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Women Ordination and the Catholic Church: A Critical View of the Arguments that the
Vatican Presents on the Issue of Women Ordination

by

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One of the most refreshing views that any theologian can find would be John Paul II's theology of the body (John Paul II, Rocchetta, Cervantes). One of the best theological analysis of Genesis was made by John Paul II himself about not only how the soul is the image and likeness of God, but also how the body is too. And studying both versions of creation in Genesis, the Priestly one (Gen. 1,1- 2,4a), and the Yahwist one (Gen 2,4b ff.), a very beautiful spiritual truth can be reached about how both male and female are God's image in their entire being: body, soul and grace (John Paul II 25- 39). Therefore, the two of them are equal in dignity as human beings and children of God.

Unfortunately, some conclusions don't follow the beautiful premises he endorses. One of those conclusions is that because of reasons of gender, women cannot be priests. It is my personal position that one cannot be against women ordination without supposing somehow that a woman is in inferior human dignity condition than man.

This would seem not to be so at first, specially for women who are against women ordination. However, I invite those women to look for a moment at point of view. The Church had its origin in the first century "ekklesias" (communities that met in an assembly to share their faith). Therefore the Church is inclusive in its nature, not exclusive.

Following this line of reasoning, if the Church excludes women from the ministry of priesthood, then that means that it must have good reasons to do so. But, as we shall see, it doesn't present any valid argument for it. It is the purpose of this page to present all the most important arguments that the Vatican presents against women ordination, and why are they logically and historically absurd.

Let us look at these arguments closely:

- Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity, when He incarnated, he became a man, not a woman. Since the priest represents Christ on Earth, it would be important to maintain a ministerial historical fidelity, therefore all priests should be men.

This argument is completely empty. There is no reason why a woman can't represent Christ. Let me give you an example of what I mean. There are many political parties and governments which sometimes have women representing the male presidents or politicians. In other cases, like in the case of the wife of former President Clinton, she can represent his views perfectly, because she has political and intellectual capacity to do it.

As in politics, in the Church there is a great number of women who have the intellectual, moral and spiritual capacity to exercise priesthood and represent Christ. Which is more important? Fidelity to gender or fidelity to the Gospel?

The second question that comes to mind is why give so much importance to historical fidelity in the aspect of gender? If this is so important, then, why doesn't the Church ask those priests to speak Aramaic or that they be circumcised? Why does it consider priests only those men born in other parts of the world, and not only those born in Bethlehem of Judea, or only those who are Jews? With this line of questioning it is quite evident that the requirement of being male as the only one to be priests shows to be arbitrary.

- Jesus didn't ordain any woman as Apostle, and the Apostles in turn, didn't ordain any woman.

It has been proven historically that this statement is completely false. Here is why.

A. The Case of the Ordination of Deaconesses

Let's start first with this statement:

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deaconess of the church at Cencreae; give her, in the Lord, a welcome worthy of God's holy people, and help her with whatever she needs from you - she herself has come to help of many people, including myself (Rom. 16,1- 2).

According to Senén Vidal this chapter 16 is a letter of St. Paul, nor written along with the rest of the Epistle of the Romans, but later compilers added this letter to it. For him, this letter was directed to the community of Ephesus, where Phoebe was going to (Vidal 359). Phoebe is the one that probably was carrying the letter with her, and St. Paul is commending her and telling his followers to welcome her to their community. Some argue that the fact that Phoebe was a deaconess means nothing, since the word "diakonos" in Greek means "servant", which didn't necessarily mean that she was ordained a deaconess in the same way that Apostles ordained deacons (Acts 6,1- 6).

The problem presented in this argument is historically evident. As Alcalá points out correctly there are ancient Church documents that corroborate the existence ordination of women for the position of deaconesses. There is a very important document called the Didaskalia, a book on the ecclesial orders in Syria dating from the third century. Afterwards it was enhanced in the Constitutions of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople in the fourth century (Alcalá 213). Among the things that the Didaskalia says is the following:

The priest, the first among you, is the Levite bishop. He is the administrator of the word and mediator; he is Master after God, your father,

and regenerator through water; he is your powerful rector (basileus). When he directs you, in the place of God, be him honored by you as you honor God, because the bishop presides over you like a prototype of God. The deacon is there as prototype of Christ; therefore love him. Be the deaconess honored by you, as the prototype of the Holy Spirit [. . .] (Alcala 213, my translation).

The Constitutions further say:

Be the deaconess honored among you as the prototype of the Holy Spirit, who doesn't do or saying anything without the deacon; just as the Paraclete doesn't say or do anything without Christ, but does with His Will giving Him glory. And there is no confession in Christ without the teaching of the Spirit, also without the deacon, no woman precedes the deacon or a bishop (Alcala 214).

The Constitutions further state that women should not teach nor baptize (Alcala 214- 215), which are two things that the Church does allow women to do today.

Alcala points out that, before the Constitutions, in the Didaskalia it states that there should be women deaconesses because they could better minister to women, and among its duties is baptizing and anointing with oil. It says also that for women to be deaconesses the hands must be imposed on them, and they must be anointed on the head, like the priests and kings were anointed in Israel. The Constitution adds something very interesting: the deaconesses should be anointed and not merely baptized, because baptism is not ordination. And though it prohibited deaconesses from teaching publicly, they could teach privately to women (Alcala 217- 219).

According to Alcala's own studies on the subject, in both the Didaskalia and the Constitution use the terms "xeirotonía" and "xeirozesía" to refer to the imposition of hands. But the term used for the imposition of hands that implied ordination and official

membership of the clergy is "xeirotónía" which was included also for women deaconesses (Alcala 221- 223). More astonishingly, in the Byzantine rituals of the eighth century, it considered women to be as called to the office of deaconess as men are, and what they received was the Sacrament of Holy Orders (224).

Others, following a more restrictive interpretation, state that deaconesses didn't form part of the clergy because of Canon 19 of Niscea's Council (†325). This canon talks about deaconesses as not having being imposed the hands of them should be considered part of the laity. What these people forget is that the imposition of hands this council is talking about in that particular passage is the "xeirozesía". The rest of the time, it talks about the cases of "xeirotónía" to refer to what after the fifth century would be called the ordination of deacons (Alcala 224- 225).

Those who argue against women ordination also forget about the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (†451) which is more explicit when it seems to presuppose that deaconesses receive the "xeirotónía" (Alcala 225).

Finally in the ninth century, the Church revoked the ministry of women as deaconesses. So, for eight consecutive centuries, women could be ordained as deaconesses and formed part of the clergy. Today women are not even considered for that ministry. For more details about it, you can see Wijngaards¹.

B. The Case of the Woman Apostle

Also there is one case of Romans 16 that is clearly avoided by those who don't favor women ordination:

Greetings to those outstanding apostles, Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen and fellow- prisoners, who were in Christ before me (Romans 16,7).

¹ http://www.womenpriests.org/traditio/deac_gen.htm. For more historical and archeological evidence of ordination of deaconesses go here:
<http://www.womenpriests.org/traditio/deac_rec.htm>.

Those not familiar with the Greek, and read this in plain English will notice nothing strange in this text, but once you turn to the Greek, the story is different, because the "Junias" here is not the name of a man, but of a woman (many translate the name correctly as "Junia"). Vidal, commenting on this passage says that this is a beautiful testimony of a woman who was an apostoloi (Apostle) (Vidal 362). So clear is this fact that Medieval scholars like Atto de Vercelli (924- 961) says that it seems that Andronicus and Junias were husband and wife, Theofilact (1050- 1108?) states that it is great that both were Apostles, considering the fact that Junias is a woman; and Peter Abelard (1254- 1316) states conclusively that in this passage there is a woman who is an Apostle (Alcala 361- 62). And as everybody knows there are no ancient writings that refer to Junias as a man, always as a woman (Alcala 361). It was not until the original Greek "Junia" was translated to Latin "Junias", and this made it sound like if the passage was talking about a man, but the original Greek clearly refers to the name of a woman. There are people who think that this passage refers to "apostleship" of those who preach for Christ, but what they miss is the fact that at that time there was no notion equivalent to "apostleship" in today's sense of the word.

These two cases, the one of the deaconesses and the one on Junia as Apostle, threaten greatly the Vatican's notion of woman not having being ordained ever in history, and also the idea that they can't form part of the clergy.

C. The Case of the Women "Presbyters"

Sometimes people that are against women ordination will go to these sources to deny that the Church has no power to ordain women:

- (1) It is not convenient that the so- called "presbytidas" (presbyter- women) or women- presidents be constituted in the Church (Provincial Council of Laodicea 341- 381?; canon 11).

(2) The women called "presbyters" by the Greek, and among us, old widows, virgins (univirae) and servers (matriculariae), should not be constituted in the Church as ordained (Saint Isidore of Sevilla).

(3) However, we have heard with anxiety that there is scorn against divine things which are approved by women for the ministries of the holy altars and to practice all of those things confided to the male gender that are not of their competence (letter of Pope Gelasius (†494)).

Let's look at these three statements carefully. Far from being a testimony against the idea that women were never ordained, they present proof that they did. We can see in any of these three statements that they DON'T state that women which were thought "presbyters" were not ordained, rather it means that they should not be ordained. The validity of the ordination of "presbyters" is never put into question, what these three statements do is to say, that women should not be ordained as they indeed were at the time.

In the case of (1), we see that this canon of the Council of Laodicea is controversial. Specially the debate centers around the word "presbytidas", which could probably designate the wives or widows of presbyters at the time, because they were denominated by that by the Council of Epao (†517).

In the case of (2), we find a quote from Collection Hispana of Canons and Ancient Councils falsely attributed to St. Isidore of Sevilla. As we said earlier, the author of this book is clearly against a practice being carried out at the time: that is, the ordination of women as "presbyters".

The most controversial of all quotes seems to be (3). It comes from a letter of Pope Gelasius dated March 11, 494. It was a reply to John, bishop of Ravenna who asked the intervention of the Pope in many regions in meridional Italy. G. Otranto infers from this letter, that it inevitably is talking about women ordained for priestly ministries. The

concern may have been about the helenization of customs in the Church in which women could be accepted as ministers and therefore ordained, which apparently was a custom that was repressed (Alcala 235- 36).

Most revealing seems to be the letter of Atto, Bishop of Vercelli, to the priest Ambrose, in which he states without if's or but's that women called "women priests" and "women deacons" were really ordained ministers or wives of those who were ordained. He explicitly states that there were women priests in the ancient church.

All of this suggest to us, that indeed women were ordained at the very beginning of the Church, even though it was not a dominant custom and it was quickly repressed. As a final note, we shall also expose a recent discovery. In many regions there have been found graves of women "presbyters". A stone tablet found in the catacombs of Tropea (Abruzzos), dated to the V century says the following:

B. M. S [consecrated to the good memory]. The "Presbyter" Leta, she lived XL years, VIII months and VIII days. Her husband dedicates it [the tomb]. She left in peace in the eve of the ides of May.

In this formula of dedication, we don't see the words "presbyter" (priest), nor "coniux" (husband), nor "amatissimae" (beloved) in the same way that is seen in tombstone of couples. The body is alone in this grave. This leads us to the inevitable conclusion that the body in this grave is of no other than of a woman ordained as presbyter (Alcala 236).

For more information on the issue of women ordination in antiquity read this article by Mary Ann Rosy: "Priesthood, Precedent and Prejudice"².

- Jesus didn't say anything about ordaining women, therefore this should be taken as a norm against the ordination of women.

Obviously this is another empty argument. One way to show the emptiness of the argument is also to establish a dialectical question similar to this one, but for the opposite

2 http://www.womenpriests.org/traditio/otran_1.htm

purpose: "Where did Jesus say anything about NOT ordaining women?"

Another way to show the emptiness of this argument is the fact that if the premise of this argument is applied to the Bible, then it would contradict itself. Let me show an example of how this is so. There is no doubt in anyone's mind, that (taken as fact or just metaphorically) the Lord Yahweh ordered explicitly, without if's or but's, people to circumcise if they wanted to belong to the people of God. Here's the evidence:

God further said to Abraham, "You for your part must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you, generation after generation. This is my covenant which you must keep between myself and you, and your descendants after you: every one of your males must be circumcised. You must circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and that will be the sign of the covenant between myself and you (Gen. 17,9- 11).

On the journey, when [Moses] had halted for the night, Yahweh encountered him and tried to kill him. Then Zipporah, taking up a flint, cut off her son's foreskin and with it touched his feet and said, "You are my blood-bridegroom!" So he [Yahweh] let him go. She said, "Blood- bridegroom" then, with reference to the circumcision (Exod. 4,24- 26).

"Should the stranger residing with you wish to keep the Passover in honour of Yahweh, all the males of his household must be circumcised: he will then be allowed to keep it and will count as a citizen of the country (Exod. 12,48)

Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, "Speak to the Israelites and say: 'If a woman becomes pregnant and gives birth to a boy, she will be unclean for seven days as when in a state of pollution due to menstruation. On the eighth day the child's foreskin must be circumcised (Lev. 12,1- 3).

We could quote ad nauseam the occasions that God himself has told in the Old Testament the requirement of circumcision to the males of the people of Israel, and even

to strangers that want to form part of the Jewish religion and also be part of Israel. We can see that there is no shadow of doubt that God wanted His people to be circumcised.

One of the most remarkable things one notices about Jesus, is that he never said that circumcision was not necessary after the sacrifice of the cross. In fact, even the Apostles at that time (excluding St. Paul) believed that Christians were Jewish and therefore there was no doubt in their mind that Christians should be circumcised. As more Christians converted outside Israel, in the gentile community, they were also required to circumcise. This is precisely the origin of the Jewish- Hellenistic controversy in Antioch (Acts 15,1- 2).

And to the surprise of many, in the Council of Jerusalem, they decided the following:

"The apostles and elders, your brothers, send greetings to the brothers of gentile birth of Antioch, Syria and Cilicia. We hear that some people coming from here, but acting without authority from ourselves, have disturbed you with their demands have unsettled your minds; and so we have decided unanimously to elect delegates and to send them to you with our well-beloved Barnabas and Paul, who have committed their lives to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accordingly we are sending you Judas and Silas, who will confirm by word of mouth what we have written. It has been decided by the Holy Spirit and by ourselves not to impose on you any burden beyond these essentials: you are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from illicit marriages. Avoid these, and you will do what is right. Farewell" (Acts 15,22- 29).

So . . . what God established a "thousand" times to be a requirement for salvation (taking into account that Jesus never said that circumcision is no longer valid) is now declared by the Apostles not to be valid anymore as a requirement to be saved or to be a Christian.

Why is that? Because Jesus said something very simple to the Church:

"In truth I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16,19; 18,18).

This means that the Church has the authority even to change the requirements to be Christians, as long as the essence of the Gospel is unaffected.

Isn't it ironic that the Church has the authority to change even what God stated conclusively so many times, and that Jesus didn't say anything against what God said, but claims to have no authority to change something that neither God nor Jesus said anything about? Isn't it ironic that what God and Jesus DID say has less authority for the Church and subject to change than what God and Jesus DID NOT say?

- Jesus went beyond the peer pressure of society, and contrary to Jewish customs, he was always with women, even talking to women of foreign lands as the Samaritans. Having recognized this sociological fact, why didn't Jesus ordain women contrary to society's expectations? This proves once more that women can't be ordained, because Jesus didn't want it to be that way.

As Wijngaards, very well points out:

If Jesus broke with the social customs of male predominance and yet refused to admit women to the apostolic team, we might have an indication that he was setting a permanent norm. If, however, in selecting only men for the apostolic team Jesus was guided by the general practice of his own times, we have no reason at all to presume his objection against the ministry of women in changed circumstances. And the latter, clearly, was the case (Wijngaards³).

Jesus talked about the "Father" in heaven. Wijngaards further provides another example of how Jesus didn't break "all" the norms of society of his times:

3 <http://www.womenpriests.org/scriptur/myth1.htm>

In all his parables Jesus conforms to the Jewish idea according to which the man was the centre of the family. The 'owner of the house' (Lk 22, 11) is always a man. It is the man who builds the house (Mt 7, 24- 27). It is the man who defends his house against intruders (Mt 12, 29) and stays awake at night to catch a burglar (Mt 24, 43). It is the man who manages the property (Mk 25, 14- 30), who has authority over the servants (Mt 24, 45- 51) and who controls the family store (Mt 13, 52) (Wijngaards⁴).

About the figure of the husband:

When speaking about marriage, Jesus takes the man-centred concept of the Jews for granted. He speaks of a king arranging a marriage for his son, without ever mentioning the queen (Mt 22, 1- 14). At the wedding itself, it is not the bride but the bridegroom who is celebrated. The wedding guests are called 'the friends of the bridegroom' (Mt 9, 15). The ten virgins are not waiting for the bride but for the bridegroom. It is he who excludes the foolish ones from the feast (Mt 25,1- 13). It was quite natural for Jesus to say 'The bride exists only for the bridegroom' (Jn 3, 29). In passing Jesus makes mention of a man's wife and children being sold as slaves to pay off his debt (Mt 18, 25) and enumerates the wife and children among other possessions which he invites his close followers to leave for the kingdom of heaven (Lk 18, 29). Isn't it abundantly clear from all this that Jesus simply accepted the social relationships between man and woman as he found them in his own times? (Wijngaards⁵)

And from all of this and other evidence to support his claim, Wijngaards concludes the following:

All these laws were in force in Jesus' time. All religious leaders - whether

4 <http://www.womenpriests.org/scriptur/myth1.htm>

5 <http://www.womenpriests.org/scriptur/myth1.htm>

priests, scribes, pharisees or rabbis - were men. If this was the religious climate of the day, need we be surprised that Jesus called only men to be his apostles? To put it differently: entrusting the ministry to women would have required a profound social revolution, even more than a religious reform. Even if Jesus had wanted to overthrow the social structures of his society, it would be doubtful if he could have achieved this in so short a time. A centuries- old social myth that is ingrained in the texture of people's life and thought cannot be uprooted even by a God- man through three years of preaching. But Jesus did not want to effect an immediate social liberation.

Although his teaching and redemptive action enshrined the principles that make true social equality possible, Jesus himself refrained from any direct social rebellion. He refused to be drawn into a political struggle for independence. He accepted discrimination against women as a reality of the society in which he lived. In selecting only men for leadership functions in his Church, Christ simply followed the social limitations forced on him by contemporary society (Wijngaards⁶).

However, he does recognize that indeed Jesus planted the seed for women's treatment as equals in the Kingdom of God. But we have to recognize also the following:

There is, however, no question of a direct attack against discrimination. Jesus did not fight for the emancipation of women in the same way that he made a stand for the poor. He has frequent clashes with the pharisees about the sabbath and other traditional observances. Not once is he recorded as having a dispute to remedy the oppression woman was under. The question of emancipation simply never arose. It could not arise. The social climate was not ripe for it. (Wijngaards⁷).

6 <http://www.womenpriests.org/scriptur/myth1.htm>

7 <http://www.womenpriests.org/scriptur/myth2.htm>

- The Virgin Mary was not ordained. She was the most likely to be ordained by the Apostles because of her immaculate holiness. If the Apostles didn't ordain her, it was because they couldn't ordain women.

Is this aspect of Mary not being a priestess really true? Let's see what Tradition has to say about this:

“Today, in harmony with prophecy, the shoot of David has budded forth from the always blossoming staff of Aaron, the staff that announced the flower it would bring forth, the staff of power, Christ. Today has emerged from Judah and David a young virgin girl, presenting the face of royalty and the priesthood of Aaron, who has exercised the priestly functions according to the order of Melchisedech” St. Andrew of Crete (c. 660 - 740), First Homily on the Nativity, PG 96, cols. 864B- 865A.

“Hail Blessed Virgin ointment with which the royal priesthood has been anointed , royal seal, imprinting on the universal King who takes his substance from her, a body similar to that of his Mother, incorruptible wood from which the spiritual altar who is Christ, was made.” Theodore the Studite (826), 2nd Homily on the Nativity. PG 96, col. 693C- D.

“O consecrated Virgin, offer your son and present to the Lord the blessed fruit of your womb. Offer for our reconciliation to all, this holy victim, agreeable to God. The Father will fully accept this new sacrifice, this precious oblation (victim) of whom he himself has said: “This is my well beloved Son in whom I have put my love” (Mt 3, 7).’ St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090 - 1153), 'In Purificatione Mariae', Sermo III, in Sancti Bernardi Opera Omnia, ed. J. Mabillon, Paris 1982, p. 370 col. b

'After the sacred virgin had arrived at the altar, having knelt down, inflamed by the Holy Spirit more than the seraphim, and holding her son in her

hands, she offered him as a gift and acceptable sacrifice to God praying in this way: “Accept, almighty Father, accept the oblation which I offer you for the whole world, I your handmaid. Accept now from the hands of your handmaid this very holy morning sacrifice, which one time will be offered to you in the arms of the cross as the sacrifice of the evening. Look down most pious Father on what I am offering you and pay attention to the purpose for whom I am offering it to you.” St. Thomas of Villanova (1486- 1555), 'Concio I in Purificationem', Opera, Manila 1883, vol. 4, p. 397.

“Mary is the priestess [sacerdotissa] of justice because she did not spare her own Son, but stood by the Cross, not, as blessed Ambrose says, to just see the death of her Son, not to witness the suffering of her Son, but to look forward to the salvation of the human race, prepared herself to offer the Son of God for the salvation of the world”. St. Antoninus of Florence (1389 - 1459), Summa Theologica Moralis, IV, Tit. 15, c. 3, §3. (Wijngaards⁸)

And as a priestess, she offered us also the Eucharist:

Mary is the “table that carries life, that supplies not the loaves of proposition but the bread of heaven”: St. John of Damascus.

“If the Saviour, as the Fathers of the Church assure us, is at each Mass the principal priest and the one who offers himself to the Father and who delivers himself up to people, the blessed Virgin shares in this function of the sovereign priesthood, accompanying the oblation and immolation which her Son makes of herself with her own agreement. For it is therefore that St Epiphanius among other praises, calls the Virgin a priest and an altar.” Jean de Machaut (1599 - 1676), Le Thrésor, vol III, pp. 152- 153.

“Since the will of the Virgin has cooperated with the will of the Son in the

8 http://www.womenpriests.org/mrpriest/m_why.htm

realisation of the Eucharist, we can with enough certainty declare and absolutely affirm that she has given us and has offered for us this heavenly bread. In fact, we recognise that the gift which is entrusted to us under these species - - that is : the body and blood of Christ the Lord - - is truly her gift and belongs to her. The divine Epiphanius touched on this reason in his sermon." 'De Laudibus Virginis'.

What could we say or imagine that is more splendid? He says that the Virgin is a priest in some way in the gift and in the offering of the celestial bread; which is true precisely for this reason that together with her Son she gave and offered [this eucharistic bread], thus realising at the same time both the sacrament and the sacrifice."

. . . "It was right that she who was present at the first act of giving, and of whom it was said that she had given and offered together with the Father and the Son, should also be present at the consummation and fulfilment of this donation, to such an extent that we can say that she has in the same way given and offered it (the Eucharist) with her Son."

. . . "The manner in which the incarnation was achieved in the breast of the Virgin pleased Christ so greatly ...that he invented a new way of repeating it and reiterating it...- ... that is, the Eucharist. Ferdinand Chirino de Salazar (1575 - 1646), In Proverbiis, IX, no 148- 149, vol. 1, 770D- 771A. (Wijngaards⁹)

So, not only this argument of the Virgin Mary is refuted by the fact that women belonged to the clergy at one point in history, but also it is refuted by the Tradition of the Church. Definitely, there is no greater priesthood than that of the Virgin Mary. Did she need to be ordained by any Apostle, when with her "fiat" makes Christ's incarnation

9 http://www.womenpriests.org/mrpriest/m_why.htm

possible, when she served as the bridge between the divine and the human? Certainly not.

- To grant priesthood to women is symbolically inappropriate, because Christ is represented symbolically in the Bible as a man and the Church (the bride of Christ) as a woman. Therefore the person representing Christ, i.e. the Priest, must be a man.

The same kind of reasoning can support the contrary: “It is said that the Church is the bride of Christ, and brides are women. The priest, who represents the Church in its relation to Christ, represents the bride of Christ. Therefore, only women should be priests” (Wostyn 35, my translation). This shows how inadequate is the Church's symbolic argument to deny women the Sacrament of the Holy orders.

- The Bible says: "As in all the churches of God's holy people, women are to remain quiet in the assemblies, since they have no permission to speak: theirs is a subordinate part, as the Law itself says. If there is anything they want to know, they should ask their husbands at home: it is shameful for a woman to speak in the assembly. Do you really think that you are the source of the word of God? Or that you are the only people to whom it has come?" (1 Cor. 14,33b- 35) Therefore, if women can't preach in the assemblies, they can't be priests.

First of all it is good to see here that this passage was not written by St. Paul himself, but that it was an interpolation of some kind. How do we know this? Because this interrupts the thought sequence from v.33a to v.36. Let's see how would it sound without the passage written above:

(v. 32) The prophetic spirit is to be under the prophets' control, for God is a God not of disorder but of peace. (v. 36) Anyone who claims to be a prophet, or to have any spiritual powers must recognise that what I am writing to you is a commandment of the Lord (1 Cor. 14, 32.36). [For a more precise analysis, refer to Vidal 214- 15]

Also, it is highly unlikely that St. Paul would have written anything like 1 Cor. 14,33b- 35, because he had deep admiration for Christian women. Let's see some examples of this. We can refer to the passages in Romans 16 when he refers to Phoebe, the deaconess, a woman named Mary, and Junias in a very affectionate and respectful manner. Even at one time he protests when apparently he was told not to take women in her voyages for missions: "To those who want to interrogate me, this is my answer [. . .] [Have we not] every right to be accompanied by a Christian wife, like the other apostles, like the brothers of the Lord, and like Cephas?" (1 Cor. 9,5).

Secondly we can see in Paul passages such as this one:

Now for the questions about which you wrote.

"It is a good thing for a man not to touch a woman".

For reasons of immorality, every man should have his own wife and every woman her own husband. The husband must give to his wife what she has a right to expect, and so too the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and in the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. You must not deprive each other, except by mutual consent for a limited time, to leave yourselves free for prayer, and to come together again afterwards; otherwise Satan may take advantage of any lack of self-control to put you to the test [. . .] (1 Cor. 7,1- 5; Vidal 180: the statement in quotes is not from St. Paul as many translate in the English versions of the Bible, because if it would be his statement, then vv. 2- 5 wouldn't follow).

Sometimes the presence of a Christian woman makes her husband holy:

You see, the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through the brother. If this were not so, your children would be unclean, whereas in fact they are holy (1 Cor. 7,14).

It is also good to point out that St. Paul was very much influenced by the Platonist Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria (20 BC-50 AD), who established the degrees of likeness to God. Saint Paul seems to accept many aspects of this philosophy in which it establishes these degrees of the likeness of God: God- Christ (Logos)- man- woman. Christ for him is the head of man, and the man is the head of a woman (1 Cor. 11,7); because it is from God that man comes from, and woman comes from a man (1 Cor. 11, 8-10). But it is also very important to notice that St. Paul indeed notices that this is not consequent of his views about humanity, specially man- woman relationship. And though he indeed says that women should be subordinated to men, he states the following astonishing statement in which, in the same letter, he completely changes his mind:

However, in the Lord, though woman is nothing without man, man is nothing without woman; and though woman came from man, so does every man come from a woman, and everything comes from God (1 Cor. 11,11-12).

This can explain easily the following passage:

[. . .] for all of you are the children of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus, since every one of you that has been baptised has been clothed in Christ. There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither slave nor free man, there can be neither male nor female - for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3,26- 28).

Is the denial of women ordination consistent with these Pauline statements? Is it legitimate to deny women priesthood because of an interpolation that reflects the biases and discrimination against women at that time, and not on the Christian content Paul transmitted? Obviously the answer is "no".

Conclusion

There is absolutely no justification for denying women the Sacraments of Holy Orders. Many will say that it has been a long tradition held by the Church that women may not be priests. However, it is obvious as Haya van Meer pointed out, that such tradition does not form part of the truths held by the Church along all these centuries, because they are based solely on the biased position that women are imbecillitas naturae as St. Thomas Aquinas stated (Contra Gentiles III, 123), because through Eve sin came into the world, forgetting that through Mary salvation came to the world, because they are more imperfect than men, etc. (Boff 123) I'm not saying that Rome upholds this as being true, but by not ordaining women, it is perpetuating the effects of this terrible way of thinking. If Rome really wants to have a moral authority in front of the world to say that women should no longer be oppressed or denied any rights, it has to begin at home. Contrary to what the Pope stated in 1994, this is not a "Rome has spoken" case. The Vatican has to reflect on its position and overcome this aspect of itself which so much damages the credibility of the Church in the eyes of the world.

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