

The **BOISI CENTER** *for*

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WOMEN IN RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP

**“Christianity & the Ordination of
Women”**

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WOMEN AS LEADERS IN RELIGIONS

“Christianity & the Ordination of Women”

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WOMEN IN CHRISTIANITY

Pamela Dickey Young

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Christianity is a religious tradition that arose around Jesus, whom early followers began to call 'the Christ', which means the Messiah, the one sent and anointed by God. Jesus was born around 4 BCE. He was Jewish, as were most of his early followers, those he seems to have attracted through his charisma. After Jesus' death, the followers continued to recount stories about him and his effect on them, and they tried to convert others to follow Jesus as well. The existing sources about him and his life are mostly from the Christian New Testament, which means that they are texts composed by followers who testify to his effect on them rather than recount historical facts. The gospels are not eyewitness accounts and they are not history books. Traditions about Jesus circulated orally and in snippets of writing before they were finally compiled in their current forms as the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Each gospel has its own particular emphasis.

The New Testament is a collection of books, including the four gospels, which appeared in written form between about 50 to 100 CE. Much of the rest of the New Testament consists of letters from early converts to Christianity, especially Paul, who wrote to various churches. The Christian churches also count the Hebrew Bible (which they rename the Old Testament) as sacred scripture.

Jesus' followers were men and women who gave up virtually everything, including their families to go with him. The stories about Jesus are many, several of which tell us about the interaction between Jesus and women. Remarkably enough, given the patriarchal times in which the stories were told and written down, none portrays Jesus as re-inscribing the view that women are lesser beings than men.

Christianity was, from early on, a missionary religion, seeking not only to win formerly Jewish followers, but also to extend itself throughout the

known world. Over the centuries, Christianity has taken a wide variety of historical and cultural forms, and some of these forms are the results of major splits within the church. In the first five centuries of Christianity much effort was expended to define orthodoxy or right belief. Many of the traditional Christian ideas or doctrines date from this era.

In 1054 the first major split in Christianity occurred when the churches in the East (now called 'Orthodox' churches) separated from the churches of the West (the Roman Catholic Church), mostly over disagreements about the Holy Spirit. Then, in the sixteenth century, another major division took place in the churches of the West when a number of 'reformers' such as Martin Luther and John Calvin tried to reform what they saw as the excesses of the church. Both Luther and Calvin found themselves excommunicated as a result. Since the beginnings of this Protestant Reformation there have been many different splits resulting in the formation of many different Christian denominations too numerous to detail here.

One of the main differences between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism is the official locus of authority. For Roman Catholicism, authority is, finally, vested in the Pope and the Bishops. For Protestantism, the supreme locus of authority is usually seen to be scripture. Governance is generally carried out by the people, but the degree to which this is the case is tempered by the type of Protestantism.

Christianity is not monolithic. There is never one single 'Christian' way to believe or act. Christianity takes a wide variety of social, historical, geographic, and cultural forms. Thus, when feminists study 'Christianity' it is always helpful to remember that they are studying particular forms of Christianity, not a single unified and univocal religious tradition. All conclusions about, for example, whether Christianity is liberating to or oppressive for women, have to recognize the particular context in which that judgement is situated.

To urge caution here does not, for a minute, suggest one overlook the fact that much in the history of Christianity has been oppressive to women. Historically within Christian thought, when the topic of women arose, it was mostly men talking about women: about women's nature and purpose, about whether or not women were in the image of God, about whether women could be saved, about what sorts of leadership roles women could and could not play.

Thus, for example, Tertullian, a second-century 'father' of the church, called women 'the Devil's gateway' (Tertullian 1869: 1.1.2). Augustine, a famous and influential fourth- and fifth-century thinker, believed that males alone were the full image of God and that women could only be in the image of God when joined to males as helpers (Ruether 1974: 156). For Augustine, women were equated with the body and men with the mind. This made women sexually dangerous to men. According to Augustine, women are more

carnal than men and therefore more subject to temptation and to sin. Women, however, can only overcome such temptation and be rational instead of carnal if they renounce sexuality completely.

That woman has a rational mind equivalent to man's is never entirely denied, and indeed is assumed by the view that allows her to lead the monastic life. But since she is somehow made peculiarly the symbol of 'body' in relation to the male (i.e., in a male visual perspective), and is associated with all the sensual and depraved characteristics of mind through this peculiar 'corporeality' her salvation must be seen not as an affirmation of her nature but a negation of her nature, both physically and mentally and a transformation into a possibility beyond her natural capacities. (Ruether 1974: 161)

For Augustine, before sin entered the world through the fall (that is, before Eve ate the forbidden fruit and gave it to Adam), sexuality was dispassionate, for procreative purposes only. After sin, sinful carnality overcame rationality in the form of human sexual arousal. For Augustine, the male erection becomes the 'essence of sin [and] woman, as its source, became peculiarly the cause, object and extension of it' (Ruether 1974: 163). Thus, sin is transmitted throughout the human race by the sexual act, and woman as both original and continuing sexual temptress is primarily to blame.

TEXTS, INTERPRETATIONS, AND RITUALS

The central texts of the Christian tradition are those of the Bible. The biblical texts include the texts of the Jewish Bible (usually referred to as the Old Testament by Christians) and the New Testament texts. The New Testament was written over a period from about 50 CE to the early second century by a variety of different authors who, as far as we know, were all male. Oral traditions preceded the writing down of the gospel texts. It took several centuries before the Christian church decided more-or-less definitively on which texts were to be seen as authoritative. (This is known as the process of canonization.) There were other texts that could have been included in the New Testament canon but which were not, such as the gospel of Thomas or the various Gnostic gospels.

The biblical texts are human documents, written for particular purposes in specific times and places. The New Testament texts themselves are already interpretations of the event and importance of Jesus and testimonies to the growth of a community of followers around him. Thus, texts are already interpretations, and, subsequent to their being written, the biblical texts have histories of interpretation that can give a particular focus to the way they are read today. For example, the common reading of Eve in Christian tradition as the

temptress and the source of all sin in the world is only one possible reading of the text of Genesis 3, read back through the eyes of Augustine's interpretation of original sin. The text itself mentions disobedience, but the notion that there is an inherited sinfulness for which Eve is primarily responsible is a Christian reading of the text that comes much later. The biblical texts, even when they mention women (sometimes named women, often unnamed women), present women or any particular woman in the male, patriarchal perspective. This is simply to say that women in the biblical texts are seen through men's eyes. The texts about Jesus are somewhat removed already from Jesus and show him as interpreted by those who told the stories and eventually wrote down the texts. Not all the texts view women in the same way.

Even though there is dispute among feminists about how to interpret New Testament texts, if one reads the texts with the question of women and their status and roles in mind, some insights are notable. For example, the interactions between Jesus and women are in all cases presented as remarkably open. Women listen to Jesus; they also teach Jesus (Mark 7:24–30; John 4:1–39). And they are commissioned to preach (John 20:17–18). The purity laws that affected women's qualifications for public action do not seem to have mattered to Jesus (Mark 5:25–34). Although no women are named in the list of the 12 central disciples, the actual listing of these names varies somewhat and the list is more dependent on the importance of the number '12' (after the 12 tribes of Israel) than on the specific names. But many people, including women, followed Jesus from place to place (Matthew 27:55–6), and this is one of the central understandings of what it means to be a disciple.

There are indications that women occupied many leadership roles in the early Christian community. Women are called 'deacon' and 'apostle' (Romans 16:1, 7). Women preach. They have churches in their houses, or are in other ways patrons of the new Christian community.

The early Christian movement was what is usually called a 'charismatic' movement, which means that it did not have set structures or rules for organization. In the early Christian movement the roles of women and men seem in large part interchangeable. The earliest Christians tended to think that the end of history was at hand and that the second coming of Jesus Christ would take place in their own lifetimes. As time went on and this did not happen, more formal structures were put in place that tended to exclude women (for example, I Timothy 3:2–13). Many of the passages most problematic for women are from this later period of New Testament composition (I and II Timothy and Titus, which, according to most scholars, are not written by Paul). In letters thought by most scholars to be by Paul, there are still some problematic passages where women are enjoined to silence in churches and seen in relation to the husband who is 'head' (see I Corinthians 11:2–16; Ephesians

5:22–33). There is no question that Paul was a person of his time who had a patriarchal understanding of the place of women. This is occasionally balanced by places where he seems to see the message of Jesus as abolishing traditional hierarchical distinctions (Galatians 3:27–9).

Christians have used the biblical texts in a variety of ways throughout history. Since the eighteenth century, biblical scholars have understood the texts to be historical texts written for particular purposes in particular times and places. Biblical scholarship does not regard the texts as given directly by God.

In the late nineteenth century, a group of female scholars led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton published a book entitled *The Woman's Bible*, in which they sought to comment on the texts that were of particular interest and importance to women. They commented, for instance, on the creation stories and on the stories of Sarah and Abraham. They commented when women were visible as actors and when they were treated as second-class citizens. They commented on women's leadership in Romans 16 and on the passages of the New Testament where women seemed to be subordinated (Stanton et al., 1974).

When, in the mid-twentieth century, feminists began interpreting the biblical texts, they did so using a variety of strategies and with a several purposes in mind. 'In the footsteps of Cady Stanton, women's biblical studies have developed a dualistic hermeneutical, or interpretive, strategy that is able to acknowledge two seemingly contradictory facts. On the one hand, the Bible is written in androcentric language, has its origin in the patriarchal cultures of antiquity, and has functioned throughout its history to inculcate androcentric and patriarchal values. On the other hand, the Bible has also served to inspire and authorize women and other nonpersons in their struggles against patriarchal oppression' (Fiorenza 1993a: 5). Thus, those who seek to be feminists within the Christian tradition generally do not deny the patriarchal nature of the biblical texts and contexts, but, for the most part, they see the texts as potentially valuable beyond their patriarchal context and content.

One feminist approach to reading biblical texts argues that the texts need to be read in light of their historical, patriarchal contexts. When we interpret these texts we must be willing to give them the most charitable interpretations possible. This approach tends to be taken by feminists in more conservative denominations, where the biblical texts are seen as divinely inspired.

A second approach argues that one can look to the texts for a liberating message or some support for a liberating movement, or some other liberatory features, but one cannot assume that such a message can always be found, nor that it exists everywhere in the biblical texts. Some texts according to this approach may not be redeemable. Such an approach looks perhaps to the example of Jesus, or to stories such as that of the Exodus, the liberation of the people of Israel from Egypt.

A third approach tends to read the biblical texts without regarding them as authoritative for the Christian tradition. The Bible here is not a set of normative texts, but 'a cacophony of interested historical voices and a field of rhetorical struggles in which questions of truth and meaning are being negotiated' (Fiorenza 1993a: 8). Because the whole process of canonization itself inscribed certain values and visions, the texts and the final canon must themselves be questioned.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza argues for a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' that approaches the biblical texts searching for patriarchy and looking for who benefits and who is injured. She also argues for a 'hermeneutics of re-vision' that looks at texts broadly for 'values and visions that can nurture those who live in subjection and authorize their struggles for liberation and transformation' (Fiorenza 1993a: 10).

After the earliest period of Christianity, when it seems that both men and women were ritual actors in roles that were defined as needs arose, it has been mostly men who have acted in official capacities in ritual. In most churches only the ordained can function as celebrants of the sacraments and as preachers, and since most of those ordained have been male, little has changed until recently, when more women have begun to be ordained in various Protestant denominations. Thus, for most of the church's history, sacraments and preaching have been mainly a male preserve. When women have been ritual actors, it has mostly been in small groups of women who met for prayer or teaching on their own, but rarely has there been official sanction.

SYMBOLS AND GENDER

A symbol is a picture, word, thing, act, or concept that bears particular meanings for a particular group. Christianity employs a variety of symbols to convey its tradition and message. One central symbol for Christianity is the word and concept 'God'. Another is the concept of Jesus as Christ or saviour, which captures meaning and importance beyond simply seeing Jesus as a historical person who lived in a particular place and time. Mary, the mother of Jesus, is also a symbol as well as a character in the biblical texts. Actions such as the performing of the Christian sacraments of baptism and eucharist are symbolic actions. The cross too is a typically Christian symbol.

This section focuses on two of the central symbols of Christian tradition: God, and Jesus as the Christ or saviour.

Although some scholars would argue that all religious symbols are projections of human needs and desires rather than symbols that point to a transcendent reality, adherents of the Christian tradition usually agree that *God* points to some reality beyond the mere word. No single view of God is held by all

Christians. That said, it is also generally agreed that whatever God is, God does not have biological sex of the sort that human beings have. Yet most Christian language for God has been male language and male pronouns, and thus it evokes stereotypical male images.

Feminists have long raised questions about what it means to use primarily or solely male language and imagery for God. Religious symbols function both as symbols of reality as well as symbols *for* reality. That is, they claim to portray reality as it is as well as to act as prototypes for how reality ought to be (see Geertz 1966; Christ 1979: 274–5). Thus, presenting the symbol of God only in male language and images might give the impression that the ‘reality’ of God is that God is male. In turn, the apparent maleness of God might also reinforce a social system that connects maleness to godliness. Mary Daly argues that ‘if God is male, then the male is God’ (Daly 1973: 19). What she means is that male language for God associates God more closely with males than with females. It gives the impression that maleness is more like godliness than femaleness, hence males have the right to exercise godlike power.

If language about God were simply a matter of convenience and convention for most Christians, there would be no problem in changing the language about God to a language that uses female images or pronouns instead of or alongside male ones. Many Christians have found the idea of ‘God-she’ problematic, which then raises for feminists questions about how language for God has an impact on our views of the status of women vis-à-vis men. Thus, some scholars, like Daly, have argued that the Christian God is so inherently male that no change of language can or will alter the Christian tradition about God.

There are, in fact, some biblical images for God that portray God in female terms. For example, God is portrayed as a midwife (Isaiah 66:9; Psalm 22:9–10); as a woman giving birth (Isaiah 4:14; Deuteronomy 32:18); and as a mother hen (Matthew 23:27) (see Mollenkott 1985). Most feminist Christians have argued that one needs to augment male language for God with female language for God, and that neither is superior to the other. This argument also often goes hand in hand with recognition that, because Christians speak of a personal relationship with God, language about God needs, at least in part, to be personal. Thus, depersonalizing all language about God is not an option for most Christian feminists. Further, depersonalizing all language about God might well mean that the assumptions about the appropriateness of male language about God will never be directly or fully challenged.

Elizabeth Johnson, for example, has developed a wide-ranging rethinking of the Christian God in terms of the biblical image of ‘Sophia’ (wisdom). In the biblical tradition (both Hebrew Bible and New Testament), Sophia is one possible name for or aspect of God who is always personified as female. Johnson suggests that one can rename the Christian Trinity as Mother-Sophia,

Jesus-Sophia, Spirit-Sophia, where female language can rightly be used for all three traditional persons of the Christian Trinity (Johnson 1992). Feminist Christians also caution against using only ‘mothering’ language as a way to provide female images of God because that may simply re-inscribe rather than challenge stereotypical views of parenting (Ruether 1983: 69–70).

Jesus, a historically male figure, is central to the Christian tradition as the one who is claimed as Christ or Messiah, Saviour, Lord, and so on. Christian feminists examine what it means to have a male figure at the centre of a tradition. They ask: Can a male saviour save women? (Ruether 1983: 116). Is Jesus’ maleness essential to his role as saviour? Here the question of the overlap between Jesus’ historical maleness and his symbolic function of salvation come to the fore.

As there is no single Christian view of God, so there is no single Christian view of Jesus and how he ‘saves’ humans. Early on, Christians came to the agreement that salvation was offered to women as well as to men (Ruether 1998). Thus, women were welcomed as members of the Christian church. That said, however, the maleness of Jesus has had serious implications for women. For one thing, the maleness of Jesus reinforces and extends the notion of the maleness of God. If, as Christians claim, Jesus is the incarnation of God, and if Jesus is male, then maleness is even more like godliness than it is in a tradition such as Judaism where male language is the chief problem.

Also under discussion is the idea that God ‘chose’ a male human being in which to become incarnate rather than a female human being. Thus, God’s choice of maleness must indicate something of the importance of maleness, or the normativity of maleness instead of femaleness.

There is a long history in Christianity of debating what exactly incarnation—that is, God’s coming in human flesh—means. Although many Christians read the idea of incarnation as a straight equation that somehow Jesus is the same as God, there is a whole history of nuanced discussion on this matter that looks at exactly what incarnation could reasonably mean. The maleness of Jesus is also used in Roman Catholicism as one of the justifications for an all-male priesthood (Paul VI 1977). When a priest celebrates the mass he is said to represent Jesus to the people. Jesus was male, therefore priests must be male, for only maleness can represent Jesus.

Thus, the maleness of Jesus has been used in ways that subordinate women. And any feminist response must take these long-standing problems seriously.

SEXUALITY

Christianity has historically been far more ambivalent about sexuality than has Judaism. There is no evidence that Jesus was married, although that would

have been unusual for a Jewish man of his time. The earliest Christians thought that the second coming of Christ would occur during their lifetimes. Also, one became a Christian by conversion, not by being born into a Christian family. Thus, the value placed on procreation was less than in Judaism.

Christianity arose under the influence of both Jewish apocalypticism and classical Neoplatonism (Ruether 1979). Around the time of Jesus, Judaism developed an apocalyptic pattern of thinking that looked less and less toward God's fulfillment of human hopes within history and more and more to an otherworldly fulfillment after a cataclysmic destruction of the present world. In Neoplatonism, the intellect/soul longs to be separated from the body, which drags it down from its true spiritual home with God. The upshot of such influences was a Christian tradition that associated maleness with mind and soul as superior, and femaleness with body as inferior. Although it had other strands recognizing the goodness of creation, Christian tradition tended to be fearful of the body and all its appetites. Rosemary Ruether sees these 'dualisms' (as she calls them) to be at the root of traditional Christian attitudes both toward women and toward sexuality.

Virginity came to be seen as the preferred Christian calling, although it was clear that this was not everyone's calling. Today we tend to read the notion of virginity as a choice for women that devalues sexuality, especially in light of the interpretations of fourth- and fifth-century Christian men such as Augustine, Ambrose, or Jerome. However, there is also a countercultural possibility of reading women's early choices of virginity as renouncing the authority of a man over them (Malone 2002: 146–9). A woman who chose virginity and a life of holiness could, if she was a hermit, avoid the control of men entirely. Or, if she lived in a monastic community of women under the official authority of bishops or priests, she could live in such a way that her day-to-day life was not determined by men.

Still, by the fourth century, sexuality, especially women's sexuality, had become an object of fear and revulsion at the hands of 'fathers' of the church who clearly felt their own sexuality out of control but blamed women. Augustine, for instance, thought that lust was a result of the sin of Adam and Eve. He believed that through the weakness of human will, rooted in lust, the original sin of Adam and Eve was passed on to each new generation. Augustine's works give us insight into the fact that he himself was troubled that he could not control his own sexual urges. Scholars know that, before his conversion to Christianity, he had a concubine and a son. But after his conversion he renounced sexuality and, insofar as possible, the company of women. The Virgin Mary, who was understood to have had no lust, became the model of Christian living. She was the asexual woman whose body was simply a vessel for the birth of Jesus and who remained ever a virgin.

Thus, even though celibacy was not absolutely required of male clergy until the Middle Ages, the life of virginity was officially established as the preferable life by about the fifth century. Consequently, although all women were viewed as temptresses because women were more associated with the body and men with the spirit, those women who chose virginity were seen, at least to a certain extent, to be more like men. In the face of the lauding of virginity and the equation of women with unruly sexuality, Christian churches have found it difficult to retrieve a notion of the goodness of sexuality.

In the Protestant Reformation (sixteenth century), Luther was an exponent of the positive value of marriage. But historic Christian views of marriage considered women the property of their husbands, so it was not until recently, when a view of marriage as a relationship between equals emerged, that a central emphasis began to be placed on the quality of a marriage relationship. The result has been a revaluation of the goodness of marriage, and with it, sexuality.

In more contemporary times, different churches hold very different official views of sexuality. From the 1950s onward, many North American Protestant churches began to laud birth control for married couples as a means to prevent unwanted pregnancy and thus eliminate undue strain on marriages. As the women's movement in North America developed, churches began to recognize the importance of allowing women to control their lives. One way of accomplishing this was ensuring that they had access to birth control.

In the 1970s and 1980s churches had to struggle with premarital sex. The focus of most Protestant writing on sexuality changed from one on marriage to one on the quality of human relationships. In most Protestant churches in North America today, official opinions on sexuality are based less on traditional 'rules' about sexuality than they are on discussions of the human relationship that should underlie and support sexual activity.

Worries about sexuality in most Protestant churches in North America have changed to concentration on gay and lesbian sexuality. At the time of writing, there is a spectrum of official opinions concerning gay and lesbian sexuality in North American Protestantism. The Metropolitan Community Church was founded to welcome and minister with gay men and lesbians. Churches such as the United Church of Canada and the United Church of Christ have extended their views on sexuality as relationship to include gay and lesbian sexuality and have stopped speaking of heterosexuality as normative. Presbyterians, Anglicans, and United Methodists have positions that separate the person from the sexual activity, arguing that it is no sin to be gay or lesbian, but that 'acting on' gay or lesbian sexuality is sinful.

In this progression we can see that, in North American Protestantism, discussions about sexuality have been coincident with those in the broader culture

of which these churches are a part. Roman Catholicism is a different matter. Whereas it appeared to many in the 1960s that the Roman Catholic Church was going to embrace artificial means of birth control, all inclination to do so changed with Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae* in 1968, which directly forbade any means of birth control except the rhythm method. Although *Humanae Vitae* names unitivity (for the couple) as one of the goods (virtues) of marriage, procreation is still seen as the primary good of marriage and goal of sexual relationship. Sexual activity, in Roman Catholicism, does not have a place outside marriage. Divorce is still prohibited insofar as divorced Catholics may not remarry within the Roman Catholic Church. Gay and lesbian sexuality is reduced to sexual activity and identified as sinful. Thus, a rules-based approach to sexuality is still in place in official Roman Catholicism.

Lesbian sexuality has never been as central to Churches' worries as has the sexuality of gay men. In the Hebrew Bible no mention is made of women being sexual with women. In the New Testament, the only mention of what might be seen as same-sex activity between women is in Romans 1:26 in the context of a discussion of those who worship idols instead of the true God: 'For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received their own persons the due penalty for their error'.

Historically, most churches have extrapolated from what they see as scriptural condemnations of male same-sex activity to female same-sex activity. Such positions usually rely on a relatively literalist interpretation of texts such as Leviticus 18:22; Leviticus 20:13; Romans 1:26–27; I Corinthians 6:9ff.; and I Timothy I: 8:10. Churches that are opposed to same-sex activity often try to differentiate between the activity, which they see as sinful, and persons who might have a homosexual orientation but not act on it—that is, they say they condemn the sin, not the person.

Churches that are reinterpreting gay and lesbian sexuality in a positive light (as are, for example, the Metropolitan Community Church, the United Church of Canada, and the United Church of Christ [in the US]) first of all do not treat the texts (which are, in any event, very few in number) as rules to be followed. They argue that there are biblical principles (for example, that Jesus teaches us to love one another as God loves us) that are more central to understanding Christianity than establishing certain texts (whose principle of selection is not always immediately obvious) as rules. Secondly, they note that there are disputes about what sorts of activity are actually in question in these texts. Is it all same-sex activity, or only certain sorts of such activity (some, for example, have suggested that relationships of older persons with younger persons is what is

at issue in the Romans texts). Third, they argue (with Foucault) that 'homosexuality' as a category is a relatively recent invention, as is the notion that one has a sexual orientation. Most inclusive churches also argue that sexual orientation is a given and thus that gay men and lesbians cannot be, and ought not to be, expected to change. At the same time, they ought not be told that any sexual relationship is out of the question. So, most such churches embrace gay and lesbian sexuality under the heading of sexuality in general and talk about the importance of the quality of the relationship between two people (same sex or opposite sex) as central to determining what is morally acceptable.

Even the inclusive views of homosexuality held by some churches depend in large part on views that sexual orientation is a given (even a given-by-God) and that it cannot be changed. Thus, churches have not yet even begun to deal with the view that sexuality is socially constructed, whether it be male–female or gay–lesbian.

SOCIAL CHANGE

Many people today view organized religion as a force that strengthens rather than challenges the status quo. Thus, it is often assumed that Christianity cannot be a means to improve the status of women. The following are two examples of ways in which Christianity has been part of a social change for the better in the roles of women.

In the late-twelfth century in Europe there arose a movement of women who were pious and dedicated to good works but who did not want the restrictive life of the cloister. These women, called beguines, sometimes lived in houses with other such women and lived solitary lives. They did not follow any particular accepted religious rule and were not directly subject to a bishop or male abbot, although sometimes they made alliances with local Franciscan or Dominican male orders. Beguine houses often included women of mixed class origins, unlike cloistered women who were often upper-class and who could not work outside the cloister and thus had to support themselves by bringing dowries with them.

Beguines earned their livings in a variety of ways, including teaching, preaching, nursing, and engaging in commerce, as well as sometimes begging. Because these women lived lives of poverty and did not demand as much as their counterparts in the market in return for their labour, their entry into commerce and manufacture, such as weaving, spinning, and so on, often ran these women afoul of men in the labour market.

As one might imagine, the question of whose authority should be exercised over these women was an important one. The Second Council of Lyons in 1274 declared that any religious orders founded without papal approval must

be dissolved. In a 1298 Papal Bull, Boniface VIII decreed that all religious women had to live cloistered lives. There followed countless edicts by bishops and councils designed to wipe out uncontrolled women such as these. Often beguines were persecuted and killed. Some were among the targets of the witch craze.

Some beguines left writings, or had 'lives' written of them, among them Mary of Oignes (1177/78–1213), Marguerite Porete (d. 1310), Hadewijch, and Mechthild of Magdeberg (1210?–1294?). In her book *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, Mechthild of Magdeberg criticized the corruption of the church and the clergy of her day, and, as a consequence, she had to flee from Magdeberg to a convent at Helfta. Marguerite Porete's book *The Mirror of Simple Souls* was read throughout the late Middle Ages despite her condemnation for heresy. In the book she argues that the institutional Church itself is not the final word on what is holy or loving (Porete 1993: 122). Marguerite refused to obey an ecclesiastical order not to distribute her book; she also refused to answer to the Inquisition. She was burned as a heretic in 1310. These women often endured persecution and death as the price of the freedoms they sought. They also provide excellent examples of those who challenged the status quo and attained a certain degree of social change for women in their time.

Nellie McClung (1873–1951) was a first-wave feminist and an activist for social reform and women's rights in Canada. She was an advocate for women's suffrage and served as a Liberal Member of Parliament in the Alberta Legislative Assembly from 1921 to 1926. She was one of the 'Famous Five' women who in 1929 argued to the Canadian government that women, like men, were 'persons'. She was a member of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and Canadian delegate to the League of Nations in 1930. She was a Methodist and an advocate for the ordination of women. She was a temperance worker. She believed that women and men were equal and needed to be treated equally by state and church alike. 'Man long ago decided that woman's sphere was anything he did not wish to do himself, and as he did not particularly care for the straight and narrow way, he felt free to recommend it to women in general' (McClung 1972: 70). She was a prolific writer who published books, novels, stories, speeches, and newspaper columns.

What is most important to note for purposes here is that the main motivation in all her activities was her understanding of the Christian message (Warne 1993: 186). Although she was certainly aware that churches were not living up to her understanding of the essential Christian message, she took her inspiration from that message. 'Christ was a true democrat. He made no discrimination between men and women . . . He applied to men and women the same rule of conduct' (McClung 1972: 68). She thought that Christianity had a particular obligation to be concerned about those who were oppressed in society,

and she advocated that Christian women had a specific responsibility for the conditions of society: 'When Christian women ask to vote, it is in the hope that they may be able with their ballots to protect the weak and innocent, and make the world a safer place for the young feet' (McClung 1972: 77).

McClung advocated theological ideas that have only recently been 'rediscovered'. For instance, she was an advocate of using female as well as male imagery for God. 'I believe the Protestant religion has lost much when it lost the idea of the motherhood of God' (McClung 1972: 79).

McClung uses the biblical story of Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38–42) to argue that women are called to 'thinking', not just to serving. 'The question of whether or not women should think was settled long ago. We must think because we were given something to think with, ages ago, at the time of our creation. If God had not intended us to think, he would not have given us our intelligence. It would be a shabby trick, too, to give women brains to think, with no hope for results, for thinking is just aggravation if nothing comes out of it' (McClung 1972: 32).

McClung was a liberal feminist and a product of her times, but she does give us insight into the fact that Christian beliefs can be the source and sustainer of social reform, particularly reform for women.

OFFICIAL AND UNOFFICIAL ROLES OF WOMEN

As mentioned above, women took on leadership roles in the biblical Christian communities. As time went on, those roles that were associated with power and liturgical leadership came officially to be given to men. But that does not mean that women did not have an important place in the Church.

In the Priscilla Catacombs in Rome there is a fresco dated at least to the early third century, but probably earlier. In this fresco we see seven women at a table where bread and wine and fish are visible. The woman on the far left of the table has her hands raised in a gesture of eucharistic celebration. Here is pictorial evidence that women were in liturgical leadership. Although some have tried to argue that these figures are men, the body shapes, hairstyles, jewellery, lack of beards, and length of skirts indicate females (see Houts 1999 and Irwin 1980).

Women were among those persecuted by the Roman Empire in the second and third centuries and revered by the Church for their martyrdom. By the end of the fourth century Christianity had become the official religion of the Roman Empire, and persecution of Christians had ceased.

From the second century onward, women gave themselves to lives of chastity and asceticism. They were given titles such as deaconess, widow, and virgin. *The Apostolic Constitutions*, a fourth-century document, contains a service

for the ordination of a deaconess. Deaconesses seem to have been entrusted with the pastoral care of married women as well as with ministering to the poor and the infirm. But by the fifth century the role of deaconess seems virtually to have disappeared in the Western churches, and bishops were revising history, arguing that there had never been deaconesses at all (Malone 2000: 126–8).

Sometimes in these first few centuries of Christianity women lived ascetic lives in the desert alongside men who did the same, since the desert was seen as a place to escape the temptations of the flesh. Sometimes ascetic women lived in cities where this life was an option mostly for well-to-do, educated females. Some of these women became founders of communities of women. Although the ascetic movement in Christianity does tend to denigrate the body and sexuality, it also provided women a spiritual equality with men and a certain amount of freedom from the direct control of men.

Women also began to cluster together in Christian communities. Marcella was the leader of a group of Christian women in fourth-century Rome. 'Under her guidance, the women learned to pray, to dispose of their possessions wisely, to live in utter simplicity, and to learn the art of governing their own lives' (Malone 2000: 139). Such were among the benefits that the calling to Christian communities offered women and, over the next centuries, women flocked to such communities, which quickly became formalized as religious orders. Women in such orders, although they were ultimately responsible to bishops and dependent on male priests for the sacraments, developed a fair amount of independence in their communal lives. The religious life for women was an alternative avenue to marriage and the male dominance that came with it. In addition, religious life often offered the possibility of education to women, and it has remained such an alternative for Roman Catholic women ever since.

There also developed a tradition (in about the seventh century) of double monasteries (one of men, one of women) headed by an abbess. One such famous abbess is Hilda (d. 680 CE) of the monastery in Whitby, England. Hilda was a scholar and developed an enormous library at Whitby that became an important gathering place for theologians and a teaching centre.

The Protestant Reformation (sixteenth century), which disavowed the calling of celibacy and tried to reclaim the positive value of sexuality within marriage, eliminated the calling to the religious life for women, eliminating an option that allowed women to live outside of direct male control. In the Reformation churches until the late nineteenth century, one of the main leadership callings of an active Protestant woman was as a minister's wife. Protestant women in general were expected to live out the Christian callings of wife and mother.

In nineteenth- and twentieth-century North America, women's roles in churches changed, sometimes propelling, sometimes following societal

changes. In Methodism, founded by John Wesley in the late-eighteenth century, there was an emphasis on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and consequently women who felt a calling to pray and testify to their conversions as well as to preach began to do so.

In the nineteenth century, Protestant women's groups began to do various kinds of charity work at home and abroad. This work was aimed at education, social reform, taking care of the poor, and mission. A whole class of women church workers known as 'deaconesses' materialized. These deaconesses worked primarily for the underprivileged in cities, in the fields of social work and evangelism, but they were not considered to be members of the ordained clergy. This changed in the mid-nineteenth century with the movement for women's ordination. The first woman ordained in modern times was Antoinette Brown, in 1853 in the Congregationalist Church in East Butler, New York. In Congregationalism, early ordinations were possible because local churches were able to make individual decisions about who could and could not be ordained. Some groups of Methodists also ordained a few women in the late-nineteenth century. The first woman to be ordained in the United Church of Canada was Lydia Gruchy, in 1936.

It was not until the 1960s and 1970s that most mainline Protestant churches in the United States and Canada either began to ordain women or to accord them equal status to ordained men. It was not until the 1980s and 1990s that the numbers of women in Protestant theological schools became equal to and then exceeded the numbers of men.

The Roman Catholic Church does not ordain women. The argument against the ordination of women, stated in detail by Pope Paul VI in 1976 and reaffirmed in recent years by Pope John Paul II, makes three main points. First, tradition, assumed to have been dictated by God, has always affirmed that men only be priests. Second, Jesus had an open attitude toward women and could have chosen women to be part of the 12 disciples but he did not. This decision applies to all times and places. Third, when the priest celebrates the mass he is called to represent Jesus Christ to the people. This representation requires a 'natural resemblance' between the priest and Jesus Christ, and this natural resemblance must be the resemblance of maleness.

Many people, including many Roman Catholics, have refuted all three arguments. Briefly, these arguments take the following forms. First, the church has changed in a variety of ways over time. Why not in this way, too? Second, the lists of the 12 disciples or apostles are not uniform in the biblical sources (compare Mark 3:14–19 and Acts 1:12–13). Further, many other people, including women, followed Jesus from place to place. Twelve is a significant number because of the 12 tribes of Israel, but there is no indication that these 12 individuals alone are important in Jesus' life and ministry. As well, one

cannot simply make an equation between the choosing of followers and ordination. Jesus does not seem to have been cognizant of founding an institution that would remain in existence in perpetuity. How can one move so quickly from a charismatic movement to a notion that this movement determines the structures of the institutional church for all time? Third, why is it the 'natural resemblance' of maleness that is all-important? Jesus was Jewish; he probably had brown eyes; he probably had dark skin. Why is genitalia more important than these characteristics in establishing 'natural resemblance'?

These refutations of the official arguments against the ordination of women, however, are not likely to sway the current Pope or his bishops. A different decision on the matter of the ordination of women will have to wait for another Pope who is more open to change within the Church. The fact that fewer and fewer men are choosing the calling of celibate priesthood, especially in North America and Northern Europe, will probably eventually have an impact on this matter as well as on others.

BACKLASH

As defined by Letty Russell, backlash is 'a powerful counterassault on the rights of women of all colors, men of color, gay, lesbian and bisexual persons, working-class persons, poor persons and other less powerful groups both in the US and abroad' (Russell 1996: 477). In other words, backlash is a strategy for the traditionally powerful and privileged to retain power and privilege against arguments for full inclusion of others in the church and in society. Backlash is the enemy of diversity and of those who are marginalized. In North America, backlash against women is often supported by Christians who, theologically or politically, are opposed to changes in the status and roles of women and to theologies that support such changes.

One common form that backlash takes is to blame societal woes on the breakdown of 'traditional' families. The idea is that before women worked outside the home, before so much divorce, before single parenting was considered socially acceptable, before there was so much recognition of gay and lesbian relationships, families were more stable, children were better raised, and everyone knew his or her place in the social structure. One problem with this argument is that it is not historically supportable. In fact, 'Backlash rewrites history' (Hunt 1996: 50). The whole notion of separate private spheres for women away from the public, and especially away from economic production, is largely a product of the Industrial Revolution when families ceased to be the economic unit and men became wage earners. Further, this separation of spheres only worked for upper-class women. Poor women, especially poor 'women of colour', have always had to work outside the 'private sphere'. When

private and public are separate spheres, women become the guardians of the private, including the guardians of family piety (Rudy 1997: 26).

Supporting this ideology of the family through Christian argumentation also has its serious limitations. The New Testament does not teach or uphold anything like the modern notion of family. People lived in extended kinship groupings. Jesus called people to leave their families and follow him. And Paul thought that singleness was a better state than marriage.

Yet the idealized non-historical view of family has had a powerful impact on Church and politics, precisely because it allows those who have traditionally held power and privilege to retain it. In the United States, the Christian right has been strongly allied with the Republican Party, and successive Republican presidents and candidates since Ronald Reagan have enlisted Christian preachers and 'biblical' arguments to bolster their appeal. In Canada, where the population as a whole is less susceptible to arguments of religious authority, only the Alliance Party makes any overt use of the 'Christian values' argument. Even the Alliance Party position on this matter is subdued given that there is Alliance support beyond those who are Christian and that Canadians expect their politicians at least to pay lip service to cultural diversity.

Often when religious institutions seek to put forward or defend positions that are against advances in the status and roles of women, they use female spokespersons to assure listeners that there are women who do not want gains such as ordination; access to safe, legal abortions; more social funding for women raising children alone; and so on. This strategy is supposed to make one think that only 'radicals' or those 'far to the left' want such changes. It is a strategy devised to pit women against each other. It is also deceptive in that it shifts the focus from the question of whether something is merely for the marginalized to the question of whether 'all women' want it.

Positions that would restrict women's roles in Church and society are often bolstered by a sprinkling of particular biblical passages and theological interpretations sometimes called 'fundamentalist'. Fundamentalism, however, is hard to define. The notion of fundamentalism grows out of the American Christian context of the early twentieth century, when a series of pamphlets called *The Fundamentals* was published. But more recently fundamentalism has been used to describe particular movements within many world religions, which, among other things, are opposed to Enlightenment values of critical and rational inquiry and depend on a highly structured and authoritarian view of the particular religious tradition. All the major leadership roles in Christian fundamentalisms are taken by males with a central charismatic male leader (Lawrence 1989; Marty and Appleby 1991–5).

Christian fundamentalists take a view that the Bible is the literal and inerrant Word of God. Statements on women from I Corinthians, Ephesians,

Timothy, and Titus are often used to substantiate such views. One hallmark of such use is that the passages are not read in the historical contexts discussed above, but read as if they were literal words of God that one could simply take from the first century and apply in the twentieth century. What is deceptive here, though, is that not all biblical passages are used equally. In fact, as noted above, the views of women and family that inform the selection and interpretation of particular passages are themselves relatively recent and from a particular historical and cultural point of view. Conservative Christians, whether or not they would call themselves fundamentalists, usually hold the view that male language for God is the language that God 'himself' wants used.

UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS

Some symbols, movements, and themes are unique to Christianity, or take specifically Christian forms. In the following pages a few of these are explored.

Mary

Mary the mother of Jesus has been an ambiguous figure for Christian feminists. She is one of the few biblical women whose name is known and about whom we have more than just a few words of text. She has not figured as prominently for Protestants as the early Protestant Reformers thought that veneration of Mary was too easily confused with worship of her. The traditional image of her as fostered by the church, especially the Roman Catholic Church, has been one of the obedient woman who was chosen precisely because she was demure and passive and who acted as the vessel for God's plan. Mary, the obedient one, is often contrasted to Eve, the disobedient one. Women are instructed to model their lives on this passive, obedient Mary who served her son and his interests. The Roman Catholic doctrines of the Immaculate Conception of Mary (Mary herself was conceived without sin), of Mary's perpetual virginity, and of her bodily Assumption into heaven were set in place to protect Jesus' sinlessness and his intimate relationship to God. But they also serve to create an idealized woman: the unattainable virgin-mother. Thus, Mary, unlike all other women, is the woman untainted by sexuality.

Yet Mary has not been confined to such a role in the church. In the devotion of Catholic women worldwide, Mary has also been a strong and powerful figure who has supported them in standing up for their rights. Often such views of Mary quote the Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55), where Mary says that God has 'brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly'; and has 'filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty'. Mary is the one who understands their plights even when God and Jesus seem

far away. Not only that, but because the line between devotion to Mary and worship of Mary does get blurred, Mary at times seems very much like God, only nearer and more accessible. And so we do have a female figure who functions goddess-like in the devotion of many Roman Catholic women (see Daly 1973: 90–2).

Women as Missionaries

In the nineteenth century women became heavily involved in the missionary enterprises of extending the Church, both Catholic and Protestant, to all parts of the world. At first, Protestant women were involved in organizing funding and support for the missionary effort without themselves becoming missionaries. Throughout the nineteenth century, however, Women's Missionary organizations grew in both the US and Canada. Such missionary organizations were among the first organized women's activities in the Church. They focused on educating their own members and raising money for the missionary efforts. Initially many women spent their lives doing 'good works' in the 'mission field' as missionaries' wives. Finally churches realized that male missionaries were not always allowed contact with the women of the peoples among whom they were supposed to work, and so, by the mid-nineteenth century, Protestant churches began to send single women as missionaries. Indeed, many single women who were professionally trained, such as the early female doctors, often found that they were more accepted in the mission field than back at home (MacHaffie 1986: 93–106; Grant 1972: 57–8).

Roman Catholic nuns also entered into mission work in the nineteenth century. Pope Pius XI ordered that all congregations of nuns should have missionary communities to convert non-Westerners to Christianity, and some new religious orders were founded specifically as missionary orders (McNamara 1996).

Development of Feminist Theologies

As the women's movement developed in North America in the 1960s and 1970s, women within the churches began to articulate feminist critiques of both the institutional churches and the patriarchal theologies that supported them. Further, they began to propose new ways of thinking about theology (see Young 1995).

In 1960, Valerie Saiving wrote what is usually considered the first article in contemporary feminist theology, 'The Human Situation: A Feminine View', where she raises the question of experience that becomes central to feminist theology. She opines that women do not experience the world in the same way men do and thus that traditional theological definitions of sin and salvation do not apply to women in the same way they apply to men (Saving 1979). In

1968, Mary Daly wrote *The Church and the Second Sex*, raising questions about the status and roles of women in the history of the Church. And from these roots, and other books and articles like them that began to appear, a whole set of questions emerged. There were questions about the biblical texts and interpretations. There were historical questions. Where were the women in the Bible and in church history? Could their stories be recovered? What is the importance of noticing that the biblical texts and the history of the Church are told from a male/patriarchal point of view? And there were theological questions. Why is God always portrayed as male? Why are women seen to be primarily responsible for sin?

Feminists who wanted to stay within the church began to write biblical commentaries, histories, and theologies that took women's experiences within the church seriously and that took with utmost seriousness the full humanity of women. Thus, feminist theology quickly moved beyond critique to the construction of new ways of thinking about history and theology. Feminist theologies arose from both Roman Catholic and Protestant women who did not accept that the patriarchal institutional church was the only or best interpreter of Christianity. Although some feminist theologians like Mary Daly (1973, 1975) and Daphne Hampson (1990, 1996) have left the Christian Church behind as irretrievably patriarchal, many other feminist theologians have decided that within Christianity there are liberating strands that can be woven together into a non-patriarchal whole (Young 1990).

The work of feminist historian and theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether has spanned more than three decades. It was she who brought attention to the construction of Christianity in hierarchical dualisms such as mind/soul over body and humans over nature (Ruether 1975). She wrote one of the first books of constructive theology where, going beyond criticism of the patriarchal theologies, she formulated a theology from a feminist starting point (Ruether 1983). Letty Russell, whose work was parallel to Ruether's, developed ideas of partnership to overcome hierarchical thinking (Russell 1974, 1979, 1993).

Today feminist theologies are many, varied, and diverse, arising from new contexts to speak to new experiences.

Christian feminism has a variety of global and cultural forms. Early Christian feminist theologies were rightly criticized for speaking from basically one stance, that of white, educated, heterosexual, and relatively privileged women, yet using the term *woman* as a generic. Women of colour, women from geographic locations outside North America and Europe, and lesbian women began to raise questions about the assumptions of these early theologies that all women's experiences were alike. They raised new questions. They explored new outlooks. Lesbian women began questioning the construction of sexuality as focused on heterosexual pairs (Heyward 1989). Within North America

there are womanist theologies (from an African-American perspective), and *mujerista* theologies (from a Hispanic perspective). There are also *mujerista* theologies from Central and South America, African feminist theologies, and Asian feminist theologies (Russell et al. 1988; Fabella and Oduyoye 1988; Fabella and Park 1989; Chung 1990; Aquino 1993; Oduyoye 1995; Isasi-Díaz 1996). Each of these theologies tries to take its own cultural context and its own particular version of patriarchy into consideration. For example, Maria Pilar Aquino, writing of Latin America, specifically addresses issues within the Roman Catholic Church, the dominant church in Latin America. Issues of colonialism and capitalism affect women in Latin America. She also examines the cultural specificity of *machismo*.

Machismo does not derive or have its origin in capitalism, although it converges and combines with it in mutual reinforcement. But it can also combine with socialist structures in which unequal relationships persist between men and women, if there is insufficient criticism of women's double workload, the sexual division of labor, and inequalities between the sexes in general. (Aquino 1993: 23)

Aquino suggests many contributions that a specifically feminist Latin American theology can make to theological understanding. One such contribution is to portray God as a God of life:

The starting point for this new experience of faith is the general context of suffering and oppression of the Latin American masses. In the light of faith this situation is *unnatural*, and God is not indifferent to it. On the contrary, realizing that this immense suffering is against God's plan for fullness of life for humanity has led to the discovery of God in the suffering faces of the oppressed. . . . This encounter with God in the faces of the poor, of women, and all the oppressed has given faith a new meaning. . . . [P]recisely because life is preeminent to women, they feel called by God—like the biblical prophets—to denounce every threat to it. (Aquino 1993: 132–3)

Chung Hyun Kyung is a Korean feminist theologian who has sought to integrate traditional Korean women's shamanistic practices and beliefs and other expressions of women's popular religion in Asia into her feminist Christianity. Indeed, when she invoked the spirits of her ancestors in the context of a speech to the World Council of Churches in 1991, she was denounced by many of the more conservative church persons present as a syncretist (one who indiscriminately combines or collapses two or more religions into one) (see Chung 1988 and 1990).

We Asian women theologians must move away from our imposed fear of losing Christian identity, in the opinion of the mainline theological circles, and instead risk that we might be transformed by the religious wisdom of our own people. We may find that to the extent that we are willing to lose our old identity, we will be transformed into truly *Asian* Christians. . . . Who owns Christianity? (Chung 1990: 113)

Chung notes that because most shamans in Korea have been women, Korean women relate best to Jesus in the image of a woman. To make her point, she quotes from the poem 'One Day I Shall Be Like a Banyan Tree', by Indian theologian Gabriele Dietrich:

I am a woman
and the blood
of my sacrifices
cries out to the sky
which you call heaven.
I am sick of you priests
who have never bled
and yet say:
This is my body
given up for you
and my blood
shed for you
drink it.
Whose blood
has been shed
for life
since eternity?

(Quoted in Chung 1990: 69 from
Gabriele Dietrich [1985])

Christian Feminist Anti-Semitism

One of the temptations of Christian feminist theology is to portray Christianity as superior to Judaism on the matter of the status of women. When Christian women began express concern about the patriarchy endemic to the Christian tradition they often began with Jesus' teachings and acts as recorded in the New Testament. Often, a contrast was too quickly drawn between 'Christianity' and its non-patriarchal roots and 'Judaism' as patriarchal. This characterization fails to recognize that Jesus was himself a Jew and that what became Christianity was in its beginnings a movement within Judaism. It also fails to

take seriously the official Judaism of Jesus' time and place (centred on the temple and ritual practices by a priestly caste), which was no more a monolithic representation of all Judaism than the Christianity of any particular time and place is of all Christianity. In Jesus' time there was reaction against this official Judaism from a number of Jewish quarters (see Ruether 1998: 14–15). The aims of Christian feminism cannot be met if the route to 'rescuing' Christianity for women means denigrating another religious tradition. Christian feminists can draw on Jesus' acts and teachings without having to find them superior to all other religious movements of the period (see Fiorenza 1994: 67–73).

CONCLUSION

There is no singular way to talk about women in the history of Christianity. Women's roles have been varied and variable. Patriarchy has been a given and women have worked around that to discern roles. For many women, Christianity has offered more than its patriarchal forms would seem to suggest. There is also no singular way to talk about the prospects of reforming Christianity in a non-patriarchal manner. Like all other cultural forms, Christianity is closely related to the values of the cultures in which it finds itself. Sometimes forms of Christianity lag behind those values, sometimes they forge ahead, sometimes they simply keep pace.

The question of whether one can be Christian and feminist at the same time does not allow for an easy answer. One response is that there are lots of women in a variety of social and geographical contexts who name themselves this way. They see liberating potential within some forms of Christianity even as they recognize the patriarchy. They see the possibility of reform.

It will be crucial to examine how Christianity modifies as scholarship begins to take seriously the critiques of feminist theory on issues that once seemed simple and straightforward, such as whether 'women' is a category defined only or fully by biology or whether one might, regardless of one's biology, perform (or refuse to perform) the gender role 'women'. It is clear that ongoing feminist reflections will continue to be important and necessary to the academic study of Christianity.

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I

The State of the Question

This is not a book I ever intended to write. I was quite content to produce rather obscure articles on what people in the Middle Ages thought about the Christian ritual meal, called, variously, communion or the Lord's Supper or the Mass. In fact, until 1997, I never questioned the received wisdom that women had never been ordained in the Christian West. I got dragged into this question quite accidentally through a controversy not of my making.

In 1997, I gave an address at the Catholic Theological Society of America that suggested that women in the Middle Ages had presided over ceremonies during which they distributed the bread and wine consecrated during the communion ritual. It wasn't a very radical suggestion but seemed to touch a nerve with some people. My talk, along with the addresses of my colleagues John Baldovin and Mary Collins, earned the disapproval of Cardinal Avery Dulles in an issue of the Catholic journal, *Commonweal*. There was a bit of a kerfuffle that seemed to be fading when a colleague of mine, Evelyn Kirkely, stopped me in the hallway and remarked, "I heard you proved that women had been ordained in the Middle Ages." I was perplexed and a little annoyed. No, I protested, I had proved no such thing, and further, women never had been ordained in the Middle Ages.

Kirkely, not being Catholic, had not followed closely the minor uproar over the papers given at the CTSA. She was suggesting, nevertheless, a possible conclusion that could be drawn from the

examples I had given. She was herself an ordained minister and an accomplished scholar. She doesn't voice opinions lightly. On the short trip back to my office, I reconsidered my hasty response. I had never checked the evidence. Maybe women were ordained. Maybe, as Kirkley intimated, women distributed communion because they were ordained to do so.

There is no point in rehearsing the fascinating hunt that followed. As so often happens in scholarship, one small clue led to another and yet another. Slowly, a pattern emerged. There was no shortage of evidence about ordained women and of secondary studies analyzing this evidence. But the sources were dismissed as anomalies, and the studies that argued that women had been ordained were attacked or marginalized. Mostly, though, both were ignored. Few historians questioned, as I had not, the assumption that women had not, and could not have been, ordained in the Middle Ages. The memory of ordained women has been nearly erased, and where it survived, it was dismissed as illusion or, worse, delusion. This was no accident of history. This is a history that has been deliberately forgotten, intentionally marginalized, and, not infrequently, creatively explained away. The pages that follow hope to expose this buried treasure, not only to excavate and expose the sources that survive concerning ordained women, but also to shed light on the brave scholars, mostly women, who have been insisting, against the odds, for decades that this is a legacy that should not, and cannot, be lost.

The story starts with theologians. They, rather than historians, have spent a great deal of time and ink over the question of whether women have ever been ordained. Most, but not all, have concluded that women have not. But we are getting ahead of our story. Since it is the theologians who have set the limits and the tone of the issue of women's ordination, it is with theologians that we must begin, and theologians have a very different set of questions than historians.

The Difference between Historians and Theologians

The history of Christianity is replete with references to the ordination of women. There are rites for the ordination of women; there are canonical requirements for the ordination of women; there are particular women depicted as ordained, and a number of roles limited to women are included among lists of ordained ministries. There is no question that women were considered to have been ordained by a large number of Christians over several centuries. Yet there remains a good deal of controversy over what exactly the sources that so describe women might have meant when they spoke of that ordination. That this controversy over the meaning of these sources exists at all tells us more about the later history

of Christianity than it does of the period in which the sources appeared. In short, there is only a controversy because in later centuries Christians did not ordain women and some Christian groups still do not ordain women. During these later centuries and for these groups, women were often considered incapable of being ordained. According to this way of thinking, if women were (and are) incapable of being ordained, then they cannot have been ordained in the past. Therefore the texts that so describe them must be somehow mistaken. References to the ordination of women must either be not truly Christian (i.e., heretical) or they must really mean something other than what they seem to mean.

The most common explanation for the numerous references to the ordination of women in the first millennium of Christianity, at least for those who deny that women can be ordained, clarifies those references by describing them as referring to something other than a "real" ordination. They may denote a blessing, or consecration, but not what the words would appear to mean. This reading, of course, depends on the definition of a "real" ordination. The description of an ordination as "real" implies that there is a fixed definition of ordination in Christian history or, at least, that the definition of ordination from one particular period in Christian history is definitive for all of that history.

But to determine one particular definition of ordination as definitive is fundamentally a theological, not an historical, endeavor. Determining what counts as a valid ordination requires that theologians in each Christian denomination decide by what criteria an ordination is considered valid, and further, whether those criteria are eternally valid or mutable over time. Historians do not make such decisions. Historians ask, rather, what ordination meant at a particular moment in the past. Any ceremony called an ordination that fits the criteria established at that time and place *was* an ordination.

The distinction between the very different roles of theologians and of historians is crucial for this study.¹ Historians should not, in this case, assume that women were not ordained in the past simply because the ordinations women underwent then do not meet the criteria for ordination in the present. So, for instance, to ask the interesting historical question whether women ever led the eucharistic liturgy in the past should not be confused with the historical question whether women were ever ordained in the past. The first question is only relevant to the second if leading the eucharistic liturgy were constitutive of valid ordinations in the past.

This study is concerned first and foremost with the historical question whether women were ordained in the past, that is to say, whether they were considered ordained by their contemporaries according to the definition of ordination used at that time. Theologians may judge that definitions of ordination used in the past were inadequate or invalid or both. Those decisions are

but a necessary part of each Christian denomination's self-understanding. Such decisions are not of immediate concern to historians, however, and the two separate tasks of theology and of history should not be confused. When they are so confused, some rather odd conclusions have been reached.

The strangeness of this approach can be more clearly seen when compared to the situation of men in Christian history. Throughout the history of Christianity, one finds references to the ordination of men. There are rites for the ordination of men; there are canonical requirements for the ordination of men; there are particular men depicted as ordained, and a number of roles limited to men are included among lists of ordained ministries. Yet no historians, of whom I am aware, question whether these references are, in fact, mistaken. Men are assumed to have been ordained in all such references because the references say they were and there has never been a period in history or a Christian group that ever denied (or denies) on theological grounds that men were (or are) capable of being ordained. One can then assume that if there had never been a period in the history of Christianity when women had been judged to be incapable of ordination, references to their being ordained would be as unproblematic as references to men being ordained.

The purpose of this book is to help uncover how it happened that women came to be considered as incapable of ordination. Implied in this question is the broader question of whether the definition of ordination changed in such a way that it excluded women and, if so, how it changed. In this sense, the purpose of this book is quite limited. It will not attempt to answer, or even to address, the theological question of whether women should now be ordained. Nor will it discuss whether the ordinations of women that took place in the past meet the criteria for ordination assumed in the present. This book will address only the meaning that ordination had for women in Western Christianity from roughly the sixth through the thirteenth centuries. The reasons for this limited focus are twofold. First a study of the Eastern and Oriental Christian Churches would require a much more extensive analysis than is possible in a single volume.² Second, the ordination of women during the early centuries of Christianity and particularly in the early centuries of Eastern Christianity has been more thoroughly covered in recent research than has the ordination of women during the medieval centuries in the West.³

What the Theologians Have Been Saying

The last forty years have produced an extraordinary amount of research on the question of whether women have ever been ordained within Christianity.

Several scholarly books and articles have discussed the historical background of, and the theological arguments for and against, the ordination of women. As a result, a great deal more is known now about the history of the roles women played in the official church during the early centuries of Christianity than during perhaps any other period in modern Christian history. Slightly less is known about the roles that women played in medieval Christianity, yet there, too, our knowledge has increased significantly. All of this research, however, has been conducted with two particular theological questions in mind. First, have women ever been validly ordained at any time in the two-thousand-year history of Christianity? Second, should women be ordained now? In fact, the first question has been asked mainly to answer the second question.

The fact that these two questions have shaped most of the research on the roles women have played in official Christian ministry has had a profound effect on the results of that research. Since the first question has so often depended on the second question, the criteria for determining whether women have ever been ordained in the Church are those required in answering the first question. To put it simply, what most scholars are asking in the first question is really, "Is there any evidence in the past that supports the ordination of women in the present?" A review of the literature so far produced should help make this clear.

The Early Studies

Even the early modern studies that addressed this question did so from an explicitly theological stance. Jean Morin, the great liturgist, produced a monumental collection of ordination rites in Greek, Latin, and Syriac in 1655.⁴ He included a separate section discussing the question of whether women had been ordained to the diaconate or not in the early church.⁵ He concluded that since the same rites were used for deacons and deaconesses in the most ancient Greek rites, then deaconesses were indeed ordained.

Three of the most ancient Greek rituals, uniformly one in agreement, hand down to us the ordination of deaconesses, administered by almost the same rites and words by which deacons [were ordained]. Both are called ordination, χειρτονία, χειροφείσις. Both are celebrated at the altar by the bishop, and in the same liturgical space. Hands are placed on both while the bishop offers prayers. The stole is placed on the neck of both, both the ordained man and the ordained woman communicate, the chalice full of the blood of Christ placed in the hands of both so they may taste of it.⁶

Morin certainly knew that this would shock most theologians and recounted the opinion of Epiphanius that women could not be priests. This opinion, according to Morin, should not mean, however, that other offices were not open to women. In fact, Morin was certain that his fellow theologians, however rigid they might be, would be won over by the force of the evidence Morin presented.⁷

Morin was the first, to my knowledge, to argue that the requirements for a true ordination require (1) that the ritual be called an ordination, (2) that the ritual be celebrated at the altar by the bishop, (3) that hands are laid upon the one to be ordained, (4) that the stole is placed on the one to be ordained, (5) that the ordained receive communion under the forms of both bread and wine, and most important (6) that the ordination be to one of the "major orders," that is, priest, deacon, or subdeacon. In short, the ancient ceremonies had to meet the requirements for ordination as they would have been understood in the seventeenth century.

Morin was in fact asking the theological question whether these women ordained in the past would be validly ordained in (his) present. This is precisely the confusion of theological and historical questions discussed above. What Morin did not ask is whether women in the past were validly ordained according to the definition of ordination used at the time they were ordained. Most scholars after Morin who addressed this issue would adopt a similar theological approach and apply the same criteria as Morin for determining whether women had ever been ordained.

The Jesuit, Jean Pien,⁸ also wrote an early tract on deaconesses as an appendix to the 1746 volume of the *Acta Sanctorum*. In the second section of the tract, "Concerning the Ordination of Deaconesses," he began, "Before I undertake a word about the ordination of deaconesses, I wish to warn the reader that I am not treating here of ordination in the strict or sacramental sense of the word, but of that sense which might be ceremonial or improper as I will explain more fully later."⁹ Pien then went on to list references to deaconesses found in literary and legal texts as well as in inscriptions. Several of these texts would indicate, as Morin had pointed out, that women were indeed described as ordained deaconesses and were so ordained by a laying on of hands. Pien, however, unlike Morin, described this ritual as "not strictly speaking sacramental, but merely ceremonial"¹⁰ and went on to provide his own texts to support his claims. In conclusion, he quoted the twelfth-century Greek theologian Theodore Balsamon: "A deaconess is not ordained, even if some ascetic women improperly were called deaconesses."¹¹ Thus, the pattern for much of the discussion of the ordination of women was set. Scholars would undertake ever more elaborate dissections of the ancient texts that speak of the ordination of women in order

to determine whether or not ordination rites for women and ministries of women in the past met the criteria for ordination and ministry required of men in the present.

A brief study of deaconesses was undertaken in the nineteenth century by Arcadius Pankowski.¹² A section of his study was dedicated to the question of the ordination of deaconesses. Pankowski reviewed the material, particularly that used by Morin, yet concluded with Pien that deaconesses had never been truly ordained. "A merely ceremonial ordination, in which we hold deaconesses to have been participants, was not the same [as that of deacons] as it does not give the power of public preaching in the church, ministering at the altar, sacrificing, or conferring the other sacraments. These offices of sacramental ordination alone were already forbidden to the female sex from the time of the apostles."¹³ The criteria cited by Pankowski are, again, the criteria that would have been assumed to be eternally valid. The same criteria that applied in the nineteenth century would have applied from the very beginnings of Christianity.

In the early years of the twentieth century, a debate began among liturgists as to the status of the ancient deaconesses. One of the most complete collections of sources on this issue was compiled by Josephine Mayer in her *Monumenta de viduis diaconissis virginibusque tractantia* (*Records Treating of Widows, Diaconesses and Virgins*).¹⁴ Containing both the original Greek and Latin sources, it remains one of the most complete collections of original material on these offices. Mayer herself concluded from her studies that deaconesses were set apart by their office in a special position between laity and clergy.¹⁵

The most complete of the early study of deaconesses from this period was Adolf Kalsbach's 1926 investigation of the rise and decline of that order. He made the important point that women could only be judged as truly ordained when rites of consecration had been fully developed in Christianity. According to Kalsbach, this occurred in the second half of the fourth century, and from that point on, women were not considered to be ordained.¹⁶ Kalsbach insisted that ordination in the past needed to be judged as valid on its own terms. At the very least, it was inappropriate to make retrospective judgments on the validity of any ordination until the criteria for a valid ordination had been established.

Kalsbach's suggestion that any analysis of the ordination of women must also entail an understanding of the concept of ordination itself was taken up in 1954 by the Spanish scholar, Santiago Giner Sempere.¹⁷ In a lengthy analysis of the most important sources, Sempere warned the reader that:

It certainly produces anxiety to read the words "ordination," "imposition of hands," etc. [in regard to the ordination of women]. But one ought not to forget the inconsistency of those words,

particularly in the first centuries of the church, and the ease with which one encounters the phrase, "ordination of deaconesses," as synonymous with the expressions, "consecration," "benediction," "veiling," etc. which never appear when treating of the ordination of deacons or priests.¹⁸

Sempere realized, as had Morin, that the language of many ancient documents, taken at their face value, attested to the ordination of women. For Sempere, then, those documents must have meant something else in their own time and certainly did not mean the same as true sacramental ordination as it would become defined in later centuries. Sempere realized that a different definition of ordination must have been used in earlier centuries but assumed that this definition must have been incomplete, if not defective, since it included women.

The Recent Flurry of Scholarship

By the middle decades of the twentieth century, the rising social and political claims of women for equality began also to affect most Christian denominations. The discussion of the ordination of women began in earnest, spurred by the possibility that women would be allowed to be ordained. Several Christian denominations, including the Evangelical Church in Germany, the Anglican Communion, the Old Catholic Church, the Orthodox Churches, and the Roman Catholic Church, began to study the possibility of the ordination of women.¹⁹ There were nearly eight hundred articles and books written on this subject between 1960 and 2001, and interest in the subject does not seem to have waned since then.²⁰ Not all of these discussions are immediately pertinent to the topic of this book since they do not address the ordination of women in earlier Christian history. Still, a comprehensive discussion of even all of the historical studies would constitute another book of equal length, so a brief overview of some of the major contributions to the question must suffice.

In 1960, in an article in the journal *Maison-Dieu*, the Jesuit scholar Jean Daniélou argued that the evidence showed that women had been ordained in the past. His approach was astonishingly similar to that of Morin over three hundred years earlier. "Above all in the East, we are face to face with Ordination rites which include a laying-on-of-hands, clothing with the deacon's vestments and the delivery of the chalice, offering remarkable parallels to the ordination of men."²¹ Daniélou was quick to point out, however, that women had never been ordained to the priesthood.²²

Another Jesuit scholar, Haye van der Meer, offered a different argument in favor of the ordination of women, in this case, to the priesthood rather than to the diaconate. Writing in 1969, van der Meer, after extensive historical analysis, argued that women had in the past been excluded from ordination to the priesthood, but that the grounds for this exclusion were historically conditioned and did need not necessarily apply in the present.²³ A year later, the German scholar Ida Raming completed her doctoral thesis investigating the medieval canonical background to the exclusion of women from the priesthood.²⁴ Raming, like van der Meer, did not argue that women had been ordained to the priesthood, but rather that the grounds for the exclusion of women from ordination were based on misogyny and, in some cases, on forged documents. In any case, reasons based on these authorities should no longer be used to validate the exclusion of women from ordination to the priesthood in the present.²⁵

The argument had taken a decidedly different turn. First, van der Meer and Raming argued that women could, or should, be ordained as priests as well as deaconesses. Second, they did not seek to prove that women had been ordained in the past, but rather that the reasons for the exclusion of women from ordination in the past were no longer valid. These authors were not the first to argue that women should be ordained as priests, but they were perhaps the first to do so after an exhaustive study of the historical sources against such an ordination.²⁶

Two of the most influential studies on the ordination of women as deaconesses were those of the French scholars Roger Gryson and Aimé Georges Martimort. Both analyzed at length the historical documents related to this office in the first centuries of Christianity in both Eastern and Western Christianity. Gryson's study covered evidence through the sixth century, while Martimort's study continued into the thirteenth century in the West. So thorough was the treatment of the subject by these two scholars that all later studies are either based on, or refer back, to, these important contributions.

Yet the two scholars reached very different conclusions. Gryson's study, published in 1972,²⁷ discussed the ministry of women in general in the early history of Christianity, although as he stated, "Actually, women did not exercise any other ministry properly so called in the early Church except that of deaconesses and occasionally of widows."²⁸ Gryson found no evidence that widows were ever ordained since they played no role in liturgical services.²⁹ Deaconesses, however, "from the end of the 4th century, were definitely counted among the clergy like clerics, with the laying on of hands (*cheir-otonia*), they received ordination under precise juridical conditions."³⁰

Gryson made explicit the reasons for his study in his conclusions: "From a doctrinal point of view, since for several centuries a large portion of the Church followed this practice [of ordaining deaconesses] without raising a theoretical problem, it is perfectly conceivable to confer on women a diaconal type of ministry. Women deacons then receive a true ordination, with nothing distinguishing it formally from the ordination of their male colleagues."³¹ Again, the criteria Gryson used to assess the ordination of deaconesses were the same as those first suggested by Morin, and he made quite it clear that the purpose of his study was to investigate the history of the early church to help determine present practice. Like van der Meer and Raming, Gryson suggested that the fact that women did not function as priests in the early years of Christianity could be merely cultural.³²

Gryson's study received a strong response from Martimort in the *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique*. Martimort argued that the *Apostolic Constitutions*, a fourth-century document upon which Gryson had partly relied for his evaluation of women deaconesses, was of questionable orthodoxy.³³ Further, the *Constitutions* also described the laying on of hands as part of the ordination ceremonies of subdeacons and readers, orders that modern theology would not consider capable of being truly ordained. Martimort went on to suggest details in the rite of ordaining deaconesses that diverged from that of deacons. In short, the *Constitutions* did not provide proof that women were ordained.³⁴

Gryson answered Martimort's challenge in his own article in *Mélanges des sciences religieuses*.³⁵ Gryson disputed the heretical status of the *Apostolic Constitutions* as described by Martimort but also insisted that his analysis depended on more than this one source. He further found that the differences between the rites of ordination for deacons and deaconesses were too slight to designate one a true ordination and the other not. Most important for our study, Gryson took issue with Martimort's concern with modern theological concepts: "I believe that 'the concepts of our modern theology' have nothing to do with determining how the *Apostolic Constitutions* regarded the ordination of deaconesses. One cannot say that because our theology is reluctant to accept this ordination as sacramental, the same as that of the male deacons, the *Apostolic Constitutions* could not consider it such."³⁶ Gryson, however, did not leave the matter there. Even if one used modern criteria for ordination, the ancient documents of the Eastern Church described a true sacramental ordination.

Concerning the theological appreciation, I would certainly never have hazarded a conclusion on the sole basis of the testimony of the *Constitutions*. But actually, this evidence is not isolated; it appears in a series of concordant testimonies tending to prove that, in the

milieu termed "Syrian-Byzantine," from the end of the fourth century in any case, women deacons received an ordination analogous to men deacons, and, as a consequence, if one refers to the "concepts of our modern theology," it was a sacramental ordination. Since this was not a marginal fact or a fantasy rejected by legitimate authority, but, on the contrary, an institution peacefully accepted by a large part of Christianity for several centuries, one can deduce from it, it seems to me, that when the Church judges it relevant, women can receive the sacrament of orders for a ministry of the diaconal type, whose limits the Church can establish.³⁷

Despite the fact that Gryson was well aware that the author of the *Apostolic Constitutions* did not use the same concept of ordination that modern theologians would use, in the end, he insisted that it was the modern criteria that must be met for women to be considered as ordained in the past. On this one issue, both sides of the dispute over the ordination of women in the past agreed. In order for women to be considered as ordained in the past, the ordinations of those women must pass muster as ordinations as they exist in the present. Martimort and Gryson did not disagree over the criteria for evaluating ordinations in the past; they disagreed whether those criteria had been met or not. And so the debate continued.

Writing shortly after Gryson, and dependent to some extent upon both Gryson and van der Meer, Jean Galot produced a comprehensive study of women and ministry in the church.³⁸ After a careful study of the documents and of the theological requirements for ordination in the Roman Catholic Church of the twentieth century, Galot took the position that the ancient deaconesses of the Eastern church were in fact sacramentally ordained.³⁹ This ordination, however, stood at the very edge of the clerical state, almost between the clergy and the laity.⁴⁰ This was because no women, not even the ancient deaconesses, ever did or ever could have access to the priesthood. Despite the obvious prejudice against women in the scriptural and historical sources, the divine plan clearly forbade women access to the sacerdotal order.⁴¹ Galot was much clearer than any previous writer that he was deliberately applying the twentieth-century laws governing ordination to evaluate the ordination of women (and men by implication) in the past. His purpose, as the final chapter of his book makes clear, was purely theological. He wished to outline the possible roles for women in the present Roman Catholic Church.⁴²

Joan Morris, a British theologian and journalist, published a study of the quasi-episcopal role of women particularly in the medieval church in 1973.⁴³ Although her study was concerned mostly with the jurisdictional power that

women exercised in Christian history, she included an appendix entitled "The Ordination of Abbesses," in which she presented extensive references to documents that referred to abbesses as ordained. Among the references were rites for the ordination of abbesses. "We can conclude," Morris noted, "that women from earliest times were ordained to an administrative position within the Church. They at times received the titles of *Episcopa*, *Sacerdos Maxima*, *Praeposita*, and *Custos* of churches. They had all the powers of a bishop with regard to the jurisdiction of churches and people within their territories."⁴⁴

Morris reasoned that abbesses were validly ordained as bishops because they did what bishops did, and so were given the titles usually reserved to men who were ordained. She did not address the validity of women's ordinations in the past but did raise in a very pointed way the problem of how to explain references to abbesses in the past that clearly spoke of them as ordained.

In 1982, Martimort produced his own extensive study of the history of deaconesses. It remains the most comprehensive study of the sources on the role of deaconesses in Christianity from its beginning through the attempted renewal of the status of deaconess among the Carthusians of the seventeenth century. In general, Martimort presented his sources without bias, but his conclusions make clear his position on the ordination of women. Martimort found that the differences between the rituals for the ordination of deacons and of deaconesses were based on the inability of deaconesses to serve at the altar and to continue on to ordination as priests.⁴⁵ He concluded that the ordination of deaconesses was "merely ceremonial," not sacramental, using Pien's phrase. In his conclusion, Martimort admitted, "It is difficult to avoid anachronism when one wishes to resolve present problems with the solutions of a past long gone: the ancient institution of deaconesses was, in its time, burdened with several ambiguities, as we have seen."⁴⁶ Unfortunately, despite this warning, he concluded his study with a continued use of modern theological categories to assess the validity of the ordination of deaconesses. Deaconesses could neither serve at the altar and nor aspire to the priesthood. The equivalence between ordination and service at the altar was assumed to have been equally important in the past as it is in the present.

In the same year, the Italian scholar Giorgio Otranto suggested that women had actually functioned as priests in Italy and in Brittany in the fifth and early sixth centuries.⁴⁷ He based this conclusion on a letter of Gelasius I, dated 494, in which the pope condemned the practice of bishops allowing women to officiate at the altar. A similar condemnation was sent by the bishops in Gaul to two Breton priests who allowed women to serve at the altar with them. Otranto found confirmation that women had served as priests during this period in epigraphs dedicated to *presbyterae* in Calabria, Dalmatia, and Poitiers. Otranto

concluded, "Although specific attestations of women priests are few, the frequent and always polemical treatment of the question of the admission of women to the priesthood, both in Christian authors and in the *Acta* of councils, leads us to conclude that the cases of women participating in liturgical service must have been more numerous than those attested in the literary and epigraphical testimonies."⁴⁸ Otranto was the first scholar to argue that women had been ordained and served as priests (*presbyterae*) within orthodox Christianity. As had Martimort, however, Otranto assumed that service at the altar implied ordination, and vice versa. The link between the Eucharist and ordination was not questioned.

Questioning the Definition of Ordination

Marie-Joséphe Aubert's lengthy study of deaconesses in 1987 relied heavily in its historical analysis on the work of Gryson and Martimort.⁴⁹ Aubert agreed with Gryson that the ordination of female deacons in the Greek church was a true sacramental ordination.⁵⁰ Aubert admitted, however, that asking whether deaconesses were so ordained was simply the wrong question. In a long quotation from Yves Congar, the Dominican theologian and historian, Aubert made his position clear:

This is a bad question. I think that there is a certain *quiproquo* about the notion. Order in the ancient church, "*ordo*," "*ordinare*" meant to establish a certain "order" in the Church. The question does present itself as knowing whether this is the sacrament of Orders. Without doubt one might ask that today if one thinks of things in this way. But the ancients did not work like that. The question solely to be established about an "*ordo*" was whether it is *authentic*, the "order" of the female diaconate.⁵¹

Aubert repeated this position in the conclusion to his study: "Theologians pose themselves the question if eastern deaconesses received the sacrament. In fact, this would be for them to read an ancient institution using a much later frame of analysis for this institution that is relatively inadequate for it."⁵²

In short, Aubert insisted that, historically speaking, one cannot answer the question of whether women had received a true sacramental ordination in the fourth century because the concept of a true sacramental ordination simply did not exist then. The "ordination" to which the ancient document alluded was not at all the same concept that the modern question implies. The continued use of the word "ordination" (in Latin, *ordinatio*) for rites of initiation into Christian ministry gives the illusion of perfect continuity. Yet for men and women,

ordination had a far different meaning for the first half of Christian history than it would come to have in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

Aubert only briefly alludes to what an early concept of ordination might have been. According to Aubert, ordination in the ancient church did not involve the conferral of priestly power but was rather the installation (*ordinatio*) into a new job or position (*ordo*) in the church. Ordination was not limited to the priesthood and so was less sacramental than functional, and this, according to Aubert, marked a profound difference.⁵³ Aubert's insight, based on that of Congar, was extremely important. Yet few scholars picked up on it, and the investigation into the ordination of women in the past continued to be driven by the question whether women should be ordained in the present.

A collection of essays on the subject of women and the liturgy edited by Teresa Berger and Albert Gerhards in 1990 contained a review by Dirk Ansgorge of the role of the ordination of women in Christian history as it had so far developed.⁵⁴ Using the work of Gryson, Galot, Martimort, and Aubert, Ansgorge concluded that at least in some places and at some times in the history of the church, women had received a true sacramental ordination based on the modern definition of that term.⁵⁵ Ansgorge, again, specifically asked the historical question in order to address the modern issues associated with the ordination of women.⁵⁶

A year later, Joseph Ysebaert wrote an article addressing the origin of deaconesses in the Western church of late antiquity.⁵⁷ He concluded that the rite of ordaining deaconesses was adopted from the Eastern Christian practice. Further, despite the objections of some councils in Gaul, a proper ordination ceremony, including the laying on of hands and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, was practiced in the West.⁵⁸ Just as earlier studies, Ysebaert's article was consciously inspired by the modern debate over the restoration of the practice of ordaining deacons in the Roman Catholic Church. Ysebaert was looking for signs that women in the past had been ordained in the same way as they would need to be ordained in the present.⁵⁹

In 1997, Peter Hünemann, Albert Biesinger, Marianne Heimbach-Steins, and Anne Jenson edited a thorough discussion of the ordination of deaconesses from both theological and historical perspectives.⁶⁰ Although the edited volume was fundamentally concerned with the modern issue of the ordination of deaconesses, four of the essays summarize the scholarship on the history of women's ordination. A brief overview of the history of the ordination of deaconesses was included as part of a longer theological essay on the revival of the female diaconate by Albert Biesinger. Like Ansgorge, Biesinger argued that the history demonstrated that women had once been ordained as deaconesses.⁶¹ Hans Jorissen and Peter Hünemann summarized the arguments for and

against the ordination of deaconesses in contrasting articles.⁶² Both scholars agreed that the basic historical argument against the ordination of deaconesses was based on the definition of ordination as service at the altar. Since deaconesses had never served at the altar, then any ceremony that they may have undergone could not be a true ordination.⁶³ Finally, Heike Grieser in a brief summary article contended that the evidence would suggest that women had been ordained in the past.⁶⁴

Contributions from Eastern Christianity

Although the subject of this book is limited to ordination in the Western church, some mention should be made of the discussion concerning the ordination of women in the past among scholars in the Greek Orthodox Church. An excellent summary of the Orthodox positions on this question was compiled by Kyriaki Karidoyanes FitzGerald in her book *Women Deacons in the Orthodox Church*.⁶⁵ The opposition to the ordination of deaconesses in the Eastern church, according to FitzGerald, was based on a very similar argument to that detailed by Jorissen and Hünemann. The diaconate, in this understanding, is part of the fullness of priesthood shared by the three orders of bishop, priest, and deacon. Since women cannot be ordained as priests, then they cannot be ordained as deacons, as the diaconate is merely the first step in the process of becoming a priest.⁶⁶ Conspicuously for our study, FitzGerald noted that "this understanding of ordained ministry finds its roots in the medieval West."⁶⁷

The Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church of Greece decided to restore the female diaconate on October 8, 2004, thus ending at the least the modern debate over the possibility of the ordination of women to the diaconate in the Greek Church. Yet, historical investigation of the role of women in the Byzantine church continues. Particularly notable are the recent studies by Valerie Karras. Holding that women were ordained deaconesses in the past, Karras reiterated the view of FitzGerald that opposition to this recognition was due to an understanding of the diaconate that tied it firmly to the priesthood. If women could not be ordained as priests, then it must follow that they cannot be ordained as deacons either.⁶⁸

The findings of FitzGerald and Karras strengthen the position of earlier scholars that the meaning of ordination, both in the past and in the present, centers for many scholars on the question of service at the altar. The three "major orders" of deacon, priest, and bishop perform that service, and it is that service that defines what it means to be ordained. Those who argue that women have never been truly ordained base this judgment on the evidence that women have never served at the altar, and therefore, by definition, they have never been

ordained. The proponents of the ordination of deaconesses assert that deaconesses can be ordained into the major order of the diaconate despite the fact that they have never served at the altar. They are ordained into a separate ministry of service that does not include such ministry at the altar.⁶⁹ It is significant that the Greek Orthodox scholars understand the tie between service at the altar and true ordination as a medieval Western innovation. Unfortunately, they do not elaborate on this assertion.

The Most Recent Studies

In 1996, Ute Eisen produced an exhaustive compilation of the epigraphical evidence of women ministers in the early centuries of Christianity.⁷⁰ Although her concerns were mainly with the historical evidence, Eisen did address briefly the issue of the validity of the ordination of women in the past. While carefully insisting that historical remains be understood in their contemporary setting, Eisen concluded, "It is clear that women were active in the expansion and shaping of the Church in the first centuries: they were apostles, prophets, teachers, presbyters, enrolled widows, deacons, bishops, and stewards. . . . In short, to the question of whether there were women officeholders in the Church's first centuries our study returns a resounding answer: yes!"⁷¹ Eisen provided important historical information on the role women played in the first five hundred years of Christianity but did not investigate the link between those roles and ordination.

The most complete study of the modern debate concerning the ordination of women is certainly Dorothea Reininger's *Diakonat der Frau in der Einen Kirche*, which appeared in 1999. Reininger's major concern rested with the theological arguments advanced in the Roman Catholic Church for and against the ordination of women; although in the process of presenting this material, she offered a thorough discussion of the debate in the Evangelical Church in Germany, the Anglican Communion, the Old Catholic Church, and the Orthodox churches.⁷² As background to this larger discussion, Reininger summarized the arguments over the validity of the ordination of deaconesses in the early church. She concluded that evidence from history neither mandates nor fundamentally rules out the restoration of the female diaconate.⁷³ On the difficult question of the validity of the ordination of deaconesses in the past, Reininger noted that some scholars simply found the question unanswerable. The criteria necessary even to ask the question were not developed until the twelfth century. Echoing the sentiments of Yves Congar, as quoted by Aubert, she considered the question anachronistic.⁷⁴ Reininger noted that other authors, notably Peter Hünemann, while accepting these caveats, would yet find enough

equivalence between the past and later criteria to attempt a theological judgment on the ordination of women in the past.⁷⁵

Reininger's study detailed the growing awareness among scholars that since the understanding of ordination changed significantly in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in the West, any judgment about ordinations in earlier centuries was, at best, problematic. Certainly one could, and indeed had to, make a theological judgment concerning the relevance of earlier ordinations to the present issue of the ordination of women. Yet the question of the meaning of such ordinations in the past was not, and could not be, the focus of these studies since their purpose remained precisely the issue of ordaining women now. For those Christian groups for whom tradition played an important theological role—particularly Roman Catholics, the Anglican Communion, and the Orthodox churches—if women in the past were ordained according to criteria as presently accepted by those groups, this would constitute a strong traditional argument in favor of ordination in the present.

In 2000, three studies appeared that discussed the ordination of women in the early history of Christianity. The most emphatically theological of these was Gerhard Müller's *Priesthood and Diaconate*. The subtitle, "The Recipient of the Sacrament of Holy Orders from the Perspective of Creation Theology and Christology," makes this abundantly clear.⁷⁶ At least partly in response to Dorothea Reininger's work, Müller specifically addressed the question of the validity of historical ordinations of women. According to Müller, the criteria for reading all historical documents must be the official teaching of the present magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church.⁷⁷ The church has determined that the three offices of deacon, priest, and bishop constitute a sacramental unity and hence are significantly different from any other function in the church. This sacramental unity is of the essence of ordination.⁷⁸ "If the deaconess and the subdeacon are not allowed to carry out the duties of the presbyter or the deacon, then they have not received such a commission in their blessing or consecration either, and thus *are not* deacons."⁷⁹

As Jorissen and Hünermann had pointed out some years earlier, the decisive argument against the validity of ordination of women in the past relied on criteria for ordination developed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Müller was well aware of this and, in fact, specifically alluded to this development, arguing that the touchstone for ordination was the later understanding since this was the position approved by official church teaching.⁸⁰

A second study from the year 2000 was also based on theological grounds but reached the opposite conclusion from that of Müller. Phyllis Zagano, in *Holy Saturday: An Argument for the Restoration of the Female Diaconate in the Catholic Church*, urged that the ministry of women in that church be formalized

through the ordination to the diaconate. As part of that argument, Zagano summarized the discussion concerning the validity of women's ordinations in the past and concluded that "there are stronger arguments from scripture, history, tradition, and theology that women may be ordained deacons than that women may not be ordained deacons."⁸¹

A third study from 2000 was my article, "The Ordination of Women in the Early Middle Ages."⁸² The article reviewed references to ordination in the literature of the early Middle Ages in Western Christianity and then argued that the understanding of ordination used in these sources was quite different from that of later centuries. Based on studies by earlier scholars, the article asserted that ordination in this period referred to any ceremony by which a person moved to a new role or ministry (*ordo*) in the church. Given that understanding of ordination, then, nuns, abbesses, and queens in their own historical setting were described as, and indeed considered as, ordained.⁸³ To use other criteria to determine if these women were "really" ordained was a theological decision that had to be justified on theological, not historical, grounds.⁸⁴

This article offered two new perspectives to the ongoing debate. First, although many scholars had noted that a different notion of ordination had been used before the twelfth century, I attempted to describe what precisely that understanding was. Second, I attempted to separate more clearly the theological questions raised in this debate from the purely historical issues.

John Wijngaards has been a contributor to the discussion about the ordination of women for many years through his web site, perhaps the most extensive source for bibliography on the subject.⁸⁵ In 2001 and 2002, Wijngaards published two books that detail the arguments he had been making for many years over the Internet. The first book, *The Ordination of Women in the Catholic Church*,⁸⁶ was fundamentally a theological argument refuting the papal statements justifying the refusal to admit women into ordination. Wijngaards, however, addressed his refutations not directly to the papal documents themselves, but to the late medieval sources upon which they were based.⁸⁷ His approach strengthened the contention of earlier writers, particularly Ida Raming, that it was Western medieval theology, particularly canon law, that provided the justification for the modern exclusion of women from the priesthood. Wijngaards included a discussion of the ordination of deaconesses and concluded that women did receive the sacrament of ordination. As proof, the author detailed the Byzantine rite for the ordination of a deaconess, highlighting the laying on of hands and the presentation of a chalice by the bishop that were part of this rite.⁸⁸

The second book, *No Women in Holy Orders?* specifically discussed the validity of the ordination of deaconesses in the Byzantine church. *No Women in*

Holy Orders? contains an even more elaborate discussion of ritual for this ordination, including translations of the ritual along with other important early church witnesses to deaconesses.⁸⁹ Specifically addressing in detail the arguments against the validity of this ordination, Wijngaards concluded that “the ordination rite of a women deacon, set within the framework of a full Byzantine celebration of the eucharist, shows clearly that women deacons did receive the full sacramental holy orders of the diaconate.”⁹⁰ Again, Wijngaards’s arguments for the ordination of women in the present were based partly on his judgment that the ordination of women in the past met the criteria now used to judge the validity of orders.

Conclusion

This survey does not do justice to many insights offered by so many scholars, especially over the last forty-five years. I hope, however, it does delineate how concern over the ordination of women in the present has driven the historical question of whether women had ever been ordained in the past. This connection of past and present is inevitable, since scholars raised the issue of women’s ordination in the past only in order to assist in determining whether women ought to be or even are capable of being ordained in the present. Theologians gradually became aware that the “ordination” of women, for instance, in the fourth century was understood quite differently than one would understand “ordination” in the present. Yet, theologically, the central question can, and indeed must, still be asked whether such ordinations, however different, offer any insight into how the tradition might view the ordination of women in the present.⁹¹ The concern of theologians is necessarily how the past, understood as tradition, can justify or elucidate actions in the present.⁹² On the issue of women’s ordination, therefore, the essential question for theologians must be: Are ordination rites for women in the past similar enough to those in the present to serve as evidence of a tradition that would, in part, justify the ordination of women in the present? The question assumes, of course, that similar ceremonies in the past would indicate a similar intent to ordain women into the diaconate or presbyterate and that such ceremonies would effect such an ordination. The essential issue remains what constitutes a valid ordination and whether past ordinations of women fit those criteria.

It would be difficult, or at least unhelpful, merely to detail the understanding of the ordination in the past for theologians thus concerned with the question of the ordination of women in the present. Yet the study of the ordination of women in the past has been undertaken exclusively by theologians.

Historians, as will be detailed in chapter 3, have provided excellent studies of the role of women in the early medieval church but do not, in general, refer to the theological debate over the ordination of women during this period. If the topic comes up at all, they assume that women were not ordained since they were repeatedly refused access to altar and pulpit. It should come as no surprise, then, that theologians concerned with the ordination of women have done no more than suggest that the understandings of ordination in the past are quite different than those in the present and, further, that a significant change in the understanding of ordination occurred in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

The purpose of this study will be to pick up the hints and suggestions tantalizingly distributed throughout these several studies to uncover what it might mean to say that a woman was ordained in the early Middle Ages and then to investigate why twelfth- and thirteenth-century theologians came to assume that not only could women not be ordained but also that they in fact had never been ordained.

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The Challenges and Opportunity of Women in Religious Leadership: The Episcopal Example

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Katharine Jefferts Schori (/people/katharine-jefferts-schori) January 15, 2015 (January 15, 2015)

Women have been leaders from the beginning of consciousness—learning where to find edible and healing plants and leading others to gather them, and passing on that knowledge to future generations. That is at least part of what Eve is up to in Genesis. Like Miriam, women have led celebration, song, and lament throughout time, and tended to bodies before burial as did the Marys of the Gospels. Women have challenged societal injustice with the tools available—words and prophetic actions—the widow to the judge, the Syrophoenician woman Jesus engages, the suffragettes, and women’s rights workers over centuries. Leadership means acting for change, and encouraging others to join a movement toward a different future. Christians speak of that future as the Reign of God, a society of peace with justice for all.

The Judeo-Christian tradition has had a mixed attitude toward women as leaders, particularly sacred leaders, in spite of a deep fund of feminine images of God—Wisdom, Shekinah, God as a mother bear; Ruach as Holy Spirit. God’s image is reflected across the spectrum of humanity in the Jewish tradition, with women leaders as matriarchs, prophets, judges, deliverers of their people, and in decidedly non-traditional roles and actions. Yet the formal religious leadership of Israel and Judah remained exclusively in the hands of particular groups of men until very recently. Women have always had

a significant religious role in the family, including welcoming Shabbat and teaching children the ways of the covenant.

Women are prominent in early Christianity—in Jesus' intimate circle, particularly Mary of Magdala, and as leaders of communities of his followers. Archaeological and written evidence shows women as ordained, liturgical leaders in the early church, a practice soon extinguished as Christianity became a state religion in the fourth century. Yet women continued to emerge as leaders in the developing monastic tradition, as supporters of Christian communities, as pilgrims and writers, and as theologians and mystics.

The patriarchal nature of much of human society in recent millennia has meant that only extraordinary or outstanding women leaders have been noted and remembered. Women have exercised religious leadership roles in three primary spheres: in the home and local community, as domestic tradents of the faith, through spiritual formation of children and households; in communal monastic environments; and as more public religious leaders, reformers, benefactors, theologians, and evangelists in their own right.

Women's leadership roles in the Episcopal Church have been expanding and evolving over the last two centuries. Women's monastic life is a relatively small reality in the Episcopal Church today, yet it continues to have transformative influence on education, health care, and spiritual leadership in the wider church.

The great Western missionary thrust of the last half-millennium began to significantly engage women in the nineteenth century when some began to travel with husbands to other parts of the globe in search of converts. Single women found encouragement in their witness, and by the late nineteenth century were being sent into mission territories at home and abroad, coming to represent two-thirds of all Episcopal missionaries.

In 1889 the General Convention authorized the “setting apart” of women as deaconesses for ministry in both foreign and domestic environments. They developed and worked in ministries of education, healing and healthcare, child welfare, parochial and pastoral contexts, with indigenous and indigent persons, in cities, rural areas, reservations, and in foreign lands.

One of the challenges to formal religious leadership by women is a frequent perception of inexperience for their lack of formal and titular leadership qualifications. Patriarchal norms are often blind or prejudiced toward the domestic and informal leadership that makes households and communities function and thrive, yet that has been the training ground for women who have entered more formal leadership roles later in life or when those roles first opened to them.

Ordination of women has been a greater challenge than lay leadership. There is a resistant strand of Christianity that still holds that maleness represents a higher order of creation, and that since Jesus was male, no female can be validly ordained to preside at Eucharist. Objections to ordained women’s leadership have been both fierce and intransigent, yet when women leaders are experienced in local settings, such resistance often dissipates. Incarnate encounter can be radically transformative!

Florence Li Tim-Oi was the first woman ordained priest in modern times, in Hong Kong in 1944, but was only permitted to function for a few years. The Episcopal Church began to ordain women by regularizing deaconesses in 1973. Women were first (irregularly) ordained priests in 1974; and without question since January 1977.

The trajectory for ordaining and consecrating women as bishops has been shorter yet equally fraught. The Diocese of Massachusetts elected Barbara C.

Harris as bishop in 1988. Despite voluminous and loud protests she was consecrated in early 1989. The pattern in the early history of women bishops has seen their election as suffragans or assistants in far greater numbers than as diocesan bishops. To date, the Episcopal Church has elected 20 women bishops, nine of whom are or have been diocesans. The Episcopal Church elected the first woman to serve as primate in the Anglican Communion in 2006.

Why does women's religious leadership matter? Most fundamentally, the presence of women and men as sacramental, liturgical, and pastoral leaders gives incarnate evidence of human creation in the image of God.

Women often, though not universally, bring a more collaborative and participative style to their leadership. Most Western institutions are shifting away from a rigidly hierarchical style of leadership; the church is usually slower to respond. Women's leadership has also tended to more broadly include the concerns of all members of the community. Community development workers know this in the maxim, "when women are empowered, the whole community flourishes." This is a reality for all varieties of women's leadership, for work with prostitutes and orphans, hungry children, forgotten prisoners, and the power that voting can bring have all been ministries frequently begun or led by women. Religious leadership can also bring access to political leadership and systems needed to transform social injustice.

The Gospel needs the voice and active ministry of women as well as men to work toward reestablishing the image of human partnership in Eden, to serve together in caring for the whole of God's creation, and to be co-creators with God of a future that incarnates the divine intent for a restored creation called shalom.

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We Can Agree to Disagree on Women's Ordination

Bridging the battle lines of the female clergy debate.

Tish Harrison Warren, guest writer

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When I was deciding if I should seek ordination, a friend and fellow pastor said to me, "I'm not sure where I stand on women's ordination. But I think you should get ordained." I laughed, unsure of how he holds those conflicting ideas together, but recognizing that for all of us, myself included, seeking God's will on this issue is rarely cut-and-dried. It is a process of study, prayer, listening, repentance, and discernment.

As someone who was uncomfortable with the ordination of women for years, but is now an Anglican clergyperson who will (God willing) be a priest soon, I often end up in conversations where I find myself in the ironic position of wanting to defend those who disagree with my ordination.

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AS I TALK about women's ordination and read great discussions about the role of feminism in the church, this is what I want to remind those on "my side" of this issue on behalf of my brothers and sisters against women's ordination.

Objection to women's ordination is not equivalent to sexism.

Laura Ortberg Turner's recent article for Her.meneutics

reminds us of the valuable legacy of first-wave feminism and the tragedy of widespread physical and sexual abuse of women. Too often the global plight of women is ignored or belittled in the church. Too often women are devalued and denigrated in the church. Too often sexism isn't treated as the sin it most certainly is.

However, we must decouple sexism and the objection to women's ordination. We do the church and Christian feminism a disservice when we use belief about women's ordination as a litmus test for sexism.

While some may oppose women's ordination for sexist reasons, others do so out of a genuine, even uncomfortable, conviction about the meaning of particular Greek words and the witness of Scripture. Friends, teachers, and pastors against women's ordination nevertheless encourage and disciple me in ways that profoundly benefit my life and ministry. (Likewise, I've met people who are for women's ordination but treat women in sexist ways.) It isn't fair for those who are against women's ordination but still encourage and value the gifts of women to be implicated in injustice.

When we reductively equate opposition to women's ordination to sexism, we ignore the complexity of the issue and the messy process of communal discernment in a church body. This false equivalency gives too easy of a pass to those on both sides—allowing them to take a position, sit comfortably with their ideological team, and no longer grapple with the larger, more invidious problem of sexism in the church and the wider world.

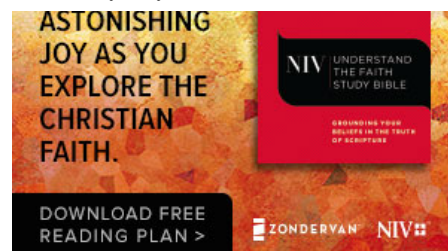
Too often, we ascribe ulterior motives of misogyny to those against women's ordination or accuse those who are for it of being self-seeking. Instead, let's assume the best motives for those who disagree with us—those who are against women's ordination are trying to be faithful to Scripture, not oppressive to women.

And here is where I find unity with those who disagree with my ordination: We each desire obedience to God's word and want the church to be who God intends her to be, even as we lovingly argue about the role of women in leadership.

We must offer hospitality to those with whom we disagree.

Those who want to retain unity in the church—especially us ordained women and female church leaders—must ensure that we preserve room for those who disagree with us or who aren't certain about this issue.

Most denominations currently take a hard line on women's ordination. They allow women's ordination and marginalize anyone against it as oppressive. Or they disallow it and marginalize anyone who advocates for it as a theological liberal. (My own tradition of Anglicanism has recently made headlines over the embroiled battle about female bishops in England.) It is a shame that fewer and fewer communities can



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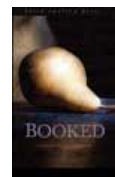
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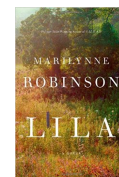
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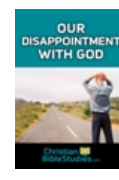


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be found where women's ordination isn't a line in the sand, dividing the faithful from the errant.

I found myself troubled by the precedent, however well-meaning, of the RCA's [removal of their conscience clause](#), which allowed dissenting pastors to opt out of women's ordination. Now, in one more denomination, this issue is a dividing line. Those who are uncomfortable with women's ordination in the RCA must violate their own consciences or risk exclusion from their denomination, forced to find another community or begin a new one.

As a Protestant and as part of a recently splintered communion, I recognize that there are legitimate reasons for division and even, at times, for denominations to fracture. But women's ordination need not be a communion breaker. There is frankly more ambiguity in the Scriptures about the role of women in the church and about ordination itself than most other doctrinal issues. Believers earnestly wrestling with the same biblical texts can differ on this issue.

It frustrates me when those against women's ordination too easily dismiss hermeneutical and theological arguments for it. But likewise, we must not forget that the prohibition of women's ordination is a valid view within historic and evangelical scriptural interpretation, and, therefore, I dearly hope that those for women's ordination will extend hospitality to those who differ, especially when objection to women's ordination is the minority view in a particular community.

Our mutual goal is serving Christ and his bride.

In conclusion, yes, we must appropriate the best truths in feminism and work to ensure that men and women are equally treated as God's mutual image-bearers. And yes, a church must provide clear and meaningful ways for all members, men and women, to use their gifts to serve the church. I hope that denominations will be increasingly open to the ordination of women, and I'm filled with gratitude and wonder that I am ordained.

However, it is harmful when denominations that ordain women demand that clergy fall in line on this issue or find a new church. As long as there are those in my communion who pure-heartedly believe Scripture precludes women from ordination, I want to allow room for them and to serve the church alongside of them. I hope they will do the same for those of us for women's ordination. Our mutual love for the church compels us to seek to grow together into him who is our head, even if our growth is painful, messy, halting, and incomplete.

Tish Harrison Warren is a transitional deacon in the Anglican Church in North America. She and her husband work with InterVarsity Graduate and Faculty Ministries at The University of Texas at Austin and have two young daughters. She writes regularly for [The Well](#), InterVarsity's online magazine for women, and was featured on The White Horse Inn. She's newly on Twitter at [@Tish_H_Warren](#).

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