

Why

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## Why doesn't the Church Ordain Women?

Jesus did not tell His church not to ordain women, any more than He told it not to ordain gay men or to bless same-sex "marriages". However, what He *did* and *did not do* is more important than what he *said* or *did not say* on such matters, especially when they only became issues centuries after He spoke. He selected twelve *men* to receive Apostolic authority, bypassing many devout women and other men. As to why, we can look for clues in various parts of the Bible and in Jewish law.

### The Order of Creation.

The creation story begins with chaos: "The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep."<sup>1</sup> God imposed order by sending forth his Word and his Spirit<sup>2</sup> so all three Persons of the Holy Trinity are involved in the creation.<sup>3</sup> Already we have hierarchy which is essential to order. The Trinity has order: the Father initiates, the Son obeys, and the Spirit goes forth. But hierarchy does not imply inequality, as the first preface for Trinity Sunday clearly indicates.<sup>4</sup>

The full Trinitarian doctrine did not develop until after the Canon of Scripture closed but the elements are present in the baptism of Jesus and in such passages as: "God has put all things in subjection under his feet",<sup>5</sup> "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me",<sup>6</sup> "The Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing",<sup>7</sup> "I and the Father are one",<sup>8</sup> "My Father is greater than I."<sup>9</sup>

This concept of equality within hierarchy is important for the understanding of the relationship between male and female in the order of creation, because "God created man in his own image. In the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."<sup>10</sup>

Where God is a community of Persons, united in love, equal in glory, but ordered hierarchically, then the basic human community, a man and a woman united in love and equal in glory, must also be ordered hierarchically. And so it is.

28. However, for some centuries past, in a departure from the Church's original practice, both the Orthodox and Roman Catholics have ordained only unmarried bishops.

29. Lk.1: 38 (RSV).

30. Mt. 28:16-20 (RSV).

31. Acts 2:14 (RSV).

32. *Ibid.* v. 15.

33. Mt. 22:14 (RSV).

34. Acts 4:34.

35. Acts 8:26-40.

36. *See* Titus 1:5.

37. I Cor. 11: 3-7.

38. Rom. 16:1.

39. Eph. 5:21ff; I Pt. 3:1-7.

40. Jn. 15:18, 19; Lk.6:26; Lk. 22:25, 26.

41. I Cor. 14:33-36.

42. Acts 16:15.

43. Acts 16:31-33.

44. I Pt. 3:1, 2.

45. I Tim. 2:12.

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*tion from the Old Covenant to the New, the hereditary requirement was laid aside but the male requirement was not.*

*Humans' spiritual lives have always been strongly influenced by imagery and symbolism. Tthe imagery and symbolism of the Church suggest a masculine role for the priesthood, not a feminine one.*

*Although women were available who could have served as witnesses to Christ's life, work, and teaching, He chose only men to be His Apostles and after Him those Apostles chose only men to succeed themselves.*

*Accepting women's ordination concedes the dubious propositions both of males and females' interchangeable roles and of modern culture's legitimacy as both source of and criterion for Revelation.*

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1. Gen. 1:2 (RSV).

2. Gen. 1:2,3 (RSV).

3. See the opening verses of St. John's Gospel.

4. The Book of Common Prayer (1928), p. 79.

5. I Cor. 15:27 (RSV), quoting Ps. 8:6.

6. Mt. 28:18 (RSV).

7. Jn.5:19 (RSV).

8. Jn. 10:30 (RSV).

9. Jn.14:28 (RSV).

10. Gen. 1:27 (RSV).

11. Gen.2:18 (RSV).

12. Gen. 18 (RSV).

13. Gen. 2:23 (RSV).

14. Gen 2:18-23 (RSV).

15. I Cor. 15:22a (RSV).

16. Gen. 3:5-6.

17. Gen. 2:25 (RSV).

18. I Cor. 15:22 (RSV).

19. Eph. 5:23 (RSV).

20. See Article VII "Of the Old Testament" of the *Articles of Religion*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 604 (PECUSA 1928).

21. Gen. 2:16.

22. I Kings 11:1-8.

23. I Kings 16:29-33.

24. Heb. 5:6, quoting Ps. 110:6 (RSV).

25. Gen. 14:18.

26. Gen. 12:3 *alt.* (RSV).

27. I Tim. 3:2.

In the second creation story, God forms "the adam" from dirt. Notice the definite article: *Adam* is not a proper name but simply the Hebrew word for dirt. The *adam* is the earth creature but no one earth creature can truly reflect the image of God, who is a community of love. So God says, "It is not good that the man [generic] should be alone. I will make him a helper fit for him."<sup>12</sup>

The *adam* names all the animals. In the Bible, naming is always a superior's act, exercising headship over a subordinate. As parents name their children and humans name their pets, so God renames people when He takes headship over them: Abram to Abraham, Jacob to Israel, Simon to Peter.

Human authority over animals is stated directly in the first creation account<sup>11</sup> but symbolically in the second, as the *adam* gives the animals their names. In the second account, the man gives the woman her name,<sup>13</sup> thus claiming headship over her.

The removal of the rib to form the helpmate divides the *adam* into male and female but emphasizes that both are of the same substance, "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh",<sup>14</sup> as opposed to the animals who are subordinate to both Adam and Eve (now proper names) and not equal in glory with them.

*The Scriptural account of creation reveals that order is an essential property of the created order. While hierarchy is necessary to order, properly understood hierarchy does not imply any inequality in God's eyes.*

### **Headship.**

Headship is part of hierarchy. The word appears in terms like "Head of State", "head of the household", and "head of the tribe". The head may be the source, as we speak of a river's headwaters, but more important is the head's function. The head leads in the sense of giving direction to the body, be it family, state, tribe, or church. The head also speaks for the body to the outside world. Moreover, the head is responsible for the welfare of body. Responsibility and authority are always coterminous: more of one means more of the other.

The head's successes and failures reverberate throughout the body. If the head prospers, the body prospers. If the head fails in his duty, the whole body suffers. If the head is glorified, the whole body shares the glory. If the head is shamed, the whole body shares that shame.

Adam is the head of the fallen human race (natural man). Thus Paul says "as in Adam all die",<sup>15</sup> *not* "as in Eve all die", even though she was the first to disobey. She stepped out of her place in the order of creation both by following the serpent's leadership, an animal over whom she had authority, and by desiring to be the equal of God.<sup>16</sup> But God addresses Adam, as head of the family, and holds him responsible. In following his wife instead of leading and correcting her, he brought shame and death on himself as well as the whole race of which he is the head. "The two of them were no longer naked and unashamed as they were in the original creation".<sup>17</sup>

But Christ, the second Adam, is the head of a new creation. So the Apostle says "As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive."<sup>18</sup> Baptism transfers us from the headship of Adam to the headship of Christ, so we become the beneficiaries both of Christ's Resurrection and also His glorification.

Christ exercises his headship not as a tyrant but as one who lays down his own life for the sake of the body. As head of the family, a Christian man is expected to do the same for his wife and children. So Paul says, "The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church."<sup>19</sup>

Finally, Biblical headship is exclusively male. This is not explained but it is a fact. It would not have been possible for the Second Person of the Trinity to become incarnate as a woman, for then he could not have been the second Adam and the head of a new race. The statue of "Christa" in New York's Cathedral of St. John the Divine would be laughable if it were not blasphemous.

The large number of female household heads today indicates the family's dysfunction and is largely the fault of the men who do not live up to their responsibilities.

an agreement (The Peace of Augsburg) that every ruler's subject would follow his faith.

This same concept supports infant baptism. Lydia, a wealthy, unmarried businesswoman with servants, was the head of her household. When she was baptized, that household was baptized with her<sup>42</sup> as was that of the jailer.<sup>43</sup>

Many pagan wives became Christians, but how could they be Christians and remain under the headship of pagan husbands? Both Sts. Peter and Paul held that they should remain with their husbands and try to convert them.<sup>44</sup> St. Paul adamantly forbids women to occupy positions of authority over men or to teach in the church,<sup>45</sup> although they may teach children or other women.

*In the end, in addition to all the other drawbacks to accepting women's ordination, doing so concedes the dubious propositions both of males and females' interchangeable roles and of modern culture's legitimacy as both source of and criterion for Revelation.*

### Summary

*The Scriptural account of creation reveals that order is an essential property of the created order. While hierarchy is necessary to order, properly understood hierarchy does not imply any inequality in God's eyes.*

*Headship is part of hierarchy, which is necessary to the "order" of creation which brought order out of chaos.*

*God's plan for the living portion of creation requires that men and women be neither identical nor interchangeable, but that each be necessary to the other.*

*Sexuality is an essential property of the higher animal forms of created life, including human life. The fact of sexuality inevitably leads to different rôles for most men as compared with most women.*

*The Israelites' hereditary priesthood of married men was one important distinction between them and the surrounding pagans who had unmarried priests and, especially, priestesses. In the transi-*

### Some Troublesome Passages

In one passage, St. Paul requires women to wear a head covering.<sup>38</sup> Some question about women has been asked, which Paul is answering. His word “*gune*” can mean any woman but usually means a married woman. An unmarried woman is presumed to be a virgin (*parthenos*) or, as we might say, a “maiden”. If she is not married and is not a virgin, she is considered a prostitute (*porne*).

Since Paul bases the requirement for a head covering on the concept of headship and hierarchy, it represents women’s position in the family structure: they are under their husbands’ authority and protection. Both Paul and Peter wrote of this.<sup>39</sup> If a woman wears no head covering in public, she is following Eve’s disobedience and disrupting the order of creation.

But this passage is counter-cultural. Women today see it as demeaning and irrelevant to current conditions, just as they see the absence of women in the priesthood as demeaning and irrelevant to modern times. However, the Catholic Church has always been, and is intended to be, counter-cultural, just as Jesus said<sup>40</sup> and just like the Jews of the Old Testament.

Another passage requires women to be silent in church.<sup>41</sup> Obviously they may pray (with heads covered) and presumably may sing and say the Amens and other responses. What they may not do is preach or teach or interrupt the teacher with questions.

Again, how should we translate the word “*gune*”? This reference is to married women and the husband, as head of the household, is the designated spokesman for the family. The wife should not try to take that duty and privilege away from him which would lower his status and bring shame on him as well as her. Once again, this is counter-cultural in today’s world.

Part of headship is the body’s adopting the head’s religion. When Constantine became a Christian, the whole empire became Christian, at least in name. When missionaries converted the head of a European tribe, the whole tribe marched through the river to be baptized *en mass*. The 16<sup>th</sup> Century religious wars were settled by

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### Natural Law.

Men and women are commanded to be fruitful and multiply, which requires them to cooperate, each sex contributing its unique functions to the other. They are neither identical nor interchangeable. Similarly, the Persons of the Holy Trinity, in whose image men and women are created, are neither identical nor interchangeable. This innate aspect of creation is referred to as “natural law” and is universally applicable, as opposed to the ceremonial and dietary aspects (but not the moral aspects) of Mosaic Law.<sup>20</sup>

*God’s plan for the living portion of creation requires that men and women be neither identical nor interchangeable, but that each be necessary to the other.*

### Sexuality.

*Sexuality* is not the same as *gender*. *Sexuality* is a biological, a physical, and to some extent a psychological, property of people. They can be either male or female. *Gender* is a grammatical construct that applies to nouns, pronouns, and adjectives. They can be masculine, feminine, or neuter. People are not words, so they do not have gender.

Males are commonly referred to by or associated with masculine nouns and pronouns, and females by or with feminine nouns or pronouns. Inanimate objects often, but not always, have neuter referents. In German the word for “wife” is neuter.

In English, grammatical gender survives only in personal pronouns. “He”, “him”, and “his” are masculine. “She”, “her”, and “hers” are feminine. “It”, “it”, and “its” are neuter. To use the masculine pronoun when referring to God does not imply that God possesses sexuality. Likewise, it is common to refer to a ship with a feminine pronoun but that does not imply that a ship has genitals.

Similarly, the church is referred to with feminine nouns and pronouns. She is “mother church” and “the bride of Christ”.

Men and women both have estrogen and testosterone but in different proportions. Testosterone tends to make males more aggressive, more daring, and more action-oriented as well as bigger and stronger. Estrogen tends to make females more passive, more cautious, and more verbally-oriented as well as smaller and softer.

It isn't always that way in individual relationships. There are sexually aggressive females and sexually passive males; the female does not always respond well to the male's initiatives. God did say, however, that the woman should desire her husband<sup>21</sup> and generally the biology is reflected in the psychology.

There are also more subtle differences. Socially, men tend to gather in one room and women in another. They do not have the same interests: men like action movies and sports, women like "chick flicks" and clothes. Women notice little things about people that men don't even see. Women can identify twelve different shades of purple; men see only primary colors.

The balance varies with the individual but very few females have enough testosterone to command a following of strong men. As the old song says, "The strong obey when a strong man shows them the way." Practically, this means that the more women have charge of congregations, the more the congregations are comprised of women and effeminate men.

Men and women are not interchangeable; some roles are more suited to men than to women and *vice versa*. "Gays" argue that men and women are interchangeable; they and their feminist allies have convinced society that traditionally male rôles should be open to women and that language should be neutered sexually. It is a small step from that to letting a man play the rôle of a bride or a woman play the rôle of a groom.

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*diakonos*, or servants. They thus created the second order of ordained ministry after their own: the Order of Deacons.

Soon the authority to preach and to baptize was extended to deacons. Stephen, the first martyr, was a Deacon and so was Philip, who evangelized and baptized the Ethiopian eunuch.<sup>35</sup> Deacons still read the Gospel at Mass, prepare the elements for consecration, call the people to repentance (invitation to confession) and assist in the distribution of the consecrated elements.

Paul later delegated Apostolic authority to both Timothy and Titus, including the power to ordain "elders" or "presbyters" (from a Greek word meaning "an old man").<sup>36</sup> As the Ordinal in the 1928 Book of Common Prayer shows, ordination delegates increasing portions of apostolic authority to Bishops, Presbyters (Priests), and Deacons, according to their respective positions in the Church's hierarchy of headship.

The growing Church needed further offices which Paul listed as "gifts" but which came to be called "minor orders". In one instance a woman named Phoebe is called "*diakanon*" of the church in Cenchrea; she is entrusted with carrying Paul's letter to the church in Rome.<sup>37</sup> How should that word be translated? Grammatically it can be either masculine or feminine. It means a servant but was appropriated for the order of deacons. So was Phoebe a deacon, a deaconess as the RSV translates it, or simply a servant as the King James Version has it?

The Canon of Holy Scripture was not finally closed until after the Apostles' deaths and their deaths are one reason for assembling and closing that Canon. Possibly some writings of early Bishops like Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp may actually predate the closing of the Canon. These writings shed light on the development of the concept of Apostolic Succession and the development of the Episcopal office.

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baptize and (3) instruct.<sup>30</sup> They were also assured of the Christ's abiding presence, which was evidenced by the descent of the Holy Spirit upon each of them at Pentecost.

Acts does not say that only the twelve were gathered in one place and saw tongues of fire about their heads, but Luke does say that Peter stood "with the eleven"<sup>31</sup> and that all who had received the gift of tongues (the reversal of the fragmentation of Babel) were men.<sup>32</sup> The miter is symbolic of the tongues of fire and only bishops wear it. There were many disciples but only twelve original Apostles: "Many are called but few are chosen."<sup>33</sup>

The Apostles exercised headship in several ways. First they decided to fill Judas' place among them, forfeited when he betrayed Jesus. Many bishops have followed in his footsteps. The Apostles selected two men from fellow disciples who had witnessed Jesus' Resurrection.

The candidates were both men even though many women also fit the criteria and women were the first witnesses of the Resurrection. The Apostles thus exercised the power to pass on the Apostolic authority that Jesus had conferred on them. This may be the first instance of "Apostolic succession" but it is not the last. The Apostolic circle was increased by the addition of Paul and Barnabas, Silas, James the brother of Jesus, and others -- all men.

It was Peter, "standing with the other eleven" who addressed the crowd at Pentecost as spokesman for all the disciples. Serving as spokesman for the body is a function of the headship.

In his address, or sermon, Peter identified the work of the Holy Spirit and distinguished it from the work of too much wine. These days when everybody claims to follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit, we really need men with Apostolic authority to exercise that aspect of headship.

The Apostles were also in charge of what we might call the first welfare program -- the collection of money in a central treasury (a task once performed by Judas) and the distribution of the daily ration of food.<sup>34</sup> They delegated that to seven men who were called

## **Priesthood.**

The ancient Jews were always counter-cultural. Monotheistic Abraham was surrounded by idolaters and polytheists. Moses was given dietary and other laws to distinguish Jews from their neighbors. God told Joshua to kill his captives to prevent their intermingling with the Jews and contaminating them with pagan religions. These tended to be fertility cults, headed by female deities whose temples featured priestesses and sacred prostitution.

Israel often failed to keep God's Commandments but twice she (note the feminine pronoun) fell especially deeply into apostasy. Once Solomon, the head of state, brought pagan women into his harem and allowed them to continue their pagan worship, sometimes even joining them and erecting temples for their idols.<sup>22</sup> Another time Ahab, King in Samaria, adopted the pagan religion of his wife, Jezebel, and erected shrines to Baal, a male nature god.<sup>23</sup>

In both these cases the male head, following the example of Adam, failed properly to lead and instead himself followed the lead of his wife, with disastrous results.

The Jews were distinguished from the surrounding pagans by their priesthood. Unlike Yahveh, pagan gods were sexual beings. Pagan priesthoods were either male or female, according to the sexuality of the deities they served, and usually unmarried. A priest or priestess was an icon or sacramental instrument of the deity, "married" to that deity. Jewish priests also served as icons or sacramental instruments of their deity but their priesthood was hereditary and all the priests were married men.

They were married because the Aaronic succession was hereditary, limited to the tribe of Levi. It had to be male because family lineages were traced through the male line.

Jesus was born into the tribe of Judah rather than the tribe of Levi and so could not be an Aaronic priest. But as the author of Hebrews contends, using Platonic philosophical concepts, that Aaronic priesthood was but a shadow or reflection of the true priesthood. The priesthood of Jesus was "after the order of Melchisedek".<sup>24</sup>

Melchisedek appears in Genesis where he is called King of Salem (Jerusalem) and “priest of God most high”.<sup>25</sup> He blesses Abraham, gives him bread and wine, and receives his tithe. The author of Hebrews devotes chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8 to his significance and priesthood. That in Abraham’s seed “all the families of the earth will be blessed”<sup>26</sup> means that the priesthood of Melchisedek is not limited to Jews.

Melchisedek’s priesthood, like Aaron’s, can be exercised only by males but is not hereditary. It is thus open to gentiles and unmarried men. The requirement that a bishop be “the husband of one wife”<sup>27</sup> suggests that marriage was a prerequisite<sup>28</sup> although some read in it only that he may not remarry if widowed.

Since the mid-20th Century some have argued that the transmission of the Christian priesthood through the laying on of hands rather than through the circumcised penis means it might be open to women. Neither the Catholic Churches of East or West agree with this, probably because of the iconic nature of the priesthood and because it places the priest at the head of a congregation *in locum Christi*. It is also expressly prohibited by St. Paul.

*The Israelites’ hereditary priesthood of married men was one important distinction between them and the surrounding pagans who had unmarried priests and, especially, priestesses. In the transition from the Old Covenant to the New, the hereditary requirement was laid aside but the male requirement was not.*

### **The Church.**

As previously noted, the Church is referred to in feminine terms. The Church receives the implanted word of God, internalizes it, joins it to her own life, protects it, nourishes it, feels its growth and movement inside of her, and finally brings it forth into the world. That is certainly feminine imagery. The Blessed Virgin Mary is the personification and archetype of the Church. Her song is the theme song of the Church: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word.”<sup>29</sup>

The Apostles and their successors implant the word in the church, nourish her, comfort her in her sufferings, lay down their lives for

her, and rejoice with the angels when the word blossoms forth into the world. These are masculine images. While female clergy are not necessarily lesbians, they are playing a masculine role in their relationships with their congregations.

Symbolism and imagery are very important in the Catholic Church(es). None of them, East or West, has ever ordained a woman. For Protestants, symbolism and imagery are not so important, but even some of them still do not ordain women.

*Humans’ spiritual lives have always been strongly influenced by imagery and symbolism. The imagery and symbolism of the Church suggest a masculine role for the priesthood, not a feminine one.*

### **Apostolic Succession.**

The Church is the physical vehicle through which Christ continues to exercise his ministry on earth. For that the Church must suffer, and it does in many places, especially in places dominated by Islam. The Church must also teach the truth and argue with those who oppose it. She must heal the sick and befriend those whom society overlooks or rejects. She must confront evil, especially hypocrisy in leadership. Jesus did all these things during his time on Earth.

But every body needs a head and the Apostles (and Anglicans would say their successors and assigns, the bishops and priests) exercise the headship of His body, the Church.

It may be helpful to distinguish between an *Apostle* and a *disciple*. A disciple (from a root that means to learn) is a follower of Jesus who believes in Him, attends to His instruction, and tries to imitate Him -- in His holiness and in His works. The Apostles were all disciples but they were selected by Jesus for a special position and a special mission.

An Apostle (from a root meaning to send with delegated authority) continued Jesus’ headship in the Church. The eleven surviving Apostles, not all the disciples, received “the great commission” at the end of St. Matthew’s Gospel and who witnessed Christ’s Ascension in Acts. The eleven were commissioned to (1) preach, (2)