

A Serious Argument Against the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood & Episcopate | Virtueonline – The Voice for Global Orthodox Anglicanism

The reasons we hold these convictions are primarily drawn from Scripture. Attempts have been made to interpret the Scriptures to allow women to serve as co-heads of the family and as priests and bishops in the Church. Responsible exegesis simply will not support these interpretations nor does experience confirm them. Alongside Scripture there are other significant reasons found in the experience of God's people in history and in God's other book-the book of creation or nature-that corroborate the biblical reasons. We will mention only the most significant of them in this brief chapter.

The primary and chief factual point that we wish to make is this: nowhere in Scripture do we read of a woman being either a priest in the Old Testament or an elder in the New Testament. In the New Testament no woman was chosen by Jesus to be one of the twelve apostles. Jesus could have chosen one of the women who accompanied him, prepared her along with the other apostles-in-training, and after the resurrection appointed her an apostle had he felt that to be appropriate. He did not do so. The same is true of the apostles. Not once did they appoint a woman to be a presbyter or bishop. It was the unvarying practice of God's people from beginning of Israel to the close of Scripture to call men to these official, stated positions in the people of God. Israel did this in sustained and self-conscious contrast to the practice of the surrounding nations and religions.

This exclusive pattern of male priesthood in designated leadership is all the more striking when we note the variety of ministries that women did exercise in Scripture, including the ministry of prophecy, which St. Paul refers to as one of the highest of the gifts of the Spirit. It is equally striking when we take note of the status, the freedom, and the call to learn and teach that Jesus and the apostles gave to women. In giving women such freedom and such an elevated place in their fellowship, they broke all of the customs of the day. Despite their boldness in breaking with custom, not once did they call women to these formal, official leadership ministries in the Church. This emphasis upon male eldership by Jesus and the apostles is of profound authority.

This uniform practice in all of the Scriptures is the fundamental point. The case for an exclusively male priesthood and episcopate does not rest on a few texts, several of which contain some phrases difficult to interpret. Rather, it rests on the overwhelming majority of the biblical texts related to governance and leadership in the family and Church; it rests upon a perspective that is pervasive and uniform in all of Scripture.

We can ask, "Why did God order things so?" Such a universal, sustained practice requires a profound and divine reason. The Bible tells us what this reason is. Male headship in the priesthood and eldership of God's chosen people roots in the male headship in the family, which is part of God's good ordering of the creation. And God's ordering of the relations of male and female in the family ultimately reflects and rests upon God's own Triune nature. Human life, made in the image and likeness of God, mirrors the mystery of God's own Triune life.

This involves our understanding of God as Triune. God is One; God is Threefold. He is the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit: three interpenetrating persons of equal dignity and divinity united in a single life of love and mutual indwelling. He is one God in one nature eternally existing in three

Persons. Since we are made in the image and likeness of God, we can expect to find (and do find) analogies of God's Triune nature in creation and above all in our human nature.

In the Triune life of God, as Scripture teaches and the Eastern Orthodox tradition often reminds us, there is a hierarchy among equals. An eternal headship and an eternal submission are lived out in the divine life of love. God the Father is by nature Father in His Triune life. He is the eternal loving fountainhead of the Trinity. He is eternally the Father of the Son and the primary source of the being of the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Son is ever delighted to do the Father's will. In a biblical view, submitting to one's father is what a good son does, whether it be human sons of human fathers or the divine Son of the divine Father. The Spirit is always the Spirit of the Father and the Son and submissive to both.

The main point we want to note is that loving headship and submission are eternal in the life of God. They are therefore of the eternal order of things. This has consequences for God's act of creation. God's own nature and his attributes provide the pattern for his act of creation and particularly for the order and life of those made in his image and likeness—men and women. We can expect to find headship and submission in the way we have been created in relation to one another. At the same time, the Father's act of creation is an authoritative act, a command. He speaks and it is done (through the Son, by the Spirit). He reigns over the creation that he has made. Here we have the significance of God's revealing himself to us in male terms as "the Father," "the Son," and "the Spirit". The male name of "the Father" points to his being distinct from the creation that he has made, ordered, and sustained, and it points also to his Lordship over it. Creation is not birthed from God's own being as the religions of the world tend to teach.

Does God not have a more feminine aspect? Yes. God has attributes that are

more fully exhibited by women than by men, but they are always "his" attributes. He is never called "her." Even the more feminine attributes are his attributes, attributes of the one who with loving, divine initiative and authority called the world into being, not from his own nature but from nothing, ex nihilo, from beyond the world.

In the light of God's Triune nature and his act of creation, we can consider more specifically his creation of us human beings, who are made in his image. When he created us he created us male and female and thereby set us in families in a specific order. In the family the man is to serve as husband of the wife in a unity of love between equals and as the head of the family as well as the representative of the family. The woman is given the complementary ministry of support and nurture. The headship of the man reflects God's Fatherhood in the life of the Trinity and in the act of creation and serves as an instrument of God's reign in human society. We read in Scripture that it is from God's Fatherhood that all earthly fatherhood is named.

Male headship also finds expression in the larger family of his people, the Church. The designation of men to be priests or elders in the people of God is a wider expression of the headship the man is given first in the family. The family is the "little church in the Church" and the Church is the Family of the families of God.

The woman's position is as important as the man's, though different. She is the treasured, supportive partner in the family and Church. Her submission and ministry of support, nurture, and quite varied service reflects and expresses the indwelling, nurturing qualities of God's being and attributes as he has revealed himself to us in creation and through the Son and the Spirit in the history of salvation.

It is important that we do not misunderstand the complementary ministries

of headship and submission. In Scripture submission is a good thing, and it is by no means limited to women. Jesus as the Son is ever submissive to the Father. All people made in God's image are to be submissive to God. The Church as the bride of Christ is by grace to be submissive to Christ who is Lord over all, the head of his body. Men and women are to be submissive to one another in a variety of structures. In the Church, the members are urged to submit to those whom the Lord has placed in authority over them. In the family, the wife is freely to submit or orient her ministry under the oversight of, and in support of, her husband. The children are to submit to their parents. In society, we all are to submit gladly to the magistrates in all things agreeable to the revealed will of God, for God has placed them over us. In addition we are to pray for them.

The terms "the ministries of headship and of submission" are more accurate than speaking of "male and female roles." This is true for several reasons. First, "roles" is a word that, in our culture, tends to suggest particular tasks, ways and means, such as who will do the cooking, keep the books, etc.. In contrast to that, we are thinking of more general responsibilities of the man giving spiritual oversight to, and providing for, the family and the woman supporting the man and nurturing the family. Particular roles or tasks are related to the particular gifts and interests of the partners and to the opportunities they have in their specific cultural settings. We do not want to be understood to be restricting women or men to particular tasks, no matter how traditional they have become. For a biblical example of what we have in mind, we think of the responsibility and the variety of tasks being carried out by the "godly woman" in Proverbs 31, or the work of Lydia who was a "seller of purple".

Second, in our culture when referred to as roles, these ministries of men and women are likely to be viewed in the terms of superior and inferior, of a dictatorial boss and of cowed subordinates. That is not how the scriptural

ministries of headship and support are to be understood. These are complementary ministries of equal importance, carried out by equals united in love, exercised in mutual consultation and care in a common mission. And they are based on the created nature of the two partners. The partners together, united as one, reflect the attributes of God and the mystery of the Trinity. As we read in Scripture the man is to love the wife as Christ loves the Church. It is a sacrificial love that is intended in male headship, both in the family and in the Church.

That men and women have been "given" ministries does not mean that men or women are never to step outside the ministries to which, by creation, they are best suited. There are times in this fallen creation, when due to circumstances or the failure of men or women to do their part that the partner will need to do what must be done. This is evident in Scripture. Also it is true that while men and women differ considerably, they do not differ totally and that we do embody the traits of one another in varying degrees. Because of this it is possible, in emergency situations, for one partner to assume the responsibility that would normally belong to the other.

Since God by design has made us male and female, we are to understand and rejoice in our created nature as male and female. In the Bible the central and defining aspects of masculinity and femininity are found in the order and ministries of male headship and female support. Whenever this order of creation and these ministries are ignored or denied, equality is defined as interchangeability.

Competition replaces complementarity. This is evidenced dramatically by the society in which we live. Our culture generally and erroneously asserts a unisex interchangeability of men and women. It tends to deny the difference between men and women with the exception of the erotic sexual aspect and it depersonalizes, commercializes, and exaggerates that. This departure in

principle and practice from traditional and biblical norms has proven to be a devastating error, as we can see in the state of things today.

While we cannot take the space to look at the various texts in the Bible that refer to our topic, we must consider one particular text because it is often cited as abolishing male headship for all who are in Christ. Some have suggested that Galatians 3:28 is a master New Testament text about the relationship of men and women and that it removes male headship in family and Church. It is thought to do this when it states that in Christ there is "neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female."

The context of this text, however, makes it clear that the text refers to God's gift of salvation. The gift of salvation received through faith and depicted in baptism rests upon grace and not works. In matters of salvation there is no distinction as Paul frequently points out. God is no respecter of persons because "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." However, the Apostle Paul certainly did not mean this "neither male nor female" to obliterate all distinctions in male and female reality and relationships. Such a view erroneously extends the meaning of this text. Men remain men and women remain women, as Christians. Christians are husbands and wives as well as parents and children. These relationships do not cease to be such when we become Christians. The point is that Galatians 3:28 does not refer to headship and submission at all. It does not address the ministries of men and women in family or Church. It is therefore not a master text defining all New Testament teaching on the relations of men and women. It does not even define all of Paul's teaching on the subject. It certainly does not cancel the order of creation to which the apostle Paul and other New Testament writers repeatedly turn to affirm male headship and female submission in family and Church. (See 1 Cor 11:3-4; Eph 5:22-33; 1 Pet 3:1-7).

Finally, in First Timothy and Titus, we find explicit and significant treatments of the place, the duties, and the character of those who are to be overseers or elders. These texts provide the primary basis in the New Testament for our developed offices of priest and bishop. In both sets of texts, the persons referenced are men. There is no hint of women serving as elders in the texts that discuss these ministries. Just the opposite is the case; it is clear that it is men who are to serve in these ministries. The conclusion regarding the teaching of Scripture is that the scriptures do not envision, or permit women to exercise the headship that is contemplated for those ordained to be priests or consecrated as bishops. It is contrary to the mystery of the Trinity, to the character of God's act in creation, and to the created nature of men and women that mirrors the life of the Trinity in marriage, the family, and in the Church. The Scripture having said "No," the Church has no right or authority to ordain women to these offices for, as the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion put it, the Church "ought not to decree anything against the same" (Article 20).

There is significant corroborative evidence for Scripture's position found in the observation of nature, and, the experience of life in society and in Church history. One such is that the symbolic character of the offices of priest and bishop make them unsuitable for women. The ordination of women symbolically distorts the scriptural revelation of God due to the intimate connection between the nature of God and the symbolic character of the ministry of priests and bishops. Symbolism is powerful in effect and defies easy explanation.

The Christian worldview is theistic. The one and only God transcends the world that he has created while at the same time sustaining the world and acting within it. God has no female consort. His action is likened a few times in Scripture to the action of a mother, for he acts in motherly ways showing that he also has the attributes in himself that are mirrored more fully by

women. However it is always clear in Scripture that his attributes adhere in him and are exercised by him who is beyond the world and not to be identified with it.

In contrast, some of the religions of the world are pantheistic not theistic. Feminine symbols and images of the divine-goddesses, female consorts, and the like giving birth to the universe-are widespread. So too are priestesses. When the feminine is given the same prominence and ministry as the masculine, pantheism is the result.

At almost every point, pantheism is a worldview and a religion in direct contradiction to God's word in Scripture. Even when the ordained woman is orthodox in faith and not a theological feminist, by being a woman serving as a priest or bishop she has imported a contrary symbolism into the representative nature of the ordained ministry. Such symbolism will inevitably push matters in the wrong direction in the Church. We can already see it to be doing so.

Men and women differ biologically, psychologically, and relationally. Ministries are meant to reflect the differences. Biologically the male is physically more outwardly directed and the woman more inwardly. This is evidenced in a number of ways. The male bone structure is generally heavier and better shaped for addressing obstacles in the environment whereas the woman's bone structure is weaker and shaped for the bearing of children.

The male hand is stronger and the male striated musculature is more capable of strong and sudden contraction. The arm and chest muscles are generally larger and more developed in the male. The bodily form of the male is more rugged than the female, with wider shoulders and narrower hips that are suitable for outward action. Whereas, the female form is more rounded and smoother with smaller, narrower shoulders and wider hips, suitable for the

bearing of children. Recent studies have stressed the benefits of breast-feeding of the newly born and the measurable, beneficial impact upon the IQ of babies of being reared in the early years by the mother. Women are biologically oriented toward the family, and men are oriented toward the world.

Descriptive psychology studies the consciousness of human beings. Building upon the physical differences, different mental and emotional traits are found between men and women. Our sexuality or gender pervades our person. Men usually have more distance from their emotions and evidence a tendency to detach themselves from immediate reactions whereas women tend to be more immediate and spontaneous in their responses.

In patterns of thought, men tend to analyze, objectify, disassociate, classify, and synthesize whereas women are more prone to be intuitive, personally related, and to exercise empathy. Men tend to be more visual/spatial and women more verbal. Men are less aware of their bodies than women tend to be. Men are more goal-oriented, and women are more care-and-need-oriented. Women are more holistic in viewing a situation, and men tend to focus on some given aspect that will lead to a particular course of action. Women are more capable mentally of multi-tasking and nurture. Men are more inclined toward sequential planning, goal setting, and achieving. Women are more welcoming in orientation whereas men are more aggressive and competitive.

Societies differ in many respects; sociologists have discerned a number of trans-cultural or common traits that characterize every healthy society. These common traits reflect and build upon the biological and psychological factors listed above. They are as follows: [NL 1-4]

1. Sexual division of labor are found,

2. Complementary roles in the communal and domestic spheres are present. Men bear primary responsibility for the larger community. Women bear primary responsibility for domestic management and the rearing of young children.

3. Some form of female subordination to men exists. Men govern the larger communities while women exercise their responsibility for domestic management and the rearing of children under the oversight of the husband.

4. Cultural expressions of gender differences between men and women are evident. [/NL] Sociologists have observed that in societies such as ours where these traits are significantly weak or obscured, the following consequences appear:

1. family life is weakened,
 2. sexual relations become troubled,
 3. women often lose a sense of value,
 4. womanly roles are neglected,
 5. manly roles are neglected, and
 6. men and women develop psychological instabilities.
- The above data drawn from the observation of God's creation, simply confirms what is clearly taught in Scripture. This should come as no surprise for the creator and the redeemer who authored both the book of nature and the book of Scripture is one and the same. He does not contradict himself. To place women in authority over the congregations is to violate the natural order of things as taught throughout the scriptures and observed in the sciences.

Thus, when considering a change as radical as the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate and in the Church's practice with regard to the ordained ministry, the burden of proof lies with those who make such a proposal. And when this proposal arises from a secular society and amid a

compromised Church, and when it is a request from but a tiny minority of the Church universal, the burden of proof required to legitimize the change becomes even more demanding. Such proof has not been forthcoming—quite the contrary.

The teaching of Scripture and evidence cited above from God's book of creation are both contrary to the innovation of the ordination of women to these offices. In summary, there are compelling reasons to affirm a male priesthood and episcopate. First and last, Scripture does not allow for the ordination of women to these offices as these offices function within Anglicanism. Serious exegesis only serves to substantiate that statement.

In addition, we have indicated some of the important theological, ecclesiastical, social, and scientific reasons that corroborate the teaching of Scripture. We are very desirous that women exercise their full ministry in the gospel, in the Church, in the family and in society. We want the full flowering of womanhood and manhood in complimentary partnership to be modeled in our families and in the Church. To ordain women to the priesthood and episcopate can only hurt the family, the Church, and society. It will hurt, not help, women and it will do damage to all.

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