

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



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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Provide an actual historical reference from the Christian tradition that corresponds to what I have called the Complementarian or Sacramentalist positions.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.