant biblical interpretation. One hesitates to use the word “fundamentalist,” but certainly these churches could be described as what George Hunsinger has designated “enclave.” There is no mention of churches such as the Evangelical Presbyterian Church or the North American Lutheran Church, both of which have an ongoing relationship with Trinity School for Ministry, where Grant LeMarquand and I teach, and both of which ordain women. The only Anglican body cited is the Diocese of Sydney, well known not only for its rejection of women’s ordination, but also for its approval of lay celebration of the Eucharist. The Calvinist leanings of Sydney are not a secret. I would not normally cite Wikipedia as a source, but Wikipedia notes that D. A. Carson (a prominent Reformed complementarian) is a regular visitor to the Sydney Diocese.

Master Passages and Paradigms

I confess that when I first read the *Response*, I was most disappointed by two discoveries. The first, which I have already addressed in an [essay](#), was the misrepresentation of our own views, particularly ascribing to us positions that we do not hold. The second, however, was the discovery that the *Response* is fairly boiler-plate complementarianism. There is nothing new here, and these arguments have been addressed and answered countless times by other scholars. I address most of them at length in my blog essays, and in my upcoming book.

The complementarian case depends on the relationship between the master story and the paradigm. The master story is based on two isolated passages and the interpretation of one metaphor (“head”) in Paul’s epistles. If 1 Tim. 2:18-15 and 1 Cor. 14:34b-35 are not universal prescriptions, but historical descriptions, the case collapses. If Paul’s use of *kephalē*

does not mean “authority over,” the case collapses. If a stronger case could be made from other biblical passages, the complementarian case would not need to place so much weight on these. Other biblical passages and theological themes are interpreted in the light of the paradigm of authority and hierarchy, but these passages provide the master story. If the primary paradigm for ministry is not hierarchy and authority, the case also collapses.

These are not good biblical passages to provide the “master story” or biblical “warrant” for a discussion of women’s ordination:

They are isolated passages and do not directly address the questions of women’s orders at all. The writers of the *Response* admit this – “In fact, neither passage *explicitly* addresses the question of women’s ordination” – but then go on to claim: “because women are prohibited from speaking in public gatherings of the Church they are therefore necessarily excluded from the ordained office of teaching in the Church.” But, of course, neither passage says anything about women speaking in “public” gatherings of the church. Because the passages do not make a distinction between “private” and “public” speaking, the writers of the *Response* necessarily must read into the passages their paradigm of hierarchy and authority, of “public” and “private,” and then proceed to establish the paradigm on the basis of the same passages.

There are good reasons to question whether 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 is not actually an interpolation, not in Paul’s original text. Assuming that it is, the most that can be said with certainty is that it prohibits some kind of disruptive speech by women in the congregation. It cannot be an absolute prohibition of women speaking in the context of worship because the discussion about women’s head coverings in 1 Corinthians 11 concerns the physical garb (or hairstyles) for women to wear when they *are* speaking *publicly* in church. Nothing in the context indicates that either 1 Cor. 14:34-35

or 1 Corinthians 11 has anything to do with women and church orders since there is no discussion of ordained ministry in the passages whatsoever.

1 Timothy 2:12 is not a prescriptive passage, but a descriptive passage. It cannot be an *absolute* prohibition against women teaching (as the writers of *The Response* admit) because at least one of Paul's disciples (Priscilla) was a teacher. The writers of the *Response* make the usual complementarian move of suggesting that Acts 18:26 means that women can only teach in private, but there is nothing in the text to indicate that Priscilla *and* Aquilla's taking Apollos aside had anything to do with a concern about Priscilla being a woman. Moreover, nothing in 1 Timothy 2:12 mentions concerns about women teaching "in public" rather than in private. The writers of the *Response* read this distinction into the text. Again, the passage says nothing about women and ordination. In Paul's actual discussion of the orders of bishops and deacons in 1 Timothy 3, he makes no connection to what he wrote in the previous chapter about women "teaching."

The writers of the *Response* complain that "It is disappointing that [LeMarquand and Witt] offer only a bare and scant assertion [about these passages]." I have written what will be an [entire chapter](#) in my book discussing these passages. But there were two primary reasons that we did not discuss them in depth. We were asked to keep our discussion as short as possible. Despite the affirmations of the writers of the *Response* that these "are perhaps the two most important texts that proponents of women's ordination must address," we regard them as peripheral, and not terribly relevant to the discussion.

The writers want to make the case that the apostle Paul's metaphorical use of the word *kephalē* ("head") in 1 Corinthians 11 and Ephesians 5 must be understood to mean "authority over" (relying heavily on Wayne Grudem), but Grudem's interpretation has been seriously challenged (I will address this in another

essay), and, again, there is no explicit discussion of church office at all in these passages.

“Hierarchy and authority” is not a good paradigm to draw from these passages; nor is it a good paradigm for church ministry. As noted, these passages provide the “master story” for the interpretation of other passages cited by complementarians, in light of which those other passages are then interpreted as being about “hierarchy” and “authority.” Certainly authority is an aspect of church ministry. All representative activity involves some authority. Even an Amish farmer working with other Amish farmers to build a barn exercises some kind of authority. However, a close look at the key passages in Scripture that address relations between men and women or that speak of pastoral practice emphasize servanthood and mutual submission, not authority (Ephesians 5, 2 Cor. 4; 1 Pet. 5:2-4).

Why Complementarianism is Not Good Hermeneutics: Asking the Question “Why”?

As noted above, Oliver O’Donovan suggests that hermeneutical engagement needs to ask such questions as “How?” “Why?” “To what extent?” “What is open and closed?” In addressing the interpretation of passages like 1 Timothy 2:12, it is not enough to simply assert that there is a restriction and that it has to do with authority. Theologically, it is also necessary to ask the question “Why?” Given the complementarian paradigm, “*Why* is there a hierarchy between men and women?” Given that complementarians recognize (indeed insist!) that women are of equal intelligence and competence with men, *why* should men always exercise authority over women? Complementarians never answer this question beyond asserting that it is a matter of “creation order,” and that men and women exercise different “roles.”

The complementarian understanding of a hierarchical relationship between the sexes, of public and private roles,

directly reflects the pattern of pre-industrial relations between the sexes. In pre-industrial societies, the real justification for these structures was economic; however, the theological rationale was based on an ontology of inequality – women were less intelligent than men, subject to temptation, and emotionally unstable – and this rationale provided the answer to both the “why” question as well as to the traditional interpretation of the Pauline passages.

The complementarian case is closely tied to a deontological “divine command” ethic. With the switch to a new understanding of sexual equality following the rise of post-industrial culture, a new rationale is demanded for preservation of pre-industrial hierarchy and male authority. The *new* complementarian rationale is two-fold – a divine command ethic combined with a new notion of “roles.” Note that roles actually exist in the sense that roles correspond to actions, and that people can play different roles depending on their actions. The same person can be both a parent and a progeny. The same person can be both a teacher and a student. But the roles in complementarianism are not based on performed actions, but on states of being. To always be in a state of subordination is not a “role” in the traditional sense, but simply a way of describing personal limitations. The metaphor of “roles” plays the sleight-of-hand role of hiding lack of rationale. To say that women must always be subordinate to men because that is their “role” is simply another way of answering the “why” question by stating that women must always be subordinate to men because women must always be subordinate to men. To appeal to divine revelation here is either to uphold a “divine command” ontology or to admit lack of rationale. Note that such an explanation is demeaning and infantilizing to women.

The authors of the *Response* attempt to address what is a real problem by claiming that “Once home and family is factored in, [LeMarquand’s and Witt’s] claim that complementarians believe

that all 'roles' are open to men, in contrast to all 'roles' not being open to women falls apart. Men cannot be wives or mothers, just as women cannot be husbands or fathers." Certainly this is true, but to be a wife or mother or a husband or father is simply the way to describe the particular manner in which both men and women can be spouses and parents. A male spouse and parent is a husband and a father; a female spouse and parent is a wife and mother. The "role" here is one that is equally shared by both sexes, simply exercised in different ways.

The *Responders'* attempt to qualify the way in which the two sexes have different roles ignores the real issue. For complementarians, men can be husbands and fathers, and men can also be *either* lay persons or clergy. Men can be students, but men can *also* be teachers. Men can listen in the church, but men can *also* speak publicly in church. In the case of women, however, women can be wives and mothers, but women can only be lay persons, *never* clergy. Within the context of worship, women can be students, but women can *never* be teachers. Women can listen in the church, but women can *never* speak publicly. So to be clear, the notion of "roles" applies to only one of the sexes. All roles are open to men, but women have the distinct "role" of being excluded from any role that would imply exercising authority over men.

The second way in which the *Responders* attempt to provide some rationale for ordaining men but never women is by pointing out that ordination is not about skills or competence; it is about *vocation*. In a footnote, they emphasize that office is not simply a function of talents or abilities, that "One is judged by faithfulness, not by the abundance of gifts." But of course, this would be the case for men as well as women. Granted that there is not a direct one-to-one correspondence between gifts and vocation, and that one is judged by faithfulness, not by gifts, why should it be the case that *only* men can find a correspondence between their gifts and

their vocation, that it should be the case that only men are “judged by faithfulness,” that only men can respond to a vocation for ordained ministry? Once one gets past the red herring fallacies here, it becomes clear that the trope of “roles” and the insistence that ministry is about vocation not skills is once more simply an appeal to deontology. Women cannot be ordained because men are in charge and women are not, and men are in charge because women are not in charge. Women cannot be ordained because women cannot be ordained.

In this context, it is significant that for the non-regulative Anglican hermeneutic found in Richard Hooker tied to a teleological ontology rather than a deontological divine command ethic, once one discarded the traditional pre-industrial rationale based on women’s subordination to men based on ontological inferiority, there would be no grounds for refusing to ordain women; the complementarian “master passages” would be understood as historical descriptions, “positive law” addressing a particular historical situation, but not as permanent prohibitions. The notion of “roles” based on some kind of permanent hierarchy between the sexes would make no sense.⁴

¹ (Eerdmans, 2013).

² Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul’s Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

³ See especially, Carrie A. Miles, *The Redemption of Love: Rescuing Marriage and Sexuality from the Economics of a Fallen World* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006).

⁴ See especially Stephen Sykes, “Richard Hooker and the Ordination of Women,” *Unashamed Anglicanism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 81-98.

Response to the Diocese of the Living Word: The Tradition Challenge



T

his is the third essay in a series of responses to the Anglican Diocese of the Living Word's "Response to Women in Holy Orders."

In an essay I wrote a while ago, I laid out what I called the "[Tradition Challenge](#)."

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.

There has been a kind of response to the “Tradition Challenge” by four writers from the Diocese of the Living Word in their *Response* to the essay “Women in Holy Orders,” written by myself and Bishop Grant LeMarquand. They state:

[LeMarquand and Witt] claim that the historic reasons for opposition to the ordination of women depend on the presupposition of ontological inferiority. That is demonstrably untrue. The unifying reason, found in every source that we have examined, is the conviction that Holy Scripture forbids the ordination of women. This reason does not require the ontological inferiority of women, unless one concludes that Scripture teaches the inferiority of women (and it is our conviction that it does not).

In the “Tradition Challenge,” I laid out the “traditional argument” against women’s ordination, and provided evidence for each one of its key propositions:

The Ontological Deficiency Claim

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

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.

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.

I concluded: "Any argument against women's ordination that does not include all three propositions is not the traditional argument, but an innovation."

In the "tradition challenge," I identified three *new* positions concerning the ordination of women – (1) Egalitarians; (2) Evangelical complementarians; (3) Catholic sacramentalists – as new positions because they all reject one or more of (A), (B), or (C). In particular, all differ from the historic position because they 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.

(A1) is directly contrary to (A). I also stated that "I have yet to find a contemporary opponent of WO who will acknowledge that (A) is inherent to the traditional position, but the above citations clearly demonstrate that it is." (I included citations.)

As shown in the quotation from the *Response* above, the writers state that the "claim that the historic reasons for opposition to the ordination of women depend on the presupposition of ontological inferiority . . . is demonstrably untrue." It takes a certain amount of *chutzpah* to make such a statement as our essay included several citations from historical figures that clearly affirm (A), which the *Responders* had to acknowledge. The writers of the *Response* also acknowledge (B) – although they challenge the qualifying last sentence that the exclusion was a general exclusion of women exercising authority, and not restricted to ordination. (I'll address their objection below.)

How then are the *Responders* able to avoid the progression (A) – > (B) –> (C)? By denying (C) “The Inherent Correlation Claim.” Yes, they admit, the Fathers and Medieval writers did indeed affirm (A). (The texts are too clear to deny this.) Yes, the tradition affirms (B), as do the writers of the *Response*; however, they deny (C). According to the writers of the *Response*, the tradition does not derive (B) from (A), but from an entirely different thesis, what we might call:

(A3): “The plain teaching of the Bible.”

The writers reject (A) with the emphatic assertion that (A) has nothing to do with (C), not only for contemporary opponents of the ordination of women, but for the tradition as well. The authors of the *Response* treat (A) as a historical curiosity. Yes, it’s there, but it had nothing to do with the historic opposition to women’s ordination: “Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain!”

A Proof Text is Not a Theological Position

In the previous essay in this series, I argued that the fundamental issue of disagreement concerning women’s ordination primarily has to do with hermeneutics, not exegesis. In what follows, I will argue that the in failing to make two important hermeneutical distinctions, the writers of the *Response* misread the historic reason for opposition to the ordination of women.

A standard distinction in biblical interpretation and hermeneutics is that between “proof-texts,” biblical exegesis, and hermeneutical application. To use a text as a “proof-text” is to cite it in support of a theological position, but not actually to argue from a careful exegesis of the text to make the position. Biblical exegesis is the process of the careful interpretation of the literal sense of the text taking into consideration such things as grammar, immediate textual context, and, when possible, casting light on possible meaning

through other canonical or perhaps cultural parallels. Such interpretation takes into account issues such as genre (narrative, history, poetry, law, prayer, wisdom), the differences between literal and metaphorical uses of speech, the canonical context of the particular text, etc. Hermeneutical application has to do with the contemporary implications of what the biblical authors wrote thousands of years ago.

In the process of biblical interpretation, it is important to recognize differences between how we read a text and how previous interpreters understood it. In the process of examining how past authors have themselves read the Bible, it is crucial to recognize the distinction between a warrant and a theological position. With the exception of heretics (such as the Gnostics) who rejected the authority of at least some parts of the biblical canon, all traditional theologians assumed the authority of Scripture. It is therefore common for later writers (such as the church fathers, medieval theologians, or Protestant Reformers) to refer to a biblical text to support a given theological position. An appeal to Scripture in this way is not in itself a theological position, but rather is used as the warrant in support of such a position. Often the appeal to texts as warrants does not involve careful exegesis of the text; rather the text is being used as a "proof-text" in justification of a position. (Proof-texting is in itself not necessarily a problem – a proof-text can be used as a warrant for a theologically orthodox position; however, citing a proof-text is not exegesis.) One cannot know how a particular biblical passage is understood by an author unless one understands how and why it is being used as a warrant. Different theologians can appeal to the same passage as a warrant to justify different and contrary positions.

To provide an example: different sides during the Arian controversy appealed to John 14:28 ("The Father is greater

than I") as a warrant for different and even contradictory theological positions. For Arius, John 14:28 meant that Jesus had to be a creature because God as Creator is greater than his creatures. For Athanasius, John 14:28 was a warrant for the eternal generation of the Son. The Father is "greater than the Son" in the sense that the Son eternally receives his Deity from the Father. For Augustine of Hippo, John 14:28 refers to the Son as incarnate. In his eternal nature, the Father is *not* greater than the Son, but insofar as the "Word became flesh" and assumed a human nature the Father is "greater than the Son" as human.

Of the three interpretations, Augustine's is probably the most theologically correct. Arius's position is heretical. Although the great defender of Nicene orthodoxy, Athanasius's interpretation of John 14:28 as referring to the Son's eternal generation edges perilously close to the heresy of "subordinationism" – if the Father and the Son share the same nature, the Son's generation from the Father *could not mean* that the Son is "less than" the Father; Augustine's position most closely aligns with Chalcedonian orthodoxy. As divine, the Son is equal to and not less than the Father; as human, the Son is a creature and less than the Father.

What should be clear from the above is that noting the citation of a biblical passage by a traditional author does not tell us anything about his or her actual position unless we understand how the passage is functioning as a warrant. We would not know anything about how Arius, Athanasius, or Augustine interpreted John 14:28 simply because they used it as a warrant for their Christologies. We especially should not presume that the interpretation of any one of these three historical biblical interpreters was the same as that of contemporary biblical interpreters simply because they all cited John 14:28. To be clear, appeal to the same biblical passage does not imply agreement as to the meaning of the passage or as to how it functions as a theological warrant.

Accordingly, it is not enough to refer to an author's appeal to a biblical passage to establish his theological position until we ask the "why" question. How does the passage function as a warrant for this particular author? This is especially important in consideration of passages such as 1 Cor. 14:34 or 1 Tim. 2:12. There is mutual agreement by all interpreters that the apostle is restricting the speech of some women under certain circumstances. There is also agreement that these are not restrictions of the speech of all women under all circumstances. The hermeneutical question that needs to be addressed is "which women under which circumstances?" And, more importantly, "why the restriction?" If a later interpreter appeals to this passage as a warrant for not ordaining women, what is the *reason* behind the writer's use of the passage as a warrant?

In a [previous essay](#), I referred to 1 Cor. 14:34 and 1 Tim. 2:12 as the *last* resort to which opponents of women's ordination often appeal, but also as the *first* resort in less formal settings. It is clear that these two passages are the definitive biblical proof-texts that guide the reading of the authors of the *Response*. On page 4 of the "Preface," we read: "It should humble us when we find that the meaning of a text like 1 Timothy 2:8-15 has remained constant throughout the Church's history, both East and West, Protestant and Catholic." If by this, the writers of the *Response* mean that this has been a standard proof-text for opponents of women's ordination, I would certainly agree. As I wrote in the same essay: "These are also the passages to which those arguing for a subordination of women to men in the history of church tradition have regularly appealed." If by "the meaning of the text," the writers mean however that historical appeals to the text interpreted it in the same way as do modern opponents of women's ordination, they are simply mistaken. As I also wrote: "At the same time, it should be noted that, unlike the repeated complementarian assertions that subordination of women to men does not rest on any inequality, these earlier

writers understood the subordination of women to men to rest on an inherent ontological defect. Women were considered to be less rational, more gullible, and more susceptible to temptation, and thus, were restricted not only from church office. That women were inherently more subject to deception than men was a key reason that theologians historically argued for the subordination of women, but from any position of authority over any men in any sphere whatsoever." I also wrote "Paul is clearly drawing a connection between the order of creation and the deception of the woman, and a connection between the woman's deception and women at Ephesus not exercising authority over men," and "That women were inherently more subject to deception than men was a key reason that theologians historically argued for the subordination of women . . ."

Complementarians have said that the prohibition must be permanent and demands a permanent subordination of women to men because Paul grounds it in creation: "Adam was formed first, then Eve." However, Paul goes on immediately to mention "deception" in v. 14 – "And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner." If the prohibition is permanent and based in creation order, then the reference to deception must also be permanent and based in creation. If the prohibition is permanent and rooted in creation, then the prohibition necessarily implies an ontological inferiority of women to men; women cannot teach or exercise authority over men because, unlike Adam, they are more subject to deception. However, this is not an argument that the writers of the *Response* want to make. They affirm the position of "complementarianism" that women are equal to men in intelligence, but merely exercise different roles. (They state repeatedly that ordination is not based on "skills"). The exegetical appeal is then necessarily selective. The authors affirm part of Paul's statement – that women should not teach because Eve was formed first – but not the second part, that women should not teach because Eve was deceived.

Exegetically, the only way to avoid this dilemma is to recognize that Paul is using the reference to Adam and Eve typologically, as occurs in every other instance in the NT (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:3-4). As Eve was deceived, so the women in Ephesus are in danger of being deceived. They should learn quietly until they are better informed. In the meanwhile, they should not teach or attempt to exercise authority over men.

Historically opponents of women's ordination appealed to 1 Timothy 2:12 as a warrant for opposition to the ordination of women *because* they understand the reference in v. 14 to Eve's "deception" as a fitting description for all women. It is this failure to distinguish between 1 Cor. 14:34 and 1 Tim. 2:12 used as warrants for a theological opposition and the theological position argued for on the basis of that warrant that leads the readers of the *Response* to a misreading of the historical tradition.

The writers are able to claim their their position is the same as the traditional position because they also claim that the church fathers had two *separate* arguments against women's ordination. One was an argument based on ontological inferiority, which they reject, but another separate "biblical argument" based on 1 Timothy 2:12. In so doing the *Response* writers miss the essential distinction between proof-texting, exegesis, and hermeneutics. That two interpreters appeal to the same proof-text does not at all imply that their understanding of the text is the same.

We cannot claim that the mutual appeal of traditional writers and of complementarians to 1 Timothy 2:12 as an argument against women's ordination means that the two positions are the same until we examine the rationale behind the appeal. How does the passage function as a *warrant*? The writers of the *Response* cannot claim that their position is the same as the traditional argument unless it can be shown that traditional writers use 1 Timothy 2:12 as a warrant in the same way they do. Do any traditional opponents of women's ordination

interpret 1 Timothy 2:12 to mean that women are of equal ontological status to men, but cannot teach because men and women have different “roles” founded in creation order? According to traditional interpreters, *why* does Paul prohibit women to speak or to teach men? A reading of what these writers actually say makes it clear that Paul’s prohibition is based on women’s greater capacity for deception, *not* on a mutual equality but different roles. The fathers do appeal to 1 Timothy 2:12, but neither for complementarian nor sacramental reasons.

The *Responders* try to evade this obvious difficulty by trying to distinguish between the fathers’ appeal to 1 Timothy 2:12 as a biblical text – the “plain teaching of the Bible” – and what they call a separate claim, “that women are inferior to men, [which] is to be rejected, because it is without biblical warrant” (p. 14). They concede that Chrysostom “does suggest that women are morally inferior to men.” Concerning Epiphanius, they acknowledge that he states that “Women are unstable, prone to error, and mean spirited.” Concerning Albert the Great (whom they erroneously originally referred to as Alfred the Great, an English king who lived 400 years before Aquinas’s well known teacher) and Aquinas, they suggest that they “did not get this idea [of women’s inferiority] from a biblical source.” They distinguish between this position, which they reject, and Aquinas’s appeal to 1 Timothy 2:12: “His argument literally hinges on the teaching of Holy Scripture on the topic.” Concerning Richard Hooker, they state that Hooker’s position is not one of inferiority because he cites 1 Timothy 2:12. However, they ignore the previous two sentences in which we wrote, “Anglican Divine Richard Hooker wrote of women that their ‘judgments are commonly weakest because of their sex.’ In the marriage service, the practice of women being given to their husbands by their fathers ‘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 . . .’”

This failure to distinguish between warrant and position becomes clear repeatedly in the authors' examination of the traditional writers to whom we referred. We had written concerning Chrysostom:

The church father John Chrysostom laid down the three basic reasons that continued to provide the historical warrants for opposition to the ordination of women in the church's tradition: First, Chrysostom appealed to a basic division of labor that characterized all pre-industrial societies. The work of women is confined to the domestic sphere, while public life is reserved for 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 . . ." These differences are rooted in an intellectual superiority of men over women. It is the work of God's wisdom that the man, who is "skilled at greater things," is useless at "less important ones," and these less important tasks are assigned to women. Second, as a consequence of the fall, women are forbidden to teach: "Why not? Because she taught Adam once and for all, and taught him badly. . . she is subjected to the man and that . . . subjection is because of sin." Third, women have a great tendency to sin, but also to incite to temptation: Bishops need to pay particular attention to the female sex "because of its propensity to sins," and because "the eye, not only of the unchaste, but of the modest woman pierces and disturbs the mind."

The authors agree "that the assumption that women are intellectually or morally inferior to men ought to be rejected outright, as at odds with Scripture." They also disagree with Chrysostom's designation of men's and women's roles as "greater" and "lesser," and they disagree with his not allowing women to serve in public life. On the other hand, they claim to agree with the "basic principle that God has

given men and women different and complementary roles," and that this "basic principle is central to complementarianism." But note that Chrysostom's distinction of men's and women's roles is not based on essential equality and competency, but nonetheless different roles (the "complementarian" position), but on different roles precisely based on inequality and incompetence. Women cannot engage in public roles *because* the male is "skilled at greater things."

Concerning women's capacity to sin, we acknowledged that Chrysostom appealed to 1 Timothy 2:11 here, which he refers to as a warrant. Why is woman not allowed to teach? "*Because* she taught Adam once and for all, and she taught him badly." Chrysostom later says that woman "is subjected to the man and that the subjection is *because* of sin" (my emphasis). The authors see this as proof that Chrysostom "got those ideas from Scripture, as the fundamental historical reason for opposition to the ordination of women." Do the *Responders* believe that Chrysostom got the idea that women should not teach *because* Eve taught Adam "badly," and that woman is "subjected to the man . . . *because* of sin" from Scripture? This is certainly not how contemporary complementarians interpret 1 Timothy 2:11, but if it is the position of the authors, then it confirms our reading – that opposition to women's ordination is based on an ontological inferiority: women should not be ordained because they are more liable to sin. Despite their initial approval of Chrysostom here, the writers of the *Response* then go on to write that "Any suggestion that women are morally inferior to men ought to be vehemently rejected . . . because it is at odds with the Scriptures." But this is precisely the position that Chrysostom derives from his reading of 1 Timothy 2:11! The authors cannot consistently claim to be following Chrysostom's lead concerning 1 Timothy 2:11 when they "vehemently reject" his interpretation of the passage as "at odds with Scripture."

So the authors of the *Response* fundamentally disagree with

Chrysostom. They reject his limitation of women's activity to the private sphere. They reject his claim that different roles of men and women are based on differences in intellectual capacity. They reject his claim that women are subject to men because of sin, they reject his notion that women are more susceptible to temptation, and they reject his interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:11 that women cannot teach because Eve "taught Adam wrongly." The only real area of agreement they have with Chrysostom is that they appeal to the same biblical proof-text. Based on this slim agreement, they claim, "the argument from tradition does not depend on the inferiority of women."

The failure to distinguish between warrant and argument also leads to a serious misreading of Thomas Aquinas. The authors acknowledge that "Aquinas did indicate that women cannot be ordained because the female sex cannot 'signify eminence of degree.'" However, they then claim: "that was not the only reason he gave for his opposition to the ordination of women. His argument literally hinges on the teaching of Scripture on the topic."

Anyone who is familiar with Aquinas's method in the *Summa Theologiae* knows that his argument always follows a pattern in which he raises a question, lists objections to the question, then states his own position, beginning with a *Sed Contra* ("on the contrary") that *always* begins with a biblical quotation. Aquinas then follows with a *Respondeo* ("I answer that"), in which he states his own position as an *exposition* of the biblical text. When Aquinas states that women cannot be ordained because they cannot "signify eminence of degree," this is his answer to the hermeneutical question "Why does Paul prohibit women to teach?" The biblical citation is not "*another reason*"; rather it is the *warrant* for Aquinas's own position that follows. On Aquinas's reading, Paul forbids women to teach because women cannot "signify eminence of degree."

Sara Butler, perhaps the most articulate advocate of the Roman

Catholic position, recognizes the nature of Aquinas's argument: "He offers as scriptural proof the text of 1 Timothy 2:12 . . . What disqualifies a woman, he reasoned, is that she is in a state of subjection, and thus cannot signify 'eminence of degree.'" Butler then continues, "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" (Sara Butler, *The Catholic Priesthood and Women: A Guide to the Teaching of the Church* (Hillebrand Books, 2007), 47).

In a similar manner, the failure to distinguish between warrant and reason leads to a misreading of Richard Hooker. The writers state that "the plain teaching of the Bible [is] the traditional reason," and that Hooker "treats the Bible as his primary objection to the ordination of women." As with the above mentioned church fathers and Aquinas, the authors miss the point of how Hooker appeals to Scripture here. Hooker does indeed cite 1 Tim. 2:12 in the context of whether women should be allowed to baptize. Against the Puritans, Hooker allowed for emergency baptism by women. He then cites 1 Tim. 2:12 and 1 Cor. 14:34 to argue that this does not allow the admission of women to church office. However, Hooker offers no theological *argument*, but the mere assertion that "the Apostle's ordinance was necessary against women's public admission to teach." Hooker only refers to women in two other passages in *The Laws*, and it is here that he articulates the closest thing we can find to an actual theological *reason* for the restriction of women's roles. Hooker suggests that women often become Puritans because their "judgments are commonly weakest because of their sex" (Preface 3.13). In his discussion of the wedding ceremony, Hooker states: "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" (Book 5,

43.5). Insofar as Hooker provides any *reason* why Paul forbids women to teach, it would be because “the very imbecility of their nature and sex doth bind them, namely to be always directed, guided and ordered by others.”

Having shown that the authors were mistaken in their claim that traditional authors do not affirm (A), the “Ontological Deficiency Claim,” I turn to their critique of the part of (B) that claims that the restriction was rooted in a restriction of female authority in general, not simply in the case of ordination.

The authors challenge our claim that the restriction against the ordination of women applied to all activities in which women had authority over men by appealing to a statement in Aquinas that “Deborah exercised authority in temporal, not in priestly matters, even as now woman may have temporal power” and to the fact that Hooker lived during the reign of Elizabeth I. Certainly these are, however, the exceptions that prove the rule. The authors seem to forget that they had already acknowledged that Chrysostom restricted the role of women in the public sphere (they disagreed). The citation from Albert the Great (not Alfred the Great!) with which they disagreed also indicates a general distrust of women, not just ordained women. In an [earlier essay](#), I also cited the Scottish Reformer John Knox, who also appealed to 1 Cor. 14:34 and 1 Tim. 2:12, and then concluded:

The apostle taketh power frome all woman to speake in the assemblie. Ergo he permitteth no woman to rule aboue man. The former parte is euident, whereupon doth the conclusion of necessitie folowe. For he that taketh from woman the least parte of authoritie, dominion or rule, will not permit vnto her that whiche is greatest: But greater it is to reigne aboue realmes and nations, to publish and to make lawes, and to commande men of all estates, and finallie to appoint iudges and ministers, then to speake in the congregation. For her iudgement, sentence, or opinion proposed in the

congregation, may be iudged by all, may be corrected by the learned, and reformed by the godlie. But woman being promoted in souereine authoritie, her lawes must be obeyed, her opinion folowed, and her tyrannie mainteined: supposing that it be expreslie against God, and the prophet [profit] of the common welth, as to[o] manifest experience doth this day witnesse.

I have already dealt with the passage in Aquinas [here](#), to which I refer my readers. How Hooker reconciled Queen Elizabeth's reign with his assertion that women should always be "directed, guided, and ordered by others," I don't know, but the inconsistency is Hooker's, not mine. (It is surprising that Anglicans would seem to have forgotten the history behind Henry VIII's attempt to annul his marriage that led to the eventual separation of the Church of England from Rome. Whatever else one thinks about Elizabeth's reign, a female monarch was not simply a matter of course!)

An Historical Account is not a Prescription

A key factor in Richard Hooker's disagreement with the Puritans about church practices such as episcopacy and written liturgy had to do with hermeneutics – the relationship between what Scripture says and how the church appropriates biblical teaching in a different and historical context. In his discussion, Hooker made an important observation that merely historical statements in Scripture cannot be presumed to provide permanent warrants for later Christian practice: "When that which the word of God doth but deliver historically, we counter without any warrant as if it were legally meant, and so urge it further than we can prove it was intended, do we not add to the laws of God, and make them in number seem more than they are?" (Book III. v. 1)

In a [previous essay](#), I argued that Hooker's hermeneutical principle has relevance for contemporary practice. There is a

hermeneutical danger of confusing a merely historical practice with a warrant, of confusing the historically descriptive with the permanently prescriptive. In the pastoral epistles, Paul is addressing the social setting of first-century Mediterranean culture. The house churches he addressed were patterned along the lines of the Mediterranean household, and Paul assumes that the householder would be male, have children, and manage a household. As noted in our essay, the job requirements Paul gives for officeholders (bishop and deacons) are moral, and there is nothing in the requirements themselves that would provide a theological *warrant* for excluding women from ordination. As I have argued [elsewhere](#), even the prohibition of 1 Timothy 2:12 seems to be addressing a restricted historical context. Paul does not write an imperative, but an indicative “I am not permitting,” and the context indicates a specific concern about dangers of deception in the church at Ephesus.

This failure to distinguish between historical practice and warrant appears in the *Response's* reading of Epiphanius. The writers acknowledge that Epiphanius wrote that “Women are unstable, prone to error, and mean-spirited.” They claim that this is not all that he wrote concerning the ordination of women, however. “Fundamentally, Epiphanius makes a sacramental argument, derived from his reading of Scripture.” They note that Epiphanius “draws a parallel between offering sacrifice and presiding over the sacraments,” claiming “Never at any time has a woman offered sacrifice to God.” Here again, the writers miss the crucial distinction between warrant and position or argument. Epiphanius does indeed appeal to numerous biblical historical examples as precedent. What he does not do, however, is “make a sacramental argument.” To quote from what I wrote [elsewhere](#):

However, Epiphanius is simply appealing to tradition here. He makes no theological argument. At no point does he draw an inherent connection between male priests or apostles and a

sacramental argument concerning the apostles resembling a male Jesus Christ; nor does he attach any significance to the role of male apostles in celebrating the Eucharist. He does, however, provide a kind of warrant for his rejection of women's ordination in the section just preceding, when he refers to the women in the sect against which he is arguing: "And who but women are the teachers of this? Women are unstable, prone to error, and mean-spirited." (Panarion 79.7, 1,6). He goes on to write: "[H]ere the devil has seen fit to disgorge ridiculous teachings from the mouth of women." (Panarion 79.7, 1,7). He precedes the discussion about male priests and apostles . . . by stating:

Now, then, servants of God, let us adopt a manly frame of mind and dispel the madness of these women. The speculation is entirely feminine, and the malady of the deluded Eve all over again . . . [W]e shall have reason to suppose that the minds of these women which have been ensnared by the pride of that snake, are like the ideas of the deceiver . . . Once again he is bringing death on that sex . . . (Panarion 79.7, 2,1-2).

It is only then that Epiphanius continues: "Never at any time has a woman been a priest." (Panarion 79.7, 2,3). Epiphanius' estimate of women is then, the one we have seen already. Women are irrational, emotionally unstable, and subject to temptation.

The same pattern appears in the *Apostolic Constitutions*, which the authors quote. (Interestingly the exact same quotation appears in an earlier essay I wrote, but which Bishop Grant and myself did not quote in our essay. Did the authors of *The Response* simply borrow these quotations from my blog while ignoring what I had actually written about these passages?) The AC seems to conflate 1 Cor. 14:34 and 1 Tim. 2:12: "We do not permit our women to teach in the church," and appeals to

historic precedent, claiming neither Mary the mother of Jesus nor Jesus' female disciples were teachers.

The authors of the *Response* claim that the argument is sacramental because AC states that no women baptized, but as with Epiphanius, this is a mere appeal to historical precedent. The AC says nothing about women not resembling a physical Christ in the administration of the sacraments, which is the sacramental argument. AC's rationale becomes clear in the following: "For if the head of the wife be the man, it is not *reasonable* that the rest of the body should govern the head." Here again, the rationale is the one we have already seen – that of intellectual inferiority. It is not *reasonable* that the body should govern the head. Certainly AC claims biblical precedent, certainly there is a hierarchy based in authority, but it is also clear that the rationale is as we stated. As I wrote on my blog, "It is clear that the concern has to do with the authority of men over women and, a hierarchy rooted in ontological difference [i.e., lesser intelligence], not with administration of the sacraments."

Conclusion

At the conclusion of the "Tradition Challenge," I wrote:

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.

The authors of the *Response* were likely unaware that I had made such a challenge, but they did claim: “[LeMarquand and Witt] claim that the historic reasons for opposition to the ordination of women depend on the presupposition of ontological inferiority. That is demonstrably untrue.”

As I have shown above, the “claim that the historic reasons for opposition to the ordination of women depend on the presupposition of ontological inferiority” is demonstrably *true*. The writers of the *Response* try to avoid the “plain meaning” (I am willing to use that term) of what traditional writers actually give as their reason for opposing the ordination of women by making a distinction between cultural objections (with which they disagree), and appeals particularly to the single biblical proof text of 1 Timothy 2:12. The authors claim that the appeal to Scripture is the *actual* reason behind the traditional opposition, but the argument fails because the authors miss the distinction between *warrant* and reason or position. Specifically, they never examine the manner in which traditional authors actually appeal to 1 Timothy 2:12 as a warrant. Traditional authors believed that women could not be ordained because of an ontological impediment: they were less intelligent than men, more susceptible to temptation, and emotionally unstable. This is the only argument that actually appears in the texts. Certainly traditional opponents appeal to biblical texts. However, traditional opponents of women’s ordination appealed to 1 Timothy 2:12 because they believed it confirmed what they already believed – that women could not teach men because they were less intelligent, and therefore, more easily deceived.

I wrap up by addressing a number of criticisms the *Responders* raise against us that are related to the historical reason for opposition to women’s ordination.

The writers of the response claim that we “grant a disproportionate amount of time to the argument that women are inferior.” But of course the reason for this should be obvious. The inferiority of women is the one argument that appears over and over again in the tradition.

The *Response* complains that our essay promotes a merely “functionalist” understanding of ordination. It does not. They also complain: “Drs. LeMarquand and Witt claim that the historic opposition to the ordination of women was primarily rooted in issues of competence. Simply put, they have not demonstrated that to be the case.” To the contrary, the above demonstrates that it is the tradition that places an emphasis on functionalism. The historic argument against ordination was based on an incapacity of women to do the job. Insofar as the authors of the *Response* insist that ordination is not about “skills,” they make clear that *their* rejection of functionalism is a *new* position.

The authors state: “We will not linger on the claims that the Industrial Revolution influenced contemporary acceptance of the equality of women in the Church. Such a claim would need to be demonstrated, in detail, and, while it might be interesting, is simply not pertinent to our fundamental questions.” Certainly we could not demonstrate such a claim in a short essay, but we did refer the readers to Carrie A. Miles’s book, *The Redemption of Love: Rescuing Marriage and Sexuality from the Economics of a Fallen World* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), which does make the case in detail. That the authors claim the influence of the Industrial Revolution is “simply not pertinent” causes them to miss the significance of the summary of the three basic reasons for the historic opposition to women’s ordination. As we wrote: “Chrysostom appealed to a basic division of labor that characterized all pre-industrial societies.” The authors reject Chrysostom’s “division of labor” and instead insist on a basic equality of men and women. In doing so, however, they again make clear

that their position is a *new* position. The *Responders* complain that “Dr. LeMarquand and Witt have been so influenced by late 20th and early 21st century notions of gender equality that they cannot help but read these notions into the text.” But insofar as the authors of the *Response* themselves affirm the standard complementarian position that men and women are *equal in status*, but only have different roles, they are affirming a notion of “gender equality” that someone like Chrysostom would *not* have endorsed. Certainly Chrysostom would have raised the same accusation against them that they have applied to us – that they have been overly “influenced by late 20th and early 21st century notions of gender equality”!

Finally, insofar as the authors of the *Response* affirm the complementarian position of the equality of the sexes while nonetheless insisting on a hierarchy of “roles,” they embrace a position bordering on incoherence. They affirm a traditional hierarchy that found its origins in the economic structures of all pre-industrial societies; however, they no longer endorse either the historic social structures that were the basis of the hierarchy, nor the rationale that traditional writers such as Chrysostom used to justify that hierarchy. They embrace the hierarchy, but then reject the historical reasons for its existence.

**Response to the Anglican
Diocese of the Living Word
“Response”: It’s about**

Hermeneutics



In reading the *Response* of some writers from the Anglican Diocese of the Living Word to the essay “Women in Holy Orders,” written by Bishop Grant LeMarquand and myself, I was reminded of an interchange between Anglican apologist C. S. Lewis and Episcopal theologian Norman Pittinger seventy years ago. Lewis complained that Pittinger had seriously misrepresented what he had written in his book *Miracles*: “How many times does a man need to say something before he is safe from having said exactly the opposite?”¹ How many indeed?

Are You Now or Have You Ever Been a Post-modernist?

The writers of the *Response* apparently think that Bishop Grant LeMarquand and myself are post-modernists. They ask “What if progressive theologians are actually reading a dualistic, detrimentally hierarchical and patriarchal structure *into* the text before deeming the text void for consideration?” They refer to a “linguistic turn” that “results in the idea that an authoritative interpretation of a text is not possible,” and to a “new consciousness of pluralism, ambiguity, and hope.” Their next sentence reads: “Several hermeneutical factors of this type are at play when Drs. Witt and Marquand (*sic*) argue against what they believe to be the conservative position on the ordination of women” (p. 8).

Of course, neither I nor Grant LeMarquand believe that Scripture contains a “dualistic, detrimentally hierarchical and patriarchal structure.” We would categorically reject such an interpretation of the Bible. Neither do we believe that an authoritative interpretation of a text is “not possible.” We wrote: “Most of all, we contend that there is a substantial body of scriptural reasoning and theological argument in favor of ordaining women as priests. . . . This scriptural witness leads us to believe that the ordination of godly women as leaders in Christ’s church should continue to be authorized . . .” To be clear, if we thought that an authoritative interpretation of a text is “not possible,” it would make no sense for us to claim that “this scriptural witness leads us to believe . . .”

In our summary of Richard Hooker’s position concerning the ordination of women, we wrote:

Anglican Divine Richard Hooker wrote of women that their “judgments are commonly weakest because of their sex.” In the marriage service, the practice of women being given to their husbands by their fathers “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 . . .” Hooker was opposed to women being “ministers in the Church of God,” for the traditional reason: “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.’”

In response, the authors comment that the “traditional reason” that Hooker cites is “not the traditional reason the authors reference,” and “It is nothing short of striking that the authors here identify the plain teaching of the Bible as the traditional reason (undermining their arguments elsewhere), and treat that reason as something to be rejected.”

The immediate context of what we had written makes clear that the “traditional reason” to which we were referring was Hooker’s claim that women’s “judgments are commonly weakest because of their sex,” and that the “very imbecility of women” means that they must always be “directed, guided and ordered by others.” Hooker’s citation of 1 Timothy 2:12 is not the “traditional reason,” but provides a *theological warrant* for what is the traditional reason for Hooker. Hooker appeals to the apostle Paul, but why did Hooker believe that Paul did not permit a woman to teach? Because their “imbecility” demands that they always be “directed, guided and ordered by others.”

I will address this question of the distinction between “theological warrant” and “theological position” in a later essay. But let’s be clear. It is not the case that Bishop Grant or myself reject the “plain teaching of the Bible.” We disagree with Hooker’s *interpretation* of 1 Timothy 2:12. We do not agree that his reading of the passage is the “plain teaching of the Bible.” We also disagree with the “complementarian” interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:12 endorsed by the authors of the *Response*. We do not treat 1 Timothy 2:12 *at length* in our essay – we had been asked to keep the essay as short as possible – but we make clear later on how we understand the text: “It is our contention that these texts (1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:8-15) should be understood as implying that women who are not educated should learn before they become teachers.” We provide a footnote that lists five separate references that argue this position, all written by competent biblical scholars, all of whose theological orthodoxy is above question. Certainly exegetical arguments can be challenged, and the authors of the *Response* are free to make the case that the writers we cite are mistaken in their reading of these two texts. But disagreement about the correct interpretation of a biblical text is a disagreement about *what the text says*, not about whether texts are theologically normative, and certainly not about whether it is even possible for texts to be interpreted. Knowing that

we had written this later in our essay, why do the authors accuse us of treating the “plain teaching of the Bible” as something to be “rejected”?

Moreover, it is clear that the writers themselves do not embrace Hooker’s position. They do not believe that women have weak judgments, or that women need to be guided because of their “imbecility”; they are only able to claim Hooker as an ally by making a distinction between Hooker’s “cultural influences” (which they reject) and his use of the Bible as an authority (which they claim to accept). Parsing Hooker in this way will not work, however, as I will show in a later essay.

C. S. Lewis responded to Pittinger: “I am not for a moment imputing dishonesty to Dr. Pittinger; we all know too well how difficult it is to grasp or retain the substance of a book that one finds antipathetic” (Lewis, 179). Nor do I accuse the writers of the *Response* of being deliberately dishonest. I think that they are convinced that their position is correct, and that it is based on what they call the “plain teaching of the Bible.” Presumably if Bishop Grant and I disagree with them, the only plausible explanation they can imagine for this disagreement would be that we either do not know how to read texts, or we believe that authoritative reading of texts is impossible, or that we reject the “plain teaching of the Bible.” What becomes clear in the writers’ *Response*, however, is that they themselves cannot actually believe that we hold the positions they accuse us of. They don’t really believe that we deny that authoritative interpretation of texts is impossible because they make an attempt to respond to our readings. Moreover, if we were simply rejecting the “plain teaching of the Bible,” there would again be no reason to respond to our readings. They could simply cite the places in our essay in which we had rejected the Bible’s “plain teaching.” Such passages do not exist. Of course, it is conceivably possible that we are simply incompetent in our reading of texts, but we make no pretense to originality. If

we are incompetent so are the many widely recognized biblical scholars we cite in our essay and in the bibliography we supply. It is possible that the biblical scholars that we cite are less capable of reading texts than the writers of the *Response*, but that seems unlikely. However, if none of these three accusations raised against us is true, this might demand a more careful reading of what we had actually written.

It's about Hermeneutics, Not Biblical Authority or Post-Modernism

What accounts for this incoherent reading of our position? First, I think a general antipathy to our position and the assumption that we *must be wrong* has resulted in a tendentious (and mistaken) rather than sympathetic reading of what we had written. The authors set out to refute our position, not understand it, and this is evident throughout the *Response*. Second has to do with a failure to recognize a fundamental distinction between biblical interpretation and hermeneutical application. Although disagreements of biblical interpretation are certainly important in this discussion, I would suggest that the real disagreement between the two of us and the writers of the *Response* has to do primarily with hermeneutics, not *primarily* with the exegesis or interpretation of Scripture. In this essay, I intend to focus on this issue of hermeneutics itself. In a subsequent essay, I will show how a failure to make certain basic hermeneutical distinctions has led the writers of the *Response* not only to misread our essay, but also to misread the historical texts to which we refer. In a third essay, I will argue that the writers' commitment to the hermeneutic of complementarianism has caused them to misinterpret not only our own position, but the Catholic position as well. I will address the actual discussion of biblical texts later.

In an earlier essay (now in my forthcoming book), I wrote:

It is also important to note that there is a crucial

difference between Scripture and tradition on the one hand, and hermeneutics on the other. This is the difference between understanding what the writers of Scripture taught, and what was taught in the traditions of the church (exegesis and church history), and how we address the same issues today in a different ecclesial and cultural setting (hermeneutics and systematic theology). It is the difference between “what did it mean?” and “what does it mean?,” between what Scripture and tradition said then, and how we apply it today. Too many opponents of Women’s ordination think that the question can be resolved by a simple appeal to Scripture or tradition. Protestants will appeal to Paul’s prohibitions against women speaking in church or having authority over men. Catholics will appeal to the church’s tradition of ordaining men, and assume that this settles the question. But the question needs to be addressed theologically. Biblical or historical precedent alone is not a theological argument without addressing the theological reasons behind the precedent.

I note that the writers of the *Response* make both of the assumptions I express concern about here. They presume throughout that a simple appeal to 1 Timothy 2:12 is enough to establish the “plain teaching of the Bible” and to settle the question of women’s ordination. As for the “tradition” argument, in a discussion of Epiphanius, they identify Epiphanius’s mere appeal to church tradition as a “sacramental argument,” when Epiphanius says nothing about sacraments beyond the mere appeal to tradition.

The reason that the ordination of women must be primarily a hermeneutical issue and not simply a matter of biblical exegesis is that no biblical text specifically addresses the issue. The “Preface” to the *Response* insists that ministry and orders are not “secondary matters,” while at the same time acknowledging that churches “may differ greatly as to the nature of their ministry or how it should be constituted.” But certainly the reason that churches “differ greatly as to the

nature of their ministry,” is that Scripture itself says very little about the nature of church order, and what it says is largely descriptive rather than prescriptive. Whether a church should be governed by a Pope with an infallible magisterium, led by bishops, be governed congregationally, or by a presbytery, is not something that can be decided by exegesis alone. If Scripture says little about church order, it says even less about the issue of whether women can hold church office. There are no biblical passages that state: “Women should be ordained,” but neither are there any passages that state “Women should not be ordained.”

It is because Scripture does not specifically address the issue that any arguments either in favor of or against women’s ordination must be inferential, based not on what Scripture specifically says about the issue (nothing), but on the implications of what it says elsewhere about other issues. As I wrote in a previous essay (now in my forthcoming book):

A central issue for the discussion of the biblical texts to which complementarians appeal is the recognition that the crucial issues of disagreement are primarily hermeneutical, not exegetical. There are disagreements about exegetical issues, of course. For example, what did Paul mean by “headship” in 1 Corinthians and Ephesians? Was Junia a female apostle? However, while such issues are important, the key issue has to do with hermeneutics: How does the church apply what we find written in the Bible to our contemporary situation? Both sides agree that in significant portions of the Bible, women are subordinate to men. Both sides agree that St. Paul said in Ephesians that women should submit to their husbands, and elsewhere that women should be silent in church. The larger hermeneutical concerns center around what the significance of certain biblical texts was during the times when Scripture was written, and what their implications are for today.

At the same time, it is misleading to suggest that *opposition* to the ordination of women is simply affirming the “plain teaching of the Bible.” The standard texts to which opponents of women’s ordination appeal are not straightforward in their interpretation. For example:

1) A plain-sense reading of Genesis 3:16 would indicate that the subordination of the woman to the man was a consequence of the fall into sin, yet the authors of the *Response* are certain that this cannot be the case so they appeal to inferential arguments for a subordination rooted in creation. (The authors appeal to standard complementarian authors Thomas Schreiner and Wayne Grudem for what they call “hints” of subordination. “Hints” are not the “plain teaching of the Bible.”)

2) Everyone agrees that the Old Testament priesthood was exclusively male, and Jesus called twelve male apostles. Is this masculinity normative for future leaders of the church? The writers of the *Response* claim that it is, but neither the Old Testament nor Jesus say anything about the gender of presbyters or bishops because neither the Old Testament nor Jesus discuss later church order at all. Nowhere in the NT is there any suggestion that the offices of bishop, presbyter, and deacon are based either on the OT Levitical priesthood or on the model of Jesus’ twelve apostles. So any conclusion drawn from the gender of either Old Testament priesthood or the masculinity of Jesus’ twelve apostles is *necessarily* an inference.

3) After several decades of discussion and debate, probably the majority of contemporary NT exegetes agree that the apostle Paul’s metaphorical use of *kephalē* (translated “head”) in 1 Corinthians 11 and Ephesians 5 should *not* be interpreted as “authority over,” yet the writers of the *Response* rely heavily on the scholarship of a single individual (Wayne Grudem) who reaches his conclusions based on how he claims the word is used in sources *outside of Paul’s own writings* to claim that it definitely means “authority over.”

4) A plain-sense reading of 1 Corinthians 11:10 would indicate that the authority referred to is the authority of the woman – as the majority of contemporary exegetes recognize. Yet for the writers of the *Response*, this *cannot* be the case so the authority *must* be the authority of the man *over* the woman – something mentioned nowhere in the text.

5) A literal reading of 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15 would be that no woman should ever utter speech of any kind in any church (no women in church choirs) or should never under any circumstances teach a man anywhere under any circumstances. Since no interpreter of the text thinks that Paul's ban is absolute in this sense, the hermeneutical question has to address the nature and extent of the restrictions. The authors of the response do not advocate an absolute ban either, so they make the standard "complementarian" qualifications. The restriction on speaking refers to "authoritative exercise in *public* worship." The restriction on teaching refers to "authoritative . . . *public*" teaching. Is it necessary to point out the text says nothing explicit about *public* speaking?

6) If 1 Timothy 2:12 is a permanent ban on women teaching men, then a plain-sense reading of 2:14 should conclude that women cannot teach men because women are more subject to deception than men, but the writers of the *Response* presumably do not want to affirm that! (They repeatedly insist that ordination is not based on "skills.") But even more so, 1 Timothy 2:12 is descriptive, not prescriptive. The apostle does not write "no woman should ever teach a man," but "I am not allowing" Is this a permanent *prohibition* (as the writers of the *Response* claim), or a *description* of a temporary restriction – as Bishop Grant and I believe (and to which I devote an entire chapter in my forthcoming book), and as is argued by the authors we cite.

None of the above are issues that can be decided by the "plain teaching of the Bible," especially of English translations.

The point of the above list of exegetical concerns is not to claim that the writers of the *Response* are wrong in their interpretation of Scripture and that Grant LeMarquand and I are right (I will argue that elsewhere), but that in both cases, we are dealing not with matters of the “plain teaching of the Bible,” but with issues of the interpretation of Scripture, and with hermeneutics, the contemporary implications of what Scripture teaches. All exegetes necessarily engage in a certain amount of speculative interpretation to make sense of these passages, and of their implications for contemporary practice. By using such language as the “plain teaching of the Bible,” the writers of the *Response* misrepresent not only the position of Bishop Grant and myself, but the task they themselves engage in.

It is not the case that there is no discussion of hermeneutics in the *Response*. In particular, the writers appeal to Sarah Coakley for a “more nuanced” approach. The appeal to Coakley is surprising because Coakley not only *endorses* women’s ordination, but has expressed views on gay marriage about which I imagine writers of the *Response* would have some reservations. What they appear to like about Coakley is that she suggests that “theology must be done as an act of contemplative prayer,” and that “Women find their place in the Church, not by flattening out the gender binary, but by setting that binary within the context of the work of the Spirit.” I certainly would not disagree with either of these statements. I have [written](#) (and published) about [prayer as a context](#) for theology, and of [theology as a kind of contemplative discipline](#). I have written at length affirming the [distinction between the sexes](#) and regard this distinction as essential for any understanding of [Christian anthropology](#). The ordination of women does not “flatten” or eliminate the [difference between the sexes](#).

However, even to recognize such differences (again, broadly speaking) between men and women is not an argument against

women's ordination, but for it. The relevant corrective here would again be the apostle Paul's discussion of different gifts within the diversity of the church as the one body of Christ. If there are inherent psychological differences between some women and some men, this would indicate that those women would exercise pastoral ministry differently than those men, but they would do so in a complementary manner to serve the church in a manner in which those men could not. The church should not refuse the pastoral gifts of women because of possible intellectual, emotional, or psychological differences between women and men. To the contrary, the church needs the pastoral gifts of women in order to avoid one-sidedly masculine church leadership.

Where I would disagree with the authors of the *Response* is that one of the crucial differences between men and women would not be that women cannot be ordained, or that there should be some kind of permanent subordination of women to men based on a "creation order" of "headship." This would seem to be a case of the authors presuming that because we do not endorse *their* position, we necessarily must deny any distinctions between men and women whatsoever.

Similarly, another false accusation made in the essay (and a major concern expressed several times) is that we have "argued" that "the nature of the Church is reduced to a *mere functionalism* of 'roles' in one or more of the following: teaching, administration, leading worship and governance." The footnote to which this passage refers is a section in our essay in which we discuss how OT purity laws would have forbidden women from performing "priestly functions," and that "Such concerns about ritual purity would not be relevant for New Testament Christians in light of the fulfillment of Old Testament ritual law by the priesthood of Jesus Christ." Nothing in this statement leads to the conclusion that we propose that "the nature of the Church" in "teaching, administration, leading worship and governance" is a mere

“functionalism of roles,” only that OT purity laws would not be grounds for restriction for those practicing ministry in the NT church. Actually nowhere in the document do we discuss whether we think that NT office is a matter of “function” or perhaps of “ontology.” This is another case of the writers of the essay presuming that because we do not agree with their position we must necessarily ascribe to some other position that they find objectionable, and then assigning that position to us.

This is not the first time in my life when those who have disagreed with me have falsely ascribed positions to me that they are certain I must hold. Because I wrote my dissertation on Jacobus Arminius, at least one Calvinist has assumed that I must be a “Semi-Pelagian.” Because I admire Thomas Aquinas and because of a misinterpretation of my views on sacramental theology, I have known Evangelicals who have accused me of being “Anglo-Catholic” or “sacerdotalist.” Conversely, I have been accused by Roman Catholics, Orthodox, and Anglo-Catholics of being “low-church” and a “Protestant.” I have also been amused to be cited as an “Orthodox” theologian because I wrote a positive blog essay on Cyril of Alexandria. I have been labeled a “Fundamentalist” by Liberal Protestants. I suppose I should not be surprised then if opponents of women’s ordination presume that I can only disagree with them because I am a post-modernist who rejects the “plain teaching of the Bible,” who “flattens out the gender binary,” and who reduces the office of church ministry to a “functionalism” of “roles.” As Lewis wrote in his response to Pittinger, “But if the Patagonians think me a dwarf and the Pygmies a giant, perhaps my stature is in fact fairly unremarkable” (Lewis, 181).

1 C. S. Lewis, “Rejoinder to Dr Pittinger,” *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 178-179.

Concerning Women's Ordination: What about Bonaventure?

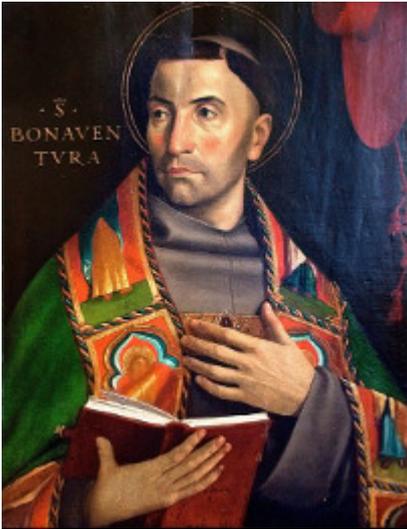
In a comment on the essay by myself and Bishop Grant LeMarquand, "[Women in Holy Orders](#)," someone named Stanislaw referred me to an essay by Sarah Coakley, entitled "In Persona Christi": Gender, Priesthood and the Nuptial Metaphor":

"I was wondering what would you make of Bonaventure's argument that the priest must be male. Sarah Coakley in her "In Persona Christi. Gender, Priesthood and the Nuptial Metaphor" paper (p. 149, pdf available [here](#):) refers to this argument when she discusses Sarah Butler's approach."

My response was too long to put in a comment.

Stanislaw,

I apologize that it has taken me so long to get back to you. Your comment came in the midst of end of the semester paper grading.



Thank you for bringing my attention to this essay by Sarah Coakley as well as the debate between Dennis Ferrar and Sara Butler. I had not been aware of either the Coakley essay or the debate. However, I do own a copy of Sara Butler's *The Catholic Priesthood and Women: A Guide to the Teaching of the Church* (Hillebrand Books, 2007), which I consider to be the definitive defense of what I have called the "new" Roman Catholic argument against the ordination of women. Butler makes one reference to Bonaventure in this book, which I had marked, but missed when I went back to write what became the chapter in my book on the topic of the representative role of Christ as acting *in persona Christi*. Her entire discussion is only a paragraph, which is likely why I missed it on a second reading.

Butler writes:

"The Scholastic theologians explained the impossibility of admitting women to the priesthood on the basis of sacramental signification, but *they did not relate this explicitly to the representation of Christ as a male*. In fact, *Saint Thomas did not do so*" (my emphasis). The reference to Bonaventure comes in two sentences at the end of the paragraph, followed by a quotation:

The declaration follows instead Saint Bonaventure, who argued that priestly ordination is reserved to men because only a

man can be the sign of Christ, who is male. According to Bonaventure,

“In this sacrament the ordained person is the sign of Christ the Mediator; since the Mediator belongs only to the male sex, he can only be represented by the male sex; therefore, the capacity for receiving Orders belongs only to males who alone can represent him by nature and, having received the character, can effectively bear the sign [of Christ].” (pp. 81-82)

That is the sole reference to Bonaventure’s position in the entire book. However, the footnote citation is revealing. I quote it in full: “St. Bonaventure, In IV sent. d. 25, a.2, q.1, conclusion. Any appeal to Bonaventure must be a ‘critical retrieval,’ because his line of argument is not free of ideas *prejudicial to women* (my emphasis). Bonaventure also notes the objection that a woman cannot be advanced to the episcopate because she is not ‘the bridegroom of the Church.’” (note, p. 82)

A passage in the Vatican Declaration *Inter Insigniores* states:

The same conviction [that women cannot be ordained] animates medieval theology⁹, even if the Scholastic doctors, in their desire to clarify by reason the data of faith, often present arguments on this point that modern thought would have difficulty in admitting, or would even rightly reject. Since that period and up till our own time, it can be said that the question has not been raised again for the practice has enjoyed peaceful and universal acceptance.

Footnote 9 to the above in *Inter Insigniores* cites the Bonaventure reference, although no explicit references appear to Bonaventure’s position anywhere in the document.

So I apologize for not having previously noted the Bonaventure

citation, but beg the excuse that it is only a footnote in *Inter Insigniores*, and Butler allows it only a paragraph in her book.

A few brief observations follow.

1) I had stated in "Women in Holy Orders" (I wrote this part):

In light of the above, three things should be noted about traditional opposition to the ordination of women: (1) The opposition is grounded in an ontological incapacity: women can not be ordained because they are considered to be less intelligent than men, emotionally unstable, and subject to temptation; (2) This restriction was not only a restriction against women's ordination, but against any activity in which women would have had authority over men. In accordance with traditional pre-industrial divisions of labor, the roles of women were confined to the domestic sphere, while men worked in the public sphere; (3) Opposition was rooted primarily in issues of competence, and of lack of authority following from lack of competence, not sacramental theology. There are no traditional arguments against the ordination of women based on the inability of women to represent a male Christ when presiding at the Eucharist.

In light of this single citation from Bonaventure, I willingly concede that the last sentence was too strong. There is a single paragraph in Bonaventure's *Commentary on the Sentences* that claims that women cannot be ordained because of an inability to represent a male Christ. At the same time, it needs to be emphasized that this seems to be a single paragraph in the entire history of Western theology prior to the modern period. *Inter Insigniores* itself mentions Bonaventure only in a footnote, and even Butler mentions him only in a single paragraph. (If there are other authors who make the same claim, Butler does not cite them, which I find significant.)

It would be misleading then to suggest that this single paragraph represents the "tradition" of the church. I would rather say (as I wrote of [Luther's own position](#) concerning the equality of women before the fall into sin) that Bonaventure seems to be a single exception to an entire tradition. Bonaventure may have anticipated a position that would be adopted as the definitive Roman Catholic position several hundred years later in the twentieth century, but this single quotation would seem to be a kind of single lonely outlier of things to come.

2) As my citations show, there is a single historic reason for opposition to women's ordination in the history of the church rooted in ontological equality. Although one has to read carefully to notice it, this is acknowledged (rather grudgingly) both by Butler and by *Inter Insigniores*. Butler states that the "Scholastic theologians . . . did not all relate this [impossibility of ordaining women] to the representation of Christ as a male" (81). Elsewhere she writes concerning Aquinas's position: "Many Catholic theologians relied on the teaching of Saint Thomas Aquinas. . . 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" (47). And, as is clear from above, *Inter Insigniores* itself states that the "Scholastic doctors . . . present arguments . . ." that we would "rightly reject."

3) Even the single citation from Bonaventure himself is only partially helpful for the Roman Catholic position because, in the end, Bonaventure still affirms the traditional reason. As Butler acknowledges in her footnote, any appeal to Bonaventure must be a "critical retrieval," because he is "not free of ideas prejudicial to women."

Butler's appeal to Bonaventure here is similar to her appeal to the earlier Epiphanius of Salamis., whom she cites as "arguably the most important piece of patristic testimony"

(61-63). Like Bonaventure, however, Epiphanius is of mixed value. Butler does not mention that Epiphanius states: "Women are unstable, prone to error, and mean-spirited."

4) What about the Sarah Coakley essay? Coakley rightly points to a certain incoherence in Butler's position:

*Butler has to admit a certain defeat where the limit of Thomas's arguments are concerned . . . [S]he has to acknowledge her modern disavowal of the faulty biological argument that finally undergirds Thomas's rejection of the ordination of women; women are not naturally subordinate to men . . . Butler helpfully clarifies that there is an apparent sleight of hand in *Inter Insigniores* in suggesting – albeit briefly – that it is Thomas who makes the argument for the necessary likeness to Christ in the priest's male visage. On the contrary, . . . the fittingness of the male representation in Thomas resides in the man's supposed natural superiority tout court . . . not in his physiological impression; it is a strand in Bonaventure's sacramental theology that is being drawn upon here. (149)*

Indeed, but as noted above, Butler acknowledges in a footnote that Bonaventure also affirms male "natural superiority."

In the rest of the essay, Coakley refers to the influence of Hans Urs von Balthasar's symbolic theology of male and female that has come to buttress some recent Roman Catholic developments. (I have addressed this [elsewhere](#).) However, Balthasar's symbolic gender theology is not helpful for Butler because she insists that "The Magisterium's Judgment Is Not Based on a Theory of Christian Anthropology" (Butler, 46).

In the rest of the essay, Coakley argues that women can be ordained because the priest acts both *in persona ecclesiae* (in the person of the church) as well as *in persona Christi* (in the person of Christ). The same claim has been made by the Roman Catholic theologian Edward J. Kilmartin, S.J., as well

as Orthodox theologians Kallistos Ware and Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, and I have followed [them](#). Coakley goes on to argue for a “proto-erotic” theology of the Eucharist, and what seems to be a kind of gender fluidity for the celebrant. This seems to be an anticipation of the argument in her books *God, Sexuality, and the Self* and *The New Asceticism: Sexuality, Gender and the Quest for God*, which I confess that I do not find helpful. I agree with Jewish writer Tikva Frymer-Kensky that one of the distinctives of the biblical doctrine of God is that God is not eroticized.

Coakley also agrees with the Roman Catholic doctrine of priesthood that “the crucial role of the priest [is] as *medius* between the divine and the human” (152). But, again, this strikes me as wrong-headed. It is the distinctive role of Jesus Christ (the Word Incarnate) to be the sole mediator between God and humanity. Ordained clergy do not have such a mediatory role; the priest is not an *alter Christus*. Rather, the function of the priest is one of abnegation. As representative of the church (acting *in persona ecclesiae*), the ordained presbyter points away from him or herself and his or her own capabilities to the finished work of Christ, who alone is the one mediator between God and humanity.

An Initial Response to the Anglican Diocese of the Living Word’s “Response” to

“Women in Holy Orders”



A couple of years ago, several bishops of the ACNA approached Grant LeMarquand, fellow Professor at Trinity School for Ministry, former Bishop in the Horn of North Africa, and current interim Bishop for the Diocese of the Great Lakes in the ACNA, and myself with the request to write a short summary of the biblical and theological case for women’s ordination to the priesthood (presbyterate). We were asked to keep this as short as possible; initially ten pages was suggested, but the final copy was still only 22 pages, plus bibliography. At that length, we could not attempt a complete argument, but only a summary, which, of course, meant that some concerns could receive only cursory attention, and even where a bit more detail was given, only a few essential points could be mentioned. One of the purposes of the attached bibliography was to point people in the direction of further resources to address some of the questions that such a short summary inevitably would raise.

The document was released only to the House of Bishops, not publicly. The primary reason for this, as an ACNA bishop wrote to me in email, was that the bishops who requested it “didn’t want your work to begin another round of a ‘T I T for T A T’ debate on the blogs.” Both Bishop Grant and I have been frustrated that what we wrote was not made publicly available, but we are also quite aware of the low level of discourse on the internet. As we wrote in the original essay, “In producing this statement we have no desire to be contentious. Our desire is simply to uphold what we believe to be a biblical and godly

practice.” What we intended is expressed in the following paragraph:

The purpose of this paper, therefore, is not to attempt to coerce any diocese into the practice of ordaining women as presbyters. This statement acknowledges that the reasons given for not ordaining women are coherent (although we disagree with them) and that it has the weight of much (but certainly not all) of the history of the church on its side. What the signers of this paper contend is that the argument in favor of ordaining women is also coherent and that there are important arguments in its favor. Most of all, we contend that there is a substantial body of scriptural reasoning and theological argument in favor of ordaining women as priests. This statement will not present every argument which could be made: substantial arguments have been made elsewhere (see the short bibliography attached). Our statement is meant to be merely an outline of the major arguments, especially those from scripture. This scriptural witness leads us to believe that the ordination of godly women as leaders in Christ's church should continue to be authorized in ACNA dioceses that have decided, or may in future decide, in favor of this policy.

I want to emphasize upfront that the purpose of our original essay was not to engage in polemics, but to open up conversation. Although we disagree with those who oppose women's ordination in the church, we assume that they hold their positions in good faith, and that they intend to uphold the teaching of Scripture and church tradition. At the same time, those who affirm the ordination of women also hold their positions in good faith, they intend to uphold the teaching of Scripture and church tradition, and they are not insignificant in number. The majority of dioceses in the Anglican communion affirm the ordination of women, as probably do the majority of historic Reformation churches (Reformed, Lutheran, Anglican, Methodist). The authors we cite in our bibliography are

representative biblical scholars and systematic theologians from numerous church traditions: mainstream Protestants (Lutheran, Reformed, Methodist), Anglicans, and (despite the opposition of their own churches) Roman Catholics and Orthodox. They include some of the most respected and authoritative voices in biblical and theological scholarship of the last two generations. To the best of my knowledge, none of the authors in our bibliography could be characterized as "revisionist," theologically "liberal," or "modernist" in their theological approaches.

When Christians who agree in affirming the sufficiency and primacy of Holy Scripture, embrace the historic creedal faith of the church, value and respect the catholic tradition of the church, agree in upholding the historic moral stances of the church as expressed in Scripture and tradition, yet find themselves in disagreement about a controverted theological issue, the question arises as to how we should go about resolving, or at least acknowledging, disagreement. The approach of a generous evangelical and catholic orthodoxy would be to affirm mutual agreement where it exists, to acknowledge inevitable disagreement, to continue in conversation in hope of resolution of disagreements, but until then to listen respectfully to one another's arguments, and neither to misrepresent another's position, nor to dismiss someone for holding a positions that he or she does not actually hold.

That of course would be the ideal. Unfortunately, far more in keeping with the current spirit of the age would be to echo the pattern of the partisan debates that so frequently poison the rhetoric of the internet. One might not actually accuse those with whom one disagrees of heresy (although this certainly happens), but it is almost as bad to imply that those in the church who disagree with us are either ignorant, scoundrels, or fools, and perhaps all three. One might summarize one's opponent's position in a way that he or she

would not recognize as what he or she actually believes, one could then address one's arguments against those "straw men" positions created by one's own imagination, refute positions not actually held, and then declare victory. Sadly, this has too often been the pattern of disagreement in the history of the Christian church even among those who self-identify as orthodox Christians.

Which leads me back to the topic of the essay written by Bishop Grant and myself. Although we did not release our essay to the public (at the request of the bishops of the ACNA), we were both surprised to discover recently that not only had the document been publicly released (without either of the authors being notified or consulted), but that what we wrote as a short essay and an outline was accompanied by a ["Response"](#) (actually an attempted refutation) that was quite a bit longer than the original essay. The "Response" seems to be an official document of "The Anglican Diocese of the Living Word." The "Response" is anonymous, produced by a "team of four clergy" at the request of the Rt. Rev. Julian Dobbs.

The difference in length between the two documents means that the "Responders" can raise issues or objections of which we certainly would have been aware, and which we might well have addressed in a longer essay, but could not address in a short summary. I myself have written a series of essays on women's ordination that comes to 500 pages of written text, that has been edited and accepted for publication by a major academic religious publisher. There is almost no objection or observation raised in the "Response" that I have not already addressed somewhere in those essays. My immediate temptation is to respond to the "Response" with the suggestion that people can read my response when my book is published in a few months.

Nonetheless, I intend to respond to the "Response." Because of its length, and the numerous issues it raises, I will not be able to do so in a single essay. First, however, I want to

express my concern about the tone of the "Response," which all too often echoes the typical rhetoric of internet debate. Bishop Grant and myself are accused of sharing an "examined bias in the ecclesiology of our culture" ("unexamined bias" was probably meant). The "Responders" refer to "progressive theologians" who read "a dualistic, detrimentally hierarchical and patriarchal structure *into* the text," who embrace a "*linguistic turn* [that] results in the idea that an authoritative interpretation of a text is not possible." They then go on to claim: "Several hermeneutic factors of this type are at play when Drs Witt and Marquand (sic) argue against what they perceive to be the conservative position on the ordination of women." However, neither Bishop Grant nor myself believes or claims that Scripture has a "dualist," "detrimentally hierarchial," or "patriarchal structure." Neither do we believe that "an authoritative interpretation of a text is not possible." The authors of the Response do not offer actual evidence that we engage in "several" such "hermeneutic factors," because we do not, so they cannot. The objection ascribes to us dishonorable motives based on assumptions that we affirm positions that we would actually oppose.

In a similar example, the Responders write that we "have been so influenced by late 20th and early 21st century notions of gender equality that they cannot help but read these notions into the text." One wonders how the Responders know so much about the real sources of our theological views, given that our arguments in the essay are exegetical, historical, and theological, and it is a very short essay. One would be hard-pressed to trace the "influences" behind any twenty-odd page essay.

We are told that the "authors misrepresent the Catholic position," "inaccurately characterize the Catholic position," and that "the authors seriously misrepresent the Catholic argument against the ordination of women." Actually, we

represent the Catholic position correctly, as I will show in a later essay. But “misrepresent” and “seriously misrepresent” speak not to competency, but to honesty. The criticism goes beyond disagreement with our interpretation of texts to accuse us of moral turpitude.

On occasion, the essay puts forth positions that we neither assert nor agree with, addresses them as if they were our positions, and then refutes not something we actually wrote, but rather something else instead. Concerning our discussion of the translation of the word *kephalē* (translated as “head” in Ephesians 5 and 1 Corinthians 11), the Responders claim that use of the word in the LXX means that “they cannot *now* argue that Paul, familiar with the LXX, would be utterly unfamiliar with that usage” (my emphasis). Of course, we argued no such thing, nor would we.

About our claims concerning church tradition, they write: “Their analysis of this reality . . . is so flawed that it can be disproved by appeal to their own sources, as has been demonstrated already.” If our position were “so flawed that it can be disapproved” from our own sources, how could we not have noticed the inconsistency? Here I’m not sure if we’re being accused of stupidity or dishonesty. Again, concerning our reference to Epiphanius and the *Apostolic Constitutions*, they write: “We must conclude that these claims put forward by the authors are simply false.” Again, we are being accused here of either dishonesty or stupidity.

So before I begin to address the actual arguments of the “Response” in later essays, I want to note first my concern about the essay’s tendentious rhetoric. A person who was not theologically trained, and was unfamiliar with the current state of scholarly discussion concerning these issues would inevitably have to conclude that Bishop LeMarquand and myself were either frauds or fools, or more likely both. I myself would certainly not trust anything written by two such scoundrels as Bishop Grant and myself are portrayed to be in

this document.

This is not the first time I have encountered such rhetoric from those opposed to women's ordination. It is unfortunate that those who profess to be orthodox Christians cannot engage in disagreement without casting suspicions on the motives or the competencies of those with whom they disagree. Unfortunately, that is too often the nature of such discussions these days. It is unfortunate that a "Response" to an essay we wrote that began with the statement "We do not desire to be contentious" would itself be not only deliberately contentious, but would question our motives, and accuse us of either poor scholarship or of deliberate misrepresentation. We stated in our original essay: "The use of arguments *ad hominem* (the logical fallacy which attacks the person rather than the position – a form of argumentation which, sadly, have become prevalent on the internet) should be resisted." Unfortunately the writers of the "Response" proved unable to resist. I certainly understand why the ACNA bishops "didn't want your work to begin another round of a 'T I T for T A T' debate on the blogs." Unfortunately, that is exactly what has happened.

My own response to the "Response" will follow in later essays.

Women in Holy Orders:



The following essay was written by Trinity School for Ministry Professor of Missions Bishop Grant LeMarquand and myself at the request of the bishops of the ACNA in August 2018. The bishops asked us not to release the document publicly because they wanted to avoid “another round of a ‘T I T for T A T’ debate on the blogs.” Recently, the document was released along with an accompanying “Response” by the Anglican Diocese of the Living Word (ACNA) without notification to either Bishop Grant or myself. Given that the “blog debate” has already become a reality, there seems little point in holding onto the essay so it appears below. I also intend to respond to the “Response,” likely in more than one essay.

A Biblical and Theological Defense of the Case for Allowing Women to Continue to be Ordained as Presbyters in the Anglican Church of North America

The Rev Dr. Grant LeMarquand and Dr. William G. Witt

On September 7, 2017, the ACNA College of Bishops stated:

Having gratefully received and thoroughly considered the five-year study by the Theological Task Force on Holy Orders, we acknowledge that there are differing principles of ecclesiology and hermeneutics that are acceptable within Anglicanism that may lead to divergent conclusions regarding women’s ordination to the priesthood. However, we also acknowledge that this practice is a recent innovation to Apostolic Tradition and Catholic Order. We agree that there

is insufficient scriptural warrant to accept women's ordination to the priesthood as standard practice throughout the Province. However, we continue to acknowledge that individual dioceses have constitutional authority to ordain women to the priesthood.

Although it had been hoped that their statement would bring a certain amount of peace to the ACNA, which has been divided on the issue of women's orders, in fact the statement generated much heat in the blogs. This paper may also generate some heat simply by virtue of its topic. This, however, is not its purpose. In producing this statement we have no desire to be contentious. Our desire is simply to uphold what we believe to be a biblical and godly practice.

The College of Bishops rightly stated that there are different hermeneutical principles being used by differing groups within the church. This paper, we hope, will make clear that we believe that there is a sufficient weight of evidence in scripture, no persuasive tradition against, and persuasive theological reasons to affirm, that women are called and gifted by God for ordained ministry in the church. The bishops also stated that the ordination of women is "a recent innovation." We would argue that women were serving in ministry positions in the apostolic period. Ordaining women is "a recent innovation" only because the practice of ordaining women was lost to the church and has now been revived. At the same time, any appeal to the "tradition of the church" as an argument against ordaining women should honestly recognize the historical reasons why women were not ordained, and that recent arguments against the ordination of women do not reflect this historical position, but are themselves recent innovations. Further, the bishops stated that there is "insufficient scriptural warrant to accept women's ordination to the priesthood as standard practice throughout the Province." We take this statement to mean that it is not the opinion of the bishops that women's ordination be imposed on

all dioceses. We concur. If some bishops and dioceses are not convinced that women should be ordained, those bishops and dioceses should not be forced to do so.

The purpose of this paper, therefore, is not to attempt to coerce any diocese into the practice of ordaining women as presbyters. This statement acknowledges that the reasons given for not ordaining women are coherent (although we disagree with them) and that it has the weight of much (but certainly not all) of the history of the church on its side. What the signers of this paper contend is that the argument in favor of ordaining women is also coherent and that there are important arguments in its favor. Most of all, we contend that there is a substantial body of scriptural reasoning and theological argument in favor of ordaining women as priests. This statement will not present every argument which could be made: substantial arguments have been made elsewhere (see the short bibliography attached). Our statement is meant to be merely an outline of the major arguments, especially those from scripture. This scriptural witness leads us to believe that the ordination of godly women as leaders in Christ's church should continue to be authorized in ACNA dioceses that have decided, or may in future decide, in favor of this policy.

Because this study is simply an outline of the pro-women's ordination argument, there may be many questions raised which could be answered if there was room for more detail. We commend the bibliography attached as a collection of writings which may help those interested to gain further insight. We would remind any who may comment on this paper to remember that this subject is a sensitive one, both for those in favor of women priests and for those against. By all means, arguments can and should be raised, but arguments should be made against ideas, not people. There is no excuse for dismissing another person's case without evidence. The use of arguments *ad hominem* (the logical fallacy which attacks the person rather than the position – a form of argumentation

which, sadly, have become prevalent on the internet) should be resisted.

Women's Ordination, Church Tradition, and Three Responses

As noted above, the ACNA bishops have stated that women's ordination is a "recent innovation to Apostolic Tradition and Catholic Order." While this claim is true as a historical statement, traditions are only as valid as the reasons on which they are based, and the reasons for the tradition against ordaining women are not difficult to trace. The church father John Chrysostom laid down the three basic reasons that continued to provide the historical warrants for opposition to the ordination of women in the church's tradition: First, Chrysostom appealed to a basic division of labor that characterized all pre-industrial societies. The work of women is confined to the domestic sphere, while public life is reserved for 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 . . ." These differences are rooted in an intellectual superiority of men over women. It is the work of God's wisdom that the man, who is "skilled at greater things," is useless at "less important ones," and these less important tasks are assigned to women. Second, as a consequence of the fall, women are forbidden to teach: "Why not? Because she taught Adam once and for all, and taught him badly. . . . she is subjected to the man and that . . . subjection is because of sin." Third, women have a great tendency to sin, but also to incite to temptation: Bishops need to pay particular attention to the female sex "because of its propensity to sins," and because "the eye, not only of the unchaste, but of the modest woman pierces and disturbs the mind."¹

These three claims were repeatedly combined to provide the historical reason why women were excluded not only from church office, but from any positions of leadership over men whatsoever. Epiphanius of Salamis, who is considered to be the first church father to write against the ordination of women, wrote: "Women are unstable, prone to error, and mean-spirited."² Thomas Aquinas's teacher Albert the Great wrote 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 . . ."³ Aquinas himself wrote of women: "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." Aquinas argued that women could not be ordained because "it is not possible in the female sex to signify eminence of degree, for a woman is in the state of subjection . . ."⁴

Anglican Divine Richard Hooker wrote of women that their "judgments are commonly weakest because of their sex." In the marriage service, the practice of women being given to their husbands by their fathers "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 ..." Hooker was opposed to women being "ministers in the Church of God," for the traditional reason: "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.'"⁵

In light of the above, three things should be noted about traditional opposition to the ordination of women: (1) The opposition is grounded in an ontological incapacity: women can not be ordained because they are considered to be less intelligent than men, emotionally unstable, and subject to temptation; (2) This restriction was not only a restriction against women's ordination, but against any activity in which

women would have had authority over men. In accordance with traditional pre-industrial divisions of labor, the roles of women were confined to the domestic sphere, while men worked in the public sphere; (3) Opposition was rooted primarily in issues of competence, and of lack of authority following from lack of competence, not sacramental theology. There are no traditional arguments against the ordination of women based on the inability of women to represent a male Christ when presiding at the Eucharist. With the rise of the Industrial Revolution in the modern West, a change took place in the traditional division of labor between the sexes. Because no longer tied for biological reasons to primarily domestic tasks, women came to work more and more outside the home, and there arose a corresponding concern for the rights and dignity of women, both inside and outside the church.⁶

In line with this new recognition of the dignity and equality of women, around the middle of the twentieth century, a major shift took place in all mainline churches – Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, and Anglican – as churches came to recognize essential equality between men and women, including intellectual and moral equality. Historical claims about women's inferiority and intellectual and moral incapacity for leadership disappeared. Women came to participate in church life in ways that they had not done before. For example, in the modern Roman Catholic Church, women are now allowed to teach in seminaries, to baptize, and (at least in theory) to perform any church function with the exception of presiding at the Eucharist. Among Anglicans, women now typically serve on vestries and serve as acolytes or altar servers.

Following this shift, three new theological positions appeared in recognition of the equality of women. First, there have been those who recognized that, since the historical reason for refusing to ordain women (inequality) no longer holds, it is permissible to admit women to ordination.

However, there also have been those who, despite the shift

from affirming the inequality to the equality of women and men, continued to insist that women still could not be ordained, and the reasons for opposition break down along confessional lines.

Protestant opposition has focused on issues of authority, with preaching and teaching, and arguments focus on the exegesis of scripture. While strongly affirming the intellectual and moral equality of men and women, Protestant "complementarians" insist nonetheless that men and women have different "roles" to play in the church. All "roles" are available to men, but women are denied any "role" that would involve teaching or exercising authority over men. Protestant arguments appeal to biblical passages that seem to affirm (1) a hierarchical understanding of the relation between men and women; (2) forbid women to speak in church; (3) forbid women to teach.

Catholic opposition focuses rather on the tradition of the church, and issues of sacramental theology. In terms of biblical exegesis, the key issues concern the function of the Old Testament priesthood; the relation between Jesus and his apostles; the kinds of roles women exercised in the church both in the Bible, and in the history of the church. Theologically, the concern is not with women teaching or exercising authority, but with the role of the ordained priest in presiding at the Eucharist. The key argument is that women cannot be ordained because, in presiding at the Eucharist, only a male priest can act "in the person of Christ" (*in persona Christi*). An ordained woman cannot represent a male Christ.

It is important to recognize that all three positions represent "recent innovations" to the church's historical tradition (not only the position that affirms the ordination of women), because all three positions affirm the church's new position regarding the essential equality and dignity of women, but all three reject the church's historical reasons for opposition to the ordination of women.

The Protestant position affirms the traditional hierarchical understanding of the relationship between men and women, and continues to base opposition on grounds of authority. Yet insofar as it affirms the essential moral and intellectual equality of men and women, the Protestant position is in conflict with the historical rationale for sexual hierarchy.

The Catholic position ironically is more in tension with the church's previous tradition insofar as it bases opposition not in issues of hierarchy and authority, but sacramental theology. Although Catholics appeal to the church's tradition, they do not endorse the historical rationale; one does not find arguments in the church fathers against the ordination of women based on a sexual typology in which a male priest resembles a male Christ. These are very recent arguments, and do not appear before the mid-twentieth century.

It is also important to recognize that although both Protestants and Catholics oppose women's ordination, they do so for contrary reasons. Protestants are concerned about issues of authority, not sacramental theology. Catholics allow women to teach and exercise authority, but merely want to restrict liturgical presidency. Anglican identity has made room for both (low church) Evangelicals and (high church) Anglo-Catholics. Because there are those within both groups who oppose women's ordination, one hears echoes of both Protestant and Catholic arguments against women's ordination in Anglican circles. At the same time, it is important to remember that this mutual opposition to women's ordination forms an uneasy alliance because the arguments embraced reflect different ecclesiologies.

Because there are two different kinds of arguments raised against women's ordination, in what follows, we will make our case in a two-fold manner, first addressing those issues of biblical exegesis which are of key concern for Protestants, and then, the issues of sacramental theology that concern Catholics.

Creation

“So God created humanity in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” (Gen 1:27)

These verses from the first Genesis creation story make it clear that God not only made human beings in his image, but that a major part of the concept of being in God’s image is that humans are male and female. Orthodox theology has always affirmed that God is not male but beyond gender. Only a humanity which is both male and female can adequately image God in his world.

Closely related to the statement that humanity, both male and female, is created in God’s image is the mandate given to humanity – the mandate to have authority over God’s creation, to rule as stewards of God’s world. We should note that the text of Genesis is clear that authority to rule is not given to the man alone but to both the man and the woman: “let them have dominion.” Women share with men in the task of ruling creation.

Some will argue (on the basis of the second creation story) that since the woman was created second, and (according to Genesis 2:18-23) since she is called his “helper,” that some kind of leadership is given to the man, implying that an unequal relationship between the genders is built into creation itself. It is true that the Hebrew word (*ezer*) can sometimes imply a hierarchical relationship. This is certainly not always the case, however. At times the “helper” and the one helped are clearly perceived as equals, and in other texts, the “helper” is the superior partner.⁷ In some texts it is even God himself who is described as our “helper.” The context of a given passage must provide the meaning of the word itself. To argue that the word itself implies hierarchy is to fall into the etymological fallacy. In this case the

text does not imply an unequal relationship – both are made in God's image and together given authority to rule creation.

It is also misleading to speak of the woman being created "second." English translations create an ambiguity that does not appear in the original Hebrew. Unlike modern English, Hebrew makes a distinction between the word *ha'adam* (properly translated "the human being" or "humanity") and the word translated "male human being." Gen. 1:28 describes the creation of humanity or humankind (*ha'adam*) in the image of God as male and female. Gen. 2:4 describes (with a deliberate pun) the creation of a single human being (*ha'adam*), whom God creates by taking him from the earth (*ha'adamah*), an earth which he will later cultivate. The name "Adam" does not appear until Genesis 4:25 (or possibly 4:1), and is simply the Hebrew generic name for "human being" (without the article).

Many English translations translate all of these instances of *ha'adam* as "man," but this is misleading if "man" is understood to mean "male human being." The Hebrew word for "male human being" does not appear until Gen. 2:23, when sexuality first enters the picture as the Hebrew word for "man" (male human being) is introduced rather than the generic *ha'adam* as both man and woman are identified as such for the first time: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman ('issa) because she was taken out of Man ('is)." The woman is called "Woman" ('issa) because she is taken from the "Man" ('is), just as he was taken from the earth. The terms 'is and 'issa emphasize the likeness of the man and the woman, the only difference being the corresponding feminine ending for the word 'issa. This does not mean that the first human being in Genesis was an androgyne, but rather that sexuality does not exist except when men and women live in communion with one another. Men exist as men and women as women only as companions of one another. Neither can be complete without the other.

The cry of recognition, "This at last is bone of my bones and

flesh of my flesh," also points to equality and companionship, not to hierarchy or subordination. Some have argued for a hierarchy of authority in that the man "names" the woman, as he had the animals (v. 20), but the man does not "name" the woman, but recognizes her as one like himself. The Hebrew word "call" by itself does not mean "naming." The woman is not named until Gen. 3:20 (after the fall), when she is named "Eve," the "mother of all living." The focus of the creation narratives of Genesis 1 and 2 is on harmony, cooperation, and mutual likeness. There is no hint of hierarchy or subordination of any kind, or any suggestions that the man is to command or be in charge of the woman or she to obey him.[8](#)

Fall

The third chapter of Genesis describes the entry of sin into the world through the human rebellion. Among the many implications of this story is that relations between the genders are damaged. Part of the curse involves an unbalanced hierarchy. The woman is told: "your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." (Genesis 3:16) The hierarchy of genders which is so ingrained in most cultures of the world is not a part of the created order, but a part of the fallen state.

Israel

Israel's story is embedded within the larger story of the world's fallenness, and Israel shares in that sinful reality. Unequal gender relations characterize the life of Israel as well as its neighbors. In the midst of this situation, laws were given which protect women, especially widows, from the power of men. The laws of Israel are, in part, a revelation of God's compassionate and merciful character.

But even in the context of patriarchal Israelite society not all leaders in Israel are men. Women fulfill a multiplicity of leadership roles in the Old Testament narratives. Worship leaders (like Miriam), prophets (like the woman of Tekoa), judges (like Deborah), faithful pray-ers (like Hannah), administrators (see Proverbs 31) are found throughout the Old Testament.

There are of course no women priests in the Old Testament. We must keep in mind, however, that in the Old Testament period there were no priests who were gentiles, or disabled or not from the tribe of Levi. Also significant are the Old Testament purity laws, which would have prohibited women from performing priestly functions for several days at least once a month, and for a significant period after child birth. Many Old Testament temple functions were also periodically scheduled, and women could not be depended on to be ritually pure on each occasion the function needed to be performed. Such concerns about ritual purity would not be relevant for New Testament Christians in light of the fulfillment of Old Testament ritual law by the priesthood of Jesus Christ. We cannot argue on the basis of the Old Testament priesthood being male, that ordination to ministry in the church ought to be restricted to males.

Ministry of Jesus

The story of the New Testament begins with willing participation of a woman, Mary, in the incarnation. Mary the willing servant is also a theologian. The *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55), Mary's song, is re-working of the Song of the Sea in Exodus 15 and Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel.

Another woman, Anna (Luke 2:36), is the first of a number of mentions of women prophets and preachers in the New Testament. Prominent among those who bear apostolic witness to Jesus are

the women disciples named in Luke 8:1-3, women who share in the peripatetic ministry of Jesus. (Luke 8:1-3). Women are virtually the only followers of Jesus who witnessed his crucifixion and his burial. Each of the four gospels name women as the first witnesses of the risen Jesus. Mary Magdalene herself, according to John, used the phrase "I have seen the Lord" (John 20:18). Richard Bauckham's comment is pertinent:

This is exactly what the other disciples later say to Thomas: "We have seen the Lord" ([John] 20:25). In Paul this is the defining content and terminology of the apostolic witness: "Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen the Lord?" (1 Cor 9:1).[9](#)

The work of witness and proclamation by Mary and the other witnesses of Jesus ministry, death, burial and resurrection is apostolic work, apostolic work which continues past the first post-resurrection days into the post-Pentecost period.

The significance of these female disciples of Jesus is often missed or glossed over. They were with Jesus throughout his three years of ministry, they heard his teaching, witnessed his mighty acts and were full participants in the mission work which Jesus sent his disciples to do. All four of the gospel writers are careful to mention the presence of the women at these events.

The significance of these women disciples is well-illustrated in the story of Jesus in the home of Mary and Martha of Bethany where Mary "sat at the Lord's feet" (Luke 10:39). The phrase "sitting at the feet" is code language for the behavior of a disciple who is learning from a Rabbi. The same phrase is used of Paul who "sat at the feet of Gamaliel" (Acts 22:5). Far from being the archetype of a submissive woman, Mary of Bethany is training as a disciple of a Rabbi in order to become a Rabbi herself. (To be a disciple is to take on an

apprenticeship to be a Rabbi; one does not become a disciple merely for one's own personal spiritual benefit.)

Early Church

We learn from the letters of Paul (among other texts) that women had prominent positions in the early church. Several women, for example, are named in the greetings of Romans 16. This is significant since Paul's practice is to greet the leaders of the congregation to whom he is writing. Phoebe is described as a deacon (v. 1) of the church of Cenchreae. It is difficult to assess exactly what the function of deacons was at this stage in the church's history, but at least two of them, Stephen and Philip, have significant preaching ministries. As well as being a "deacon" Phoebe is also described as a "benefactor" (v. 2: *prostatis*). The RSV has the very weak translation of "helper" at this point. A benefactor, rather, is one who provides the material needs for a person or organization. Phoebe is the "patron" (or, rather, "matron") of her church in the suburbs of Corinth. As such it would have been expected for her to preside at the community meal, which for Christians was the Eucharist. Certainly, other benefactors in the Greco-Roman world, who hosted organizations in their homes, would have been expected to host the meal.¹⁰ The next people named are Prisca (or Priscilla) and Aquila, also known to us from the book of Acts. Significantly Prisca is named first, as she is three out of the four times they are mentioned in Acts. This may be because she had the more significant ministry. The two are known to us as the teachers of the already eloquent Apollos (Acts 18:26). Of great importance is v.7. Without going into a thorough exegesis of this often poorly translated text, we argue that this verse mentions Junia (a woman) as an apostle, and not merely an apostle, but one "outstanding among the apostles."¹¹

It is sometimes argued against the notion that women held

church office in the early church that no New Testament text specifically names a woman as holding the office of bishop or presbyter. While this is true, it is also the case that no New Testament text specifically names a man as holding these offices either. Apart from a single reference in 1 Peter 2:25 to Christ as the “bishop/overseer” of your souls, the New Testament nowhere identifies any man by name with these titles. Rather the terms are generally applied to groups, and never to specifically named individuals: presbyters/elders (Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 21:18; 1 Tim. 4:14; 5:17, 19; Tit. 1:5; James 5:14; 1 Pet. 5:1, 5; 2 John 1:1; 3 John 1:2), bishops/overseers (Acts 20:28; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1, 2; Tit. 1:7). The single exception is Phoebe, who is named as a “deacon.”[12](#)

It is also significant that the requirements for overseers (bishops), elders (presbyters), and deacons in the pastoral epistles (1 Timothy 3:1-12; Titus 1:5-9) are moral requirements, not job descriptions. It cannot be coincidental that identical language is used to describe women throughout the pastoral epistles. Even the requirement that the bishop be a “one woman man” (1 Tim. 3:2) (“faithful to his wife,” NIV) is exactly parallel to the requirement that a widow be a “one man woman” (1 Tim. 5:9) (“faithful to her husband,” NIV). The concern here is clearly morally exclusive (no adulterers), not that the bishop must necessarily be a married male.

Finally, we note that in describing the candidate for overseer in 1 Tim. 3, the generic “whoever” (Greek, *tis*) is used: “Whoever(*tis*)aspires to be an overseer (bishop) desires a noble task” (1 Tim. 3:1). Despite misleading English translations, not a single male pronoun appears anywhere in the description in 1 Tim. 3:1-7. Nothing in the qualifications (again, “moral qualifications”) for the role of overseer (bishop), elder (presbyter), or deacon in the pastoral epistles would exclude a woman fulfilling these roles.[13](#)

Resembling Christ

A crucial issue in the discussion concerns the extent to which ordained clergy resemble or represent Jesus Christ. Catholic opponents of women's ordination argue that women cannot be ordained insofar as only a man can represent the male Jesus Christ in presiding at the Eucharist by acting "in the person of Christ" (*in persona Christi*), and so women cannot be ordained because they do not resemble a male Jesus Christ. Conversely, Protestant "complementarian" opponents argue that women cannot be ordained insofar as they do resemble Jesus Christ. The claim is that just as the eternal Son of God is equal but subordinate to the Father, so women are equal to, but nonetheless subordinate to men. (Whether such an eternal subordination of the Son to the Father is orthodox theology is questionable.)

Crucial to the apostle Paul's own understanding of how Christians are to resemble Jesus Christ are two key passages. Philippians 2:6-11 is the "master story" of Paul's cruciform spirituality, in which Paul identifies the love of Christ with a renouncing of status, a "self-emptying" that prefers others over self, being humbled even to the point of death. In the incarnation, the pre-existent Christ submitted himself to a fallen creation by taking on the form of a servant. This "master story" of Christ's self-emptying serves as a paradigm for Christian service: "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus . . ." (v. 5)[14](#)

Paul applies this same notion of cruciform spirituality to his discussion of apostolic ministry in 2 Cor. 4:7-12. Ministers of Christ carry a treasure in jars of clay, carrying in their bodies the death of Jesus so that Jesus' life is manifest in their bodies. This model of cruciform discipleship is the pattern for the manner in which all Christians (both lay and ordained) represent or resemble Jesus Christ.

This notion of cruciform spirituality is crucial for

interpreting two passages that have become key for the discussion of relationships between men and women, and thus women's ordination.

In Ephesians 5:1-6:9, Paul challenges traditional pagan and Jewish "household codes" which typically addressed male householders in their duties to exercise authority over their subordinates (wives, children, and slaves), in the light of cruciform spirituality. In contrast to "household codes" of antiquity, Ephesians 5 focuses on the mutual submission of all Christians to one another, and to the way in which both men and woman resemble Jesus Christ by "walking in love as Christ loved us" (Eph. 5:2; cf. 5:25), by "submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ" (5:21; cf. 5:33).

The duty of each one of the household members is modified in light of Christ's servanthood. Children obey their parents "in the Lord" (6:1). Slaves obey as "servants of Christ" (6:5-7). Fathers do not provoke their children, but "bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (6:4). Masters must recognize that they share a common Master with their slaves (6:9).

The common Christological pattern of 5:2 and the mutual submission of 5:21 are key to understanding what Paul says about the relationship between husbands and wives. The principle verbs addressed to husbands and wives are not specific duties, but are characteristic behaviors expected of all Christians. All Christians are to be filled with the Spirit (1) by singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs (5:19), (2) by giving thanks to God the Father (5:20), (3) by being subject to one another (5:21). (4) Husbands love their wives as Christ loved the church (5:25) in the same way that all Christians walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself for us (5:2). (6) The submission asked of wives is simply the first example of the mutual submission that is expected of all Christians to one another in v. 21. In the same way that husbands are not to love their wives in a manner

distinct from the way in which all Christians walk in Christ's love, so wives are not uniquely to submit to husbands any more than only some Christians should sing psalms and hymns or give thanks to God the Father. (There is no imperative "submit" in v. 22 as many English translations suggest; rather, the verb is supplied from the participle from the previous verse, "submitting to one another" (*hypotassomenoi allēlois*). Significantly, at no point are wives told to "obey" their husbands, or husbands to "exercise authority" over their wives.)

While Ephesians 5 addresses issues of household management, 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 focuses on disruptive worship practices in the church. Scholars do not agree on the particular issue that Paul is addressing, whether women wearing a particular head covering within the context of worship or some kind of hair style (v. 5). There is general agreement on the following: (1) Men and women equally engaged in leading worship in the Corinthian church. Paul is not restricting the public role of women in worship, but insisting that worship practices should not create public scandal. (2) Men and women are not separate from one another, but rather interdependent. There is nothing in the context that indicates that the issue of contention concerned an issue of authority of men over women. Rather, although difficult to interpret (what about the "angels"?), the only verse in the passage that mentions authority (v. 10) actually refers to the woman's own authority. 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." (3) If the first man (Adam) is the source of woman in the Genesis creation narrative, the woman is now the source of all men through childbirth, and God is the ultimate source of both man and woman, who equalizes their standing in Christ (v. 12). (4) That woman is man's glory does not mean that she was created for his purposes or utilitarian ends, but that men and women both need and are mutually dependent on one another (v. 7). (5) Even in the new age of redemption in

Christ, sexual and gender distinctions are maintained; however, that does not mean that one sex is subordinate to the other, but that both are interdependent on and need one another (vs. 11-12).

A key issue of contention for interpretation of both passages is Paul's metaphorical use of the Greek word meaning "head" (*kephalē*) to describe the relationship between men and women in both of these passages. This metaphor is so central to the Protestant argument against women's ordination that "complementarian" opponents of women's ordination use the expression "male headship" to describe their position, even when discussing biblical passages where the word *kephalē* does not occur.

In modern English usage, the metaphor "head" is often used to describe someone who is in a position of authority, as in the "head" of a company, and "complementarians" assume that Paul's use of "head" in these two passages refers to the authority of men over women. However, numerous biblical scholars challenge this assumption for the following reasons. First, they point out that when the Greek LXX translators of the Old Testament translated the Hebrew word for "head" (*rosh*) where it is used literally, they regularly used the Greek word *kephalē*; however, when used as a metaphor for "leader," the translators use words like *archōn* instead, implying that native Greek speakers did not normally understand the metaphor "head" to mean "leader" or "authority." (Out of approximately 180 times when the Hebrew Bible uses the word *rosh* as a metaphor for "leader" or "chieftain," the LXX translates it as *kephalē* only six times.)¹⁵ More important is that Paul's use of the metaphor "head" to describe the relationship between men and women is unique. Paul is also the first example we know of to make a comparison between husband and wife and Christ and the church. Accordingly, the only way to understand what Paul means by "headship" in marriage is to examine the context in which he himself uses the metaphor. (In his most recent list,

complementarian Wayne Grudem appeals to fifty examples of “head” meaning “authority” in ancient culture, but apart from the handful of LXX examples and the apostle Paul’s, which are the point at disagreement, all of his examples are from the LXX until he lists Josephus, Philo, and Plutarch (all first or second century), and are military or political examples of “one to many” leadership.[17](#)

The Catholic Argument

As noted above, the Protestant argument against women’s ordination has focused on biblical exegesis concerning issues of authority, whether women should teach men, and whether they should preach from the pulpit. In contrast, the Catholic argument focuses rather on sacramental theology, specifically, whether a woman can preside at the celebration of the Eucharist.

The Catholic argument relies on four claims:

1) The Tradition of the Church: The ordination of women is an innovation; throughout its history, the church has never ordained women. To ordain women is to depart from the tradition of the church.

2) A Male Apostolate: Insofar as the Catholic position appeals to scripture, it appeals to the exclusively male priesthood of the Old Testament, and to the male apostolate of the New Testament. Although Jesus had women followers, Jesus called only men to belong to the circle of the Twelve Apostles. Since bishops are successors of the apostles, bishops (and other clergy) must be male. To ordain women is to abandon the biblical pattern for ministerial leadership.

3) The Role of the Presiding Minister: In presiding at the Eucharist, the ordained presbyter acts “in the person of” or

“represents” the male Jesus Christ (*in persona Christi*). As the church which is the bride of Christ is symbolically female, so the presiding minister must be male in order symbolically to represent Jesus Christ as the groom and head of the church, which is his body. To ordain women is to distort the nuptial imagery of Christ as groom and the church as bride.

4) Although the Vatican’s own arguments were not based on an anthropology concerning differences between the sexes, some have argued against women’s ordination from a sexual typology based on the contrast between male transcendence and female immanence. As God the Father is the transcendent Creator, so only male priests can represent divine transcendence, while women represent the receptive faith of the church. The apostle Peter represents the active male role of clergy, while the virgin Mary represents the female receptive faith of the laity. To ordain women is to overthrow this male/female gender symbolism.

The Tradition of the Church

The issue of church tradition has already been addressed above. While it is true that there has been a tradition against ordaining women in the church, the historical rationale behind this practice was based on a perceived ontological incapacity: women were less intelligent than men, emotionally unstable, and more subject to temptation. Moreover, opposition was not to women’s ordination as such, but to women exercising any role of authority over men, whether in the church or elsewhere. The church fathers did not oppose the ordination of women based on liturgical concerns about sacramental representation, but rather concerns about female leadership. Insofar as modern Catholic opponents of women’s ordination appeal to church tradition while neither endorsing the historical reasons for opposition to women’s

ordination (concerns about authority) nor their warrant (a perceived ontological inferiority of women), nor their scope of restriction (women were not excluded merely from ordination but from any position of leadership or authority), the position is selective at best. The modern Catholic appeal to tradition endorses a historical practice while disregarding its historical rationale

A Male Apostolate

Concerns about a male-only Old Testament priesthood have been addressed above. The Old Testament priesthood was restricted not only to males, but to Jewish descendants of the tribe of Levi. Moreover, Old Testament concerns about ritual "uncleanness" would necessarily have excluded women from the priesthood. The application of Old Testament restrictions to Christian clergy would exclude from ordination not only women, but also all non-Jewish clergy who are not linear descendants of Moses' brother Aaron.

In a similar way, Jesus' reasons for having chosen only male Apostles are evident from the New Testament texts. Jesus chose male Apostles for the same reason that he chose twelve Apostles and Jewish Apostles. Insofar as Jesus' followers represent the new Israel, Jesus' twelve Apostles typologically represent the twelve tribes of Israel, and, specifically, the twelve patriarchs (sons of Jacob/Israel) from whom the nation of Israel was descended. In the new age, the Apostles will have a special role in judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30). The book of Revelation records that the New Jerusalem has twelve gates on which are written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, and twelve foundations on which are written the names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb (Rev. 21:12-14). Gentile inclusion in the church rests on the foundation of the (Jewish) twelve Apostles and on the (Hebrew) prophets (Eph. 2:11, 19-21). At his Last Supper,

Jesus, present with his twelve Apostles, reconstituted the Passover as a meal of bread and wine in which he formed a new covenant. It is at this last meal where Jesus pronounced the role of the twelve in judging Israel (Luke 22:14-30; cf Jer. 31:31-34). The twelve had to be Jewish males, and not slaves, women, or Gentiles, in order to fulfill the symbolic function of their typological role.

Bishops and presbyters may be successors of the original twelve Apostles, but they are not themselves Apostles because they do not play the same exclusive role as eyewitnesses to the ministry and resurrection of Jesus (Matt. 12:28; Acts 1:8, 21-22; 1 Cor. 9:1), and they do not play the same role of typological fulfillment of OT themes. There is no more theological warrant for contemporary clergy to be symbolically male than for them to be Jewish or to be twelve in number.

Representatives of Christ

The historical understanding of the essential role of the ordained Clergy consists in a ministry of proclamation of the Word and duly administering the sacraments.¹⁸ The background to a theology of worship and ordained ministry is found first in the New Testament. The New Testament portrays Jesus' theological identity using the Old Testament symbolism of priest, sacrifice, and temple, emphasizing three aspects of a Christian theology of priesthood and sacrifice: (1) the priesthood and sacrifice of Christ (Mark 10:45; Matt. 20:28; John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7; Rom. 3:25; Heb. 2:17, 7:27, etc.); (2) Christians as a new temple (1 Cor. 6:19-20); (3) the priesthood and sacrifice of all Christians (Rom. 12:1; 1 Pet. 2:4-5, 2:9). The New Testament does not use the word "priest" to refer to church office, and refers to Christian priesthood and sacrifice "not in acts of ritual and liturgical worship but in the practical, ethical sphere of the lived Christian life."¹⁹

The church fathers largely repeat the three key themes of the New Testament writings concerning priesthood and sacrifice although there is little discussion of them for the first millennium: (1) Jesus Christ is both high priest and sacrifice; (2) there is a sacrificial context to Jesus' Last Supper, and there are the beginnings of a notion of "eucharistic sacrifice" – not that the Eucharist is a "repetition" of Christ's once-and-for-all sacrifice, but that, in the celebration of the Eucharist, the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice is "remembered" in such a way that it is "made present" or re-enacted. In the words of Chrysostom, "it is not another sacrifice . . . but the same." (3) The church fathers speak of the priesthood of all Christians, which they interpret in spiritual and moral terms; (4) Writers assume some kind of relationship between the priesthood of Christ, and the priesthood of ordained clergy. When the celebrant presides at the Eucharist, he is presiding over a "sacrificial" action. At the same time, in the earliest examples, the sacrificial action is not understood to be the liturgical rite itself, but the prayer of the celebrant and the community. Missing from the writings of the church fathers is any detailed discussion of a relationship between Christ's priesthood and the priesthood of the ordained clergy.²⁰ There is no warrant in the writings of the church fathers for the claim that the church should exclude women from ordination because the ordained priest represents Christ, and only a male can represent Christ.

During the early Middle Ages, Latin theologians taught that only the universal Catholic church was able to celebrate the Eucharist. The priest who presided at the Eucharist was understood to represent the whole church when he acted as the liturgical leader of the local church. Later, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) was the key figure in the development of the notion that, in celebrating the Eucharist, the priest acts "in the person of Christ" (*in persona Christi*), as representing Christ to the church.²¹ In his earliest discussion of

eucharistic theology (in his Commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*), Aquinas claimed that the priest proclaims the eucharistic prayer in the name of the church and represents the church. In the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas developed two key themes of sacramental theology. First is the notion of "sacramental character," which is, primarily, the character of Jesus Christ as the incarnate "image" of God the Father (Heb. 1:3), and which enables all the baptized to partake in worship through participation in Christ's priesthood, and through which they come to resemble Christ. Aquinas identifies sacramental character as the "character of Christ . . . to whose character the faithful are likened," through their participation in Christ's priesthood.²² Second, Aquinas's understanding of Eucharistic theology built on his theology of baptism to suggest that (in Aristotelian terms), just as the matter of baptism is water and the form is the trinitarian baptismal formula ("I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit"), so in the Eucharist, the matter is the elements of bread and wine and the form is Jesus Christ's "words of institution" spoken at the Last Supper: ("This is my body"; "This is the cup of my blood"). Aquinas insisted that the words alone were sufficient because, in reciting the words, the priest is speaking the very words of Jesus Christ, and thus acting as a representative of, or "in the person" of Christ" (*in persona Christi*).²³

This understanding of the priest as consecrating the Eucharist when he recites the "words of institution" (and thus acts as a representative of Christ) came to dominate eucharistic theology in the Western Church following Aquinas's formulation, not only in the Roman Catholic Church, but also at least implicitly in Protestant churches, as shown in those churches in which the Lord's Supper consists of nothing more than the pastor reciting the narrative of the Last Supper.

This Western understanding of Eucharistic theology led to conflict in the fourteenth century over the Orthodox inclusion

of the *epiclesis*, a prayer for the invocation of the Holy Spirit that occurs in Eastern eucharistic prayers following the account of the Last Supper, but was missing from the Western Latin mass, and demonstrated a fundamental difference in Western and Eastern understandings of the role of the ordained priest in celebrating the Eucharist. Theologically, the disagreement boils down to the question of whether the presiding minister acts in the person of Christ (*in persona Christi*) and thus represents Jesus Christ or, rather, when in invoking the Holy Spirit in the *epiclesis*, the presiding minister, praying on behalf of the congregation to invoke the Holy Spirit, represents the church, and thus acts in the person of the church (*in persona ecclesiae*).[24](#)

Aquinas himself says nothing about the need for the ordained priest to be male in the context of the ordained priest acting *in persona Christi*. To the contrary, if the priest must be male in order to participate in Christ's priesthood or to resemble Christ, then it would seem to follow that only males can be baptized because Aquinas locates the sacramental character of both baptism and the Eucharist (which makes worship possible) in a participation in the priesthood of Christ in which he insists that all the baptized participate.

Nevertheless, the Roman Catholic Church came to embrace a new argument against the ordination of women rooted in an *in persona Christi* sacramental theology that first appeared in the Vatican's Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's *Inter Insigniores* ("Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood") with the approval of Pope Paul VI in 1976. The Congregation stated that the priest represents Christ, who acts through him when he says the "words of institution": "[T]he priest, who alone has the power to perform [the Eucharist], then acts not only through the effective power conferred on him by Christ, but *in persona Christi*, taking the role of Christ, to the point of being his very image, when he pronounces the words of

consecration.” The document drew the conclusion that only a male priest can represent Christ in this way because Jesus Christ is a male: “[W]hen Christ’s role in the Eucharist is to be expressed sacramentally, there would not be this ‘natural resemblance’ which must exist between Christ and his minister if the role of Christ were not taken by a man: in such a case it would be difficult to see in the minister the image of Christ. For Christ himself was and remains a man.”