

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

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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

androgynous, 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."