

On the Ordination of Women

This paper is an examination of the issues concerning the ordination of women to the sacred priesthood and the doctrine of Holy Scripture. This teaching from God's Word is upheld by the Syro-Chaldean Church of North America without compromise.

Ministry Within the Family

The Church of Jesus Christ is referred to as the family of God. The nation of Israel, before it became a nation, was first a family, the family of Jacob who was named Israel. The Israelites were the **בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל** (b'nai Yisrael), the sons of Israel. This being so, we can look to the family, as created by God and shown in the Scriptures, for instruction on the nature of authority and leadership within the Church. Specifically, we can and will now examine the roles of father and mother.

Fatherhood

I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name (Ephesians 3:15). Every family is a mirror of the Holy Trinity. Every family is defined by our Heavenly Father. This is not by His act of definition, but by the reality of His very being. He is *Father*, therefore there is family. The family may be defined as those who have a father.* A family also comes into being when a man and woman wed and there is the potential for children. The husband is, one might say, a *potential* father. As such, he fulfills certain fatherly roles even if there are no natural born or adopted children to fill out that family.

It is from God the Father, then, that we take our model and definition of fatherhood. It encompasses creation, nurture, provision, discipline, instruction, and so forth; however, the most salient feature of this model is that of headship. The following passages show us different relationships of headship.

But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ. (I Corinthians 11:3)

And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. (Ephesians 1:22-23)

For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. (Ephesians 5:23)

For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority. (Colossians 2:9-10)

We understand headship to derive from God the Father to God the Son in relation to His Church, and thence to the husband in relation to his wife and family. This headship is one of authority, direction, protection and provision. It has a strong external focus along with its internal focus. The external focus is tied to the functions of provision and protection. The father protects the family from external threats and provides for the family from external means. The internal focus

* This in no way denies the reality of a family which has no father and is headed up by a mother. This is an abnormal situation and will be discussed further below.

is one of care, guidance and discipline directed internally to the members of the family. The father represents the family to the world outside and bears responsibility for the family's response to the world. The father has great authority within the family.

Fatherhood may be likened to the "voice of God" in that it represents His Word which expresses His authority and gives direction and purpose. It is the voice of God that brings creation into being, rendering order from emptiness.

These attributes and responsibilities of the father within his family also pertain to the priest and pastor within his charge. The pastor of a congregation is a priest, a man set apart by ordination to represent the people before God sacramentally and God to the people. As priest, he leads the Eucharistic worship of the people and bears their offerings before God. The pastor exercises the headship entrusted by Christ to His Church. He is responsible for leading the people and caring for them. He is responsible for provision, protection, direction and purpose.

Motherhood

The Scriptures give us many examples of mothers. It also contains such beautiful passages as Proverbs 31:10-31 on the excellent wife. However, the concept of motherhood is not as clearly developed and expressed, especially in relation to the Church, as fatherhood is. This does not mean that we have no guide or teaching from God to lead us into a deeper understanding of the matter. On the contrary, there is much.

We draw for our understanding of motherhood on nature as supported by Scripture. While the father is in the position of defending his wife and family against external threats, providing for and protecting them, the mother brings new life into the family, caring for and nurturing that new life in the most intimate of ways. The mother's primary focus is internal. She tends to be physically weaker and goes through periods of extreme vulnerability during pregnancy, a vulnerability that the father does not experience but rather must protect. Even so, she provides the family with an inner strength that the father is less likely to provide. She enfolds the children in her warm love, protecting them and giving them confidence in the love of their parents. She strengthens and builds up her husband, giving him confidence in his own purpose and function. It is the mother who passes on to the children of the family much of the reality of who they are and what they will become. The mother has great power within the family.

Motherhood has been likened to the "hand of God," representing His creative power. It is in the hand of God that we dwell. This provides us with our existence, our very being, defining who we are. The hand of God enfolds us and protects us, giving us confidence in His great love for us at the most personal level. *But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me, And the Lord has forgotten me." Can a woman forget her nursing child, And have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you. Behold, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; Your walls are continually before Me.* (Isaiah 49:14-16)

The Canonical Restriction on Ordination and its Purpose

The canons of the Syro-Chaldean Church of North America and the Communion of Evangelical National Catholic Churches forbid the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopacy.

The reasons for this are based on the teachings of Scripture concerning the nature of priesthood, fatherhood and motherhood as explained above. They are totally related to function. This is function on as fundamental a level as the biological difference between men and women. Men

can be fathers and beget children. Women can be mothers, bearing and giving birth to children. A father may, of necessity, have to carry out some motherly functions and a mother may, of necessity, act as a father to her children, but neither can fully replace the other. Modern efforts to contravene this basic reality of God's creation through artificial means and genetic manipulation are a perverse condemnation of and rebellion against God's purposes in creating nature as He did.

A priest, elder, presbyter, is primarily a father (hence the common usage of respect), he is not a mother. The functions of the priest are representational, pastoral, and military; representing and leading the people, defending the flock, establishing order. The priest exercises Godly authority within the Church. These are the functions of a father, not a mother. The authority exercised by the priest is the authority of a father, necessarily placed in a single head. A mother has authority which is just as great but is of a different nature. The Church needs both.

Emergency Situations

There have always been and are now situations where the normal order of the family is broken. There are many reasons for this from the premature, accidental death of a parent to the sinful abandonment by a father of his family. In many such situations, there is no father, or an existing father may be non-functioning. When this happens, the mother has no choice but to fill the gap as best she can. As it is necessary and as she looks to God, He will give her the grace to do so. The Church is to support her and to fill some of the functions of the missing father; however, The Church does not regularize or establish such as the norm.

Much the same is true within the Church. When the men of the Church do not fulfill their functions, the Church suffers and women are forced to take over many of them. When this happens, God gives the woman the grace to do the job, but it is still not the same job that could be done, if a man were man enough to accept the call. The story of Deborah, Barak and Jael in Judges 4 and 5 is an excellent illustration of all these points.

We do not deny that God has raised up many women as leaders, and even pastors, in both ancient and modern times. We believe that these are abnormal, emergency situations. We do not believe that God intends that we should ordain women to the priesthood and thereby "normalize" such a situation. Only that and nothing more.

Erroneous Objections to the Ordination of Women

As the Church of Jesus Christ has struggled with this issue of the ordination of women to the priesthood, many reasons have been advanced for restricting women from this ministry. Reasons that are not based firmly on the foundation presented in this statement are erroneous. To promote them is to promote false ideas about the nature of God and the Church.

A few of these commonly stated reasons are presented below with the proper refutation.

Jesus was a man.

Priests should be men because Jesus was a man. By this logic, only Jewish men could be priests. The converse is much closer to the truth. Jesus was a man, because He was the Son of God, and as such could function as a priest.

The Church has ordained only men from ancient times.

Priests should be men because the Church has always ordained only men. While it is important to honor the ancient and continued practice of the Church, we acknowledge that the Church has,

at times, done that which is contrary to God's will as expressed in Scripture. Ancient practice is not to be laid aside lightly without diligent prayer, searching of the Scriptures and a true attempt to understand the intent of those who have gone before. Even so, it is not enough merely to fall back on the practice of the past in order to justify a present position in the face of thoughtful opposition. The historic teaching of the Church provides a rudder that keeps the Church doctrinally stable, but the direction it leads must be confirmed continually. Each generation must search the Scripture anew, drawing on the wisdom of the past for guidance but looking ultimately to the Holy Spirit for understanding of the truth.

Ordaining women will divide the Church.

Women should not be ordained because that will cause splits with the ancient Catholic Church. We are a part of the ancient Catholic Church, but do not concern ourselves with doing things canonical or doctrinal in order to maintain that unity. Having a married episcopacy already sets us at odds with the majority of the Catholic Church. Our unity with other parts of the Church of Jesus Christ is based on Him and Him alone, not on canon, doctrine or rite. This is true unity, the unity which we desire greatly to share with all parts of Christ's Body.

Passages Used to Support the Ordination of Women

Those who support the ordination of women to the pastoral ministry and the priesthood generally use a number of Scripture passages to defend this position. We will look at these passages, explaining them in the light of the rest of Scripture.

Men and women equal before God

The one passage that is quoted the most frequently is probably Galatians 3:28. *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

This passage refers not to ministry within the Church but to the free gift of salvation in Christ Jesus. It comes in a discourse on salvation by faith as opposed to the Law and all mankind's equal claim to become sons of God by believing in Him. If St. Paul had meant this passage as a statement on the roles of men and women in ministry, he would not have written statements that clearly position men in positions of headship in relation to women such as I Corinthians 11:3 and Ephesians 5:23, quoted above.

Scripture makes it abundantly clear that there is no difference in value to God between men and women. There is no difference in status before Him. In the presence of God, all are equal. Every single man and woman has exactly the same value to our Heavenly Father. That value is the value of the most precious blood of His only begotten Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. To make any distinction between men and women in reference to value or importance to God or to the Church of Jesus Christ, is to cheapen the sacrifice of Our Lord. It is blasphemy. This is one of the great triumphs of Biblical religion over paganism, Islam and many other false religions.

Priest and Prophet

Defenders of the ordination of women also point to the women prophets and leaders found throughout scripture such as Deborah in Judges 4 and 5, Anna the prophetess in Luke 2:36-38 and the daughters of Philip in Acts 21:8-9. They also point to Joel 2:28 and Acts 2:11 which repeats the prophecy of Joel, passages that prophecy the outpouring of the gift of prophecy on women. These passages do not speak of the priestly and pastoral ministry. They refer to the prophetic ministry.

Throughout the past millennium, the ministry of priest and prophet have frequently been confused. These two ministries are not the same. True, some prophets were priests but the prophetic ministry is of a different nature.

From the earliest days, when the nation of Israel was being formed in the Wilderness, the ministries of priest and prophet functioned side by side, complementing one another. The prophet spoke the word of God under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The ministry and gift of prophecy was not conferred by the community as was priesthood*, it came directly from God by the power of the Holy Spirit. In some cases, but not always, it was confirmed by the community through the priest, or by another prophet. St. Paul, I Corinthians 14:29-32, admonishes the community to discern the prophecy, whether it be of God or no. The prophetic ministry is one of calling the people to repentance and obedience or of informing them of God's will. The prophet serves as God's spokesman, frequently outside the normal channels. The prophetic ministry does not include the priestly functions of authoritative oversight and sacramental representation and intermediation. The priestly ministry does not include the prophetic function of proclaiming God's word to the community independently, unfettered by any other authority. Priest and prophet work together, each checking and exhorting the other. Both ministries are vitally important for the health of the Church. The confusion of these ministries has been the cause of great grief within the Christian community.

Towards the Fullness of Ministry Within the Church

The Church of Jesus Christ requires the full and proper participation of all her members in the ministries to which God the Father has called them. Each person is established in his or her ministry, function, position by God the Son. Each person is empowered for ministry by God the Holy Spirit.

No person may consider his or her ministry, appointment or ordination to be superior to that of another. No member of the body may deny the value of another.

The men of the Church must stand up and minister as men before God and within the Church. The women of the Church must enter fully into their ministry as women before God and within the Church. When men and women, fathers and mothers stand side by side, each fulfilling the calling of God, depending on the power of the Holy Spirit, then the Church of Jesus Christ will have great power, then she will move forward under the headship of Christ in victory overthrowing the powers of Darkness, bringing His salvation, healing, comfort and love to all mankind.

May God grant that this be so! Amen!

Promulgation

This teaching, *On the Ordination of Women*, is hereby promulgated by the Episcopal Synod of the Evangelical Apostolic Church of North America, this 25th day of February, 1996. It is to be received by all members as the teaching of the Church.

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* This is not to say that the ordination of a priest came from the community and *not* from God. Rather, it came from God *through* the community functioning according to prescribed ordinances.

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