

WOMEN AND MINISTRY

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THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT constitutes a call of the Church to profound renewal in its ministry, a renewal which broadly affects the structures of the Church and asks for a deep conversion in persons.

Before Vatican II, Catholics who thought "Church" thought hierarchy. This emphasis had placed laymen and all women, so far as social expression of Church was concerned, in a passive stance, dependent upon the initiatives and continuing directives of the clerical order. Movements resulting from lay persons' dynamic relationship with God in prayer and reflection on daily experience were deflected into roles and limited by rules which expressed the perceptions of a totally male hierarchy and sense of ministry. Vatican II stirred hearts by its insights, steeped in biblical tradition, into the nature of the Church. The Church is mystery, is a sacrament of union with God and of unity of persons, is people related to God through Christ,¹ is ever anew responding in the Spirit to the signs of the times.²

Women in particular resonated with this teaching, experiencing a sense of being Church in a dimension which was new to them. The earlier emphasis on roles which had separated women from the Church as hierarchy gave way before the Council's teaching on "the exalted dignity proper to the human person." "The rights and duties" of the person "are universal and inviolable." These include "the right to choose a state of life freely . . . the right to education . . . to a good reputation . . . to activity in accord with the upright norm of one's own conscience"³ The call to end discrimination by reason of sex⁴ indicated that woman was to be included in the full dignity to be accorded the person.

These teachings, together with the whole cultural movement towards a fairer valuation of woman,⁵ awakened in women a new consciousness of their potential. As they grew in self-respect, they experienced a new sense

¹ Constitution on the Church, no 1 (tr *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed W M Abbott [New York, 1966] pp 14-15), no 10 (p 27)

² Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, no 4 (*Documents*, p 201)

³ *Ibid*, no 26 (*Documents*, p 225)

⁴ *Ibid*, no 29 (*Documents*, pp 227-28) It is noteworthy that Vatican II, while giving a direction toward the value of personhood, did not develop the application of this teaching to woman or deal with women in the Church

⁵ The contemporary women's liberation movement traces its origins to Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York, 1953), and Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York, 1963) A superb historical treatment of women in the Church is George Tavard's *Woman in Christian Tradition* (Notre Dame, 1973)

of responsibility as Church. Many women felt called to the Scriptures, where "the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them."⁶ With new eyes they found in the Gospels evidence which challenged their previous mind-sets. They noted that Jesus had broken through all the categories and taboos of His times to reveal what respect He had for women, what expectations He placed upon them. With awe, yet with courage drawn from His promptings, many women experienced an urgency to render the institutional Church more revelatory of its redeeming Lord, more responsive to peoples' needs.

Though the Council spoke of "a variety of ministries"⁷ and stated that all believers share in the mission of Christ,⁸ the ministers recognized in the documents were primarily bishops, then priests and deacons. These ministers, organized hierarchically, were set apart from the rest of the Church by a graded participation in holy orders.⁹ Some women felt a call to this life of orders. But for most women, the pressure was that of the vision which had been clearly set forth: the Church of witness, of community, of ministry.¹⁰ They were conscious of needs, of the aspirations of people for a better life, a more human self-understanding, a deeper relationship with God and with one another. People were there to be served. When the whole Church did not move decisively in these directions, those women whose consciousness had been raised tended to make decisive choices: either they departed the Church, surrendered to apathy, or, confident in the Spirit, they deepened their experience of the Word, particularly as found in the Gospels. Here these latter found the essential insights on ministry.

This paper will attempt to chronicle this odyssey, to explicate (1) Jesus' revelation about ministry, his assimilation of women into that ministry: *gospel*; (2) the forces within the early Church and subsequent history which seem to have been at work in diminishing the participation of women in ministry: *tradition*; (3) the dynamic of the contemporary women's movement as it may affect ministry: *hope*.

GOSPEL

The gospel of Jesus is word and deed. Luke portrays for us Jesus, filled with the Spirit, announcing his program of ministry in the passage from Is 61:1-2 which is fulfilled in him:

⁶ Constitution on Divine Revelation, no. 21 (*Documents*, p. 125).

⁷ Constitution on the Church, no. 18 (*Documents*, p. 37).

⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 10 (*Documents*, p. 27); Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, no. 2: "the laity share in the priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ" (*Documents*, p. 49).

⁹ Constitution on the Church, no. 20 (*Documents*, p. 40). Cf. Raymond E. Brown, *Priest and Bishop: Biblical Reflections* (New York, 1970) pp. 53-55.

¹⁰ Constitution on the Church, no. 10 (*Documents*, p. 27); no. 9 (p. 25); Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, no. 32 (*Documents*, p. 230).

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
 because he has anointed me
 to preach good news to the poor,
 to proclaim release to the captives
 and recovery of sight to the blind.
 He has sent me to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
 to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.¹¹

The Evangelists, Luke in quite a literal way, present Jesus fulfilling that program among the poor, the sick, outcasts, and women. Wherever there is need or prejudice, Jesus breaks through categories, rejects taboos, declares himself "Lord of the Sabbath," and offers freedom of spirit as the weapon against oppressive rules and limiting roles.¹² Repeatedly Jesus empowers the weak and patiently points out to his disciples that his (and their) mission is not to be greater than others but to serve them.¹³

The key to the ministry of Jesus appears succinctly toward the end of Mark's "Way Passage,"¹⁴ where Jesus says: "For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."¹⁵ On the Way, women as well as the Twelve accompanied Jesus, going with him that eventful journey from Galilee to Jerusalem.¹⁶ The verb *diakonein*, "to serve," appears infrequently in the Gospels.¹⁷ Nevertheless, it is a very important term, for Jesus uses it to characterize and identify his mission and what he expects of his followers.¹⁸ The contexts in which this verb appears and its restricted use are especially significant. It describes the criterion to be used at the Last Judgment and expresses Jesus' reason for coming;¹⁹ in the course of Jesus' life he serves or ministers to many people. But besides Jesus, only angels and women are listed as the subject of this verb, and only angels and women are "ministers" to Jesus himself.²⁰ Jesus asked for and accepted ser-

¹¹ Lk 4:18 RSV.

¹² See Margaret Brennan, "Disturbing the Perceptual Patterns: A Reflection on the Liberation of Men," *Origins*, July 17, 1975, pp. 97-100.

¹³ Mk 9:35; 10:43-44; Mt 20:26-27; Lk 22:24-27.

¹⁴ Mk 8:22-10:52.

¹⁵ Mk 10:45.

¹⁶ Lk 8:1-3; 24:10; Mk 15:40-41; 16:9; Mt 27:55-56; Jn 19:25.

¹⁷ The verb only appears 18 times among the four Gospels. It is "not found in the Septuagint or other Greek versions of the Old Testament including the Apocrypha" (*A Concordance to the Greek Testament*, ed. W. F. Moulton and A. S. Geden [4th ed. rev.; Edinburgh, 1963] pp. 202, xii*).

¹⁸ Lk 12:37; cf. 17:8; 22:26-27.

¹⁹ Mt 20:28; Mk 10:45; Lk 22:27.

²⁰ Cf. Mk 1:13; cf. Lk 22:43; 8:3; Mt 8:15.

vices in public from women; this was unorthodox for a Jewish man in his day.²¹

Ministry as discipleship. To be a disciple was to learn from Jesus, to absorb his teachings into a life pattern, and to teach them to others. Women were surely among the disciples of Jesus. Mary the mother of Jesus is described by Luke as one who "heard the word of God and kept it."²² Witness also Mary of Bethany, who "sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching."²³ Mary won approval from Jesus in the act of repudiating a "woman's role" and appearing to Martha to violate a rule of hospitality. Martha too must be counted a disciple of the Lord; for she shared with him his precious dialogue on the resurrection of the dead and made her declaration of faith: "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God. . . ." ²⁴ To Mary she communicated the message "The Teacher is here. . . ." ²⁵

Just as Mary of Bethany broke womanly tradition to join herself as a disciple to Jesus, even more did the woman from Samaria violate conventions (and Jesus with her), speaking to and learning, in a public place, from a Jewish man.²⁶ This Samaritan woman, autonomous and rational, drew Jesus and was drawn by him into an ever deeper conversation. He taught her of the gift of inner life which he brought, led her to a state of conversion, and declared himself the Messiah. And the woman proclaimed him: "Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony."²⁷ Some of the most important elements of Jesus' self-revelation were spoken in these discourses with women: the resurrection (to Martha), the life of grace (to the Samaritan).

Women are represented not only as hearing but as remembering the Lord's words. Lk 2:52 tells us this of Mary who "kept all these things in her heart." Of the message at the tomb it is recorded of the women

²¹ Donald Senior, *Jesus: A Gospel Portrait* (Dayton, 1975) pp. 74-75.

²² Lk 11:27-28; 8:19.

²³ Lk 10:39. The lesson of Lk 10:38-42 (Mary and Martha) is enveloped by Lk 10:25-37 (the good Samaritan) and Lk 11:1-4 (the Lord's Prayer). Like Acts 6:1-4, these passages emphasize that human services must be complemented by prayer and service of the word. On discipleship see Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-26; D. Senior, "The Mother of Jesus and the Meaning of Discipleship," *Sign*, May, 1975, pp. 5-8; Jean Delorme, "Diversité et unité des ministères d'après le Nouveau Testament," in *Le ministère et les ministères selon le Nouveau Testament*, ed. Delorme (Paris, 1973).

²⁴ Jn 11:20-27.

²⁵ Jn 11:28.

²⁶ Jn 4:7-42. See Bruce Vawter, "The Gospel according to John," in *Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1968) 63:76, p. 431.

²⁷ Jn 4:39.

that "they remembered his words."²⁸ Jesus gives no hint of a repudiation of women as unable to hear or understand or remember his word. He testified to the discipleship of his own mother when he complemented her role of physical motherhood, elevating and universalizing her relationship as among those who "hear the word of God and do it."²⁹

The great lesson of discipleship was the Cross: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."³⁰ How graphic must have been this Gospel challenge to the women after they had succored Jesus along the Way of the Cross! Even in these terrible straits he had responded to their sympathy and anguish by teaching them, preparing them for the days when their discipleship would be tested.³¹ In fact, the response of the women who accepted the invitation to follow Jesus, to be with him on the Way and in his sufferings, is the one point of relief from the otherwise consistent emphasis in the Gospels on failure in discipleship.

Ministry as witness. The early Church verbalized a criterion for witness of Jesus: those "who have accompanied him during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us. . . ."³² Women fulfilled this requirement, for they accompanied Jesus and his disciples on that decisive last journey from Galilee to Jerusalem.³³ "He journeyed through towns and villages preaching and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve accompanied him, and also some women," Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and many others.³⁴ There is no evidence in the Gospels that any one of these women faltered when the apostles failed Jesus. It is among the Twelve, chosen personally by Jesus (men, to symbolize the New Israel as representative of the Twelve Tribes³⁵), that we find those who deserted, denied, betrayed him. According to the fourth Gospel, the women with the Beloved Disciple stood firm, witnessing the crucifixion.³⁶ Women watched Jesus' burial.³⁷

²⁸ Lk 24:8. Memory is regarded by contemporary theologians as an integral part of the act of faith. See Edward J. Kilmartin, "Apostolic Office: Sacrament of Christ," *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 36 (1975) 255.

²⁹ Lk 8:21.

³⁰ Mt 16:24-25; Mk 8:34; Lk 9:23-24.

³¹ Lk 23:27.

³² Acts 1:21. The text 1:21-22 makes explicit the choice of a male because the place of Judas among the Twelve is to be filled. The expression "from the baptism of John" probably does not literally imply the presence of the Twelve but is a reference to the beginning of the gospel; see Mk 1:1-4.

³³ Mk 15:40-41.

³⁴ Lk 8:1-3.

³⁵ David M. Stanley and Raymond E. Brown, "Aspects of New Testament Thought," *Jerome Biblical Commentary* 78:173, p. 797.

³⁶ Jn 18:15-18, 25-27; 19:25-27.

³⁷ Mt 27:61; Mk 15:47; Lk 23:55.

Women were singled out as the first witnesses to the Resurrection,³⁸ the first to whom the risen Lord appeared. It is amazing that the Gospels (written when the attitude toward women in the early Christian community was already tightening) recorded these facts. The story of Jesus' choice of women, told by all four Evangelists, accentuates the apostles' disbelief, even as it reinforces Jesus' habit of disregarding a limiting tradition (the Jewish nonacceptance of women as witnesses).³⁹

Ministry as apostleship. During the lifetime of Jesus the term "apostle" seems not to have been used. It came into use only after the resurrection of Jesus, particularly through the influence of Paul. The Twelve were then called apostles, "those sent." But others besides the Twelve were also called apostles.⁴⁰ Paul applied the term not only to himself and many other men, but perhaps even to a woman.⁴¹ The Samaritan woman, one of the earliest persons recorded by John as receiving an important revelation from Jesus, became a self-appointed apostle, with her work blessed by the Lord.⁴² Certainly women were sent on the most important mission of all: they were commissioned by Jesus to "Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."⁴³

Ministry as service. Jesus accepted from women the kind of service which the Church has continually recognized as fitting for women to give: the ministry of providing for bodily needs in the form of food and those ameliorations of environment which make living more human. Certain women, we are told, "used to follow him and look after him . . .," assisting him and his followers out of their own resources.⁴⁴ Jesus not only accepted this service from women but performed miraculous cures which enabled women to serve him. He healed the mother-in-law of Peter, who then "got up at once and began to wait on him."⁴⁵ Of

³⁸ The message to the women is rendered in Mt 28:1-10 by an angel, then Jesus; in Mk 16:9 by Jesus; in Lk 24:1-11 by two men; in Jn 20:1-18 by two angels, then Jesus. Though Luke does not record Jesus' appearing to the women, he does acknowledge women as witnesses of Jesus' resurrection, presents them as remembering Jesus' message (given to them in Galilee) and reminding the disciples.

³⁹ See Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (New York, 1961) p. 156.

⁴⁰ Stanley and Brown, *JBC*, p. 798.

⁴¹ 1 Cor 1:1; 15:5-7; James: Gal 1:19; Barnabas: Acts 14:14; 1 Cor 9:6; 4:9; Gal 2:9; Andronicus and Junias: Rom 16:7. Junias (Iounian) can be translated Junia (or some mss. Iulia) and was thought by Chrysostom and others to be a woman. See Stanley and Brown, *JBC* 78:179, p. 798; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "The Letter to the Romans," *JBC* 53:138, p. 330.

⁴² Jn 4:7-42.

⁴³ Mt 28:10. See Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 28: "in the Jewish notion of apostolate the one sent . . . represents the one who sends, carrying not only the sender's authority but even his presence to others."

⁴⁴ Lk 8:3.

⁴⁵ Mt 8:14-15; Lk 4:38-39; Mk 1:29-31.

the women who provided for Jesus Luke remarks: they "had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities."⁴⁶

Ministry as receiving Jesus' power and becoming instruments of the Spirit. Women attracted the power of Jesus in cures,⁴⁷ in being raised from the dead,⁴⁸ and in forgiveness of sins.⁴⁹ The woman with a hemorrhage drew power from Jesus apparently without his consciously willing it.⁵⁰ At Cana, Mary the mother of Jesus was an instrument of Jesus' clarification for us of his power, even to the point of anticipating his "hour" of glorification.⁵¹ In periods relating to crucial events in Jesus' life, women were the recipients of heavenly messages empowering them: Mary at the Annunciation, to bring forth Jesus; Magdalene and the women at the empty tomb, to proclaim the risen Lord.⁵² Women also are represented as receiving the Spirit of Jesus directly, most notably Mary his mother,⁵³ but also Elizabeth.⁵⁴ Women were present at the Pentecostal effusion of the Spirit.⁵⁵

Ministry as offering intercessory prayer and worship. In Matthew's Gospel many people "came to Jesus," some to test him, some to ask a favor for themselves or others, some to offer Jesus the respect and honor he deserves. Women are never numbered among those who test Jesus, but, perceiving his real identity, they come to Jesus to make intercession or to offer him praise and adoration. The prayerful message of Martha and Mary evoked a favorable response from Jesus when he raised Lazarus from the dead.⁵⁶ Jesus yielded to the persevering, humble prayer of even a non-Jewish woman, a Canaanite,⁵⁷ who desired to feed from the crumbs. In the parable of the unjust judge, Jesus chose a woman as a model for perseverance in prayer.⁵⁸

The proclivity of women to worship is graphically presented in the confessions of Martha and Mary⁵⁹ and in the public praise of him by the

⁴⁶ Lk 8:2.

⁴⁷ Lk 8:43-48; 13:10-13.

⁴⁸ Lk 8:49-56; Mt 9:18-26; Mk 5:21-43.

⁴⁹ Lk 7:48.

⁵⁰ Mt 9:20-22.

⁵¹ Jn 2:1-11. John uses his typical literary method of dialogue and represents Mary as evoking Jesus' power and inviting him to anticipate his "hour" of glory.

⁵² Lk 1:26-38; Mt 28:1-8; Mk 16:5-8; Lk 24:5-7.

⁵³ Lk 1:26-38.

⁵⁴ Lk 1:39-45.

⁵⁵ Acts 1:14; 2:1-4.

⁵⁶ Jn 11:3-5; 43-44. In the dialogic form common to John, the prayerful message of Lazarus' sisters arouses Jesus' concern. The spoken faith of Martha in his ability to heal Lazarus is built upon by Jesus to evoke her deeper expression of faith in the resurrection of the dead and his own manifestation of power over death.

⁵⁷ Mt 15:22-28.

⁵⁸ Lk 18:2-8.

⁵⁹ Jn 11:21-27; 20:16-18.

woman crippled for eighteen years.⁶⁰ Presence with him at his sacrifice on the cross, reverence for his body,⁶¹ were so important that they took precedence over all the fears which the women must have had. The watchful presence of the women and Beloved Disciple at the cross is symbolized in the celebration of the sacraments by the accepting Church.⁶² Women who greeted and worshiped the risen Lord responded in faith to this new form of Presence among them. They gave immediate "obedience of faith"⁶³ by bearing their Good News to the incredulous disciples.

Ministry as predictions of the future sacraments. In explaining why Jesus is happy to associate with sinners, Luke presents him teaching three parables. Between the parable of the lost sheep⁶⁴ and that of the prodigal⁶⁵ he inserts one on the woman searching for and rejoicing in the recovery of a small coin.⁶⁶ The mercy of God is allegorized through the activity of women as well as of men. Women as well as men are encouraged to seek out and promote the conversion of sinners. These figures of God's mercy prepare the way for the sacraments of baptism and penance. The Gospels also present women as ministers of unction.⁶⁷ Mary won Jesus' acclaim for having at great expense anointed his body before he died.⁶⁸ After Jesus' death, it was the women who were preoccupied to purchase spices and go to the tomb to anoint him.⁶⁹ This association of anointing with preparing the body for death and for burial may well have influenced the rite of the Anointing of the Sick.

The peak of sacramental ministry inheres in the offering of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. Theological manuals used to teach that the priest "confects the body and blood of Jesus." The question was seriously asked, and answered negatively, whether woman can perform such a function.⁷⁰ If the Spirit utilized the female powers of Mary's body to incarnate the Son of God, the Church may well recognize His will to use other female powers, for example in orders, to symbolize that incarna-

⁶⁰ Lk 13:11-13.

⁶¹ Mt 27:55-56; Lk 23:55-56; Mk 16:1-3.

⁶² Mk 15:40-41; Lk 23:49; Jn 19:25-30. See John H. McKenna, "Eucharistic Epiclesis: Myopia or Microcosm?" *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 36 (1975) 267: "Christ's sacramental offer of himself finds its complete realization only in the sacramental acceptance of this offer by the faithful."

⁶³ Rom 1:5; 16:26.

⁶⁴ Lk 15:3-7.

⁶⁵ Lk 15:11-24.

⁶⁶ Lk 15:8-10.

⁶⁷ Lk 7:46; Jn 11:2; 12:1-3; Mk 14:8; 16:1.

⁶⁸ Mt 26:13.

⁶⁹ Mk 16:1; Lk 23:56.

⁷⁰ See Haye van der Meer, *Women Priests in the Catholic Church?* (Philadelphia, 1973) pp. 143-53.

tion.

The Eucharist celebrates the entire paschal mystery and re-presents the mission of Jesus. Related to his mission at each step was the participation of a believing community. Jesus' ministry as a call to discipleship presented models for the sacramental life of the Church. Those partaking with Jesus at the Last Supper, the women and the Beloved Disciple at the cross, and the women after the Resurrection offered that presence, memory, loving faith, and service which are integral to the Eucharist.⁷¹

The various forms of ministry performed by women may seem dimly related to the ordered functions of preaching, teaching, administering the sacraments, and organizing the community of followers of Jesus until we remember that these forms were inchoate also in terms of male disciples and even the Twelve.⁷²

In the post-Resurrection period women equally with men received the charisms of the Holy Spirit.⁷³ Paul's insistence that Gentiles need not be circumcised before embracing Christianity opened to women the possibility of baptism and full membership in the Church. Doctrinally and in his personal relations with women⁷⁴ Paul appeared to appreciate the equal status of women with men in Christ. But the pressures brought to bear against this equality must have been overwhelming, especially as

⁷¹ When Jesus describes his ministry along the Way to Jerusalem as "I have come not to be served but to serve and to give my life as a ransom for many" (Mt 20:28), he invites the disciples to be like him. In Mark's account of the Last Supper these latter words are echoed as a concrete example of Jesus' sacrificial ministry (Mk 14:24). The fulness of discipleship implies that every level of human life is touched by Jesus' own saving ministry. No comparison of Gospel texts makes this more obvious than the accounts of the Last Supper events in the Synoptics (Mt 26:26-28; Mk 14:22-25; Lk 22:14-20) and Paul (1 Cor 11:24) taken together with that of John (Jn 13:1-14). Paul and the Synoptics preserve the tradition of the Passover meal, Paul and Luke especially underlining the commemorative aspect of this meal in the words of Jesus "Do this in memory of me." John omits the account of the offering of Jesus' body and blood, but retains the formula "As I have done, so you must do," applied in this instance to Jesus' humble service of washing his disciples' feet. John apparently desires to widen the scope of the commemorative action of the Church, reminding Christians that a Eucharistic celebration without service to others is meaningless and empty, that the Eucharist and service cannot be separated. John does not neglect the Eucharist, as the discourse of Jesus on the Bread of Life in chap. 6 shows. This context emphasizes how closely Jesus linked human service (in multiplication of loaves that prompted the discourse) with the fulfilment of spiritual needs. Paul, too, inserts his account of the Eucharist into the context of the mutual concern the members of a community should have for one another. Luke makes the same point with his banquet theme, where the poor, the outcasts, and women are opposed to the rich, the revered, the Pharisees.

⁷² See Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 13, 17-20, 34-43.

⁷³ Acts 1:14; 2:1-4.

⁷⁴ Gal. 3:27-28; Rom 16.

regards the difficult Corinthians. Clearly, women were early represented among the prophesiers.⁷⁵ Their homes may well have served as churches.⁷⁶

Widows constituted a special group, as in Judaism, as the recipients of food and social services. The fact that these widows later became an established order in the Church indicates that they may well have performed individual ministry in gathering the community together, communicating the message of the risen Lord, praying, and prophesying.⁷⁷ Chronologically, the first reference to any term later applied to order in the Church is that of "deacon," used for Phoebe, a woman deeply respected by Paul. He urges the Christian community to receive her and help her in every way possible because of the role of leadership she has exercised in the Church. Whatever the "deacon" meant in Paul's lifetime, the same Greek term is used for men and women.⁷⁸ The Pastorals witness to an organization of widows and the continuance of women as deacons.⁷⁹ By the third century the *Didascalia* indicated that bishops, presbyters, deacons, and deaconesses had clerical office, while widows and virgins were recognized as of nonclerical status.⁸⁰ When minor orders were enumerated in the *Apostolic Constitutions*, that of deaconess was included. It seems apparent that women played an "immense and irreplaceable role . . . in the growth of the early Church."⁸¹

The evidence of women in roles of discipleship, witness, apostleship,

⁷⁵ Acts 21:8-9; cf. Eph 2:20. See *The Jerusalem Bible*, ed. Alexander Jones (London, 1966) p. 221, note m: "particular individuals are so specially endowed with the charisma that they are always referred to as 'prophets', Ac 11:27; 13:1; 15:32; 21:9, 10. These normally occupy the second place after the apostles in the order of charisma, 1 Co 12:28-29; Ep 4:11; but cf. 1 Co 12:10; Rm 12:6; Lk 11:49; this is because they are the appointed witnesses of the Spirit, Rv 2:7, etc., 1 Th 5:19-20, whose 'revelations' they communicate, 1 Co 14:6,26,30; Ep 3:5; Rv 1:1, just as the apostles are witnesses to the risen Christ, Rm 1:1+; Ac 1:8+, and proclaim the kerygma, Acts 2:22+." The prohibition against women prophesying, "women should keep silent in all such gatherings" (1 Cor 14:33b-35) is considered by a growing body of commentators to be an interpolation influenced by a post-Pauline reaction to certain heretical groups; see A. Feuillet, "La dignité et le rôle de la femme," *New Testament Studies* 21 (1975) 163, n. 2.

⁷⁶ Acts 12:12; Rom 16:5. Six of the persons greeted in Rom 16 are women. The word used for Phoebe in Rom 16:2 is *prostasis*, a noun derived from the verb *prostasso*, meaning "to order validly," "pertaining to those who have the right to command" (p. 37). It asserts, as it is used, e.g., in Acts 10:33, authority and also dependence on God (p. 38); cf. G. Friedrich, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 8 (Grand Rapids, 1972) 37-39.

⁷⁷ Mary Lawrence McKenna, *Women of the Church* (New York, 1967) pp. 35-62.

⁷⁸ Rom 16:1. The same Greek noun is used for a man. Cf. Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:11.

⁷⁹ 1 Tim 5:3-16; 3:11. See Peter Hünermann, "Conclusions regarding the Female Diaconate," *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 36 (1975) 325-33; McKenna, *art. cit.*, pp. 35-63.

⁸⁰ McKenna, *art. cit.*, p. 66.

⁸¹ Hünermann, *art. cit.*, p. 325.

servicing, being empowered, worship, and symbolic actions cuts across the tradition presented by all four Gospels. Jesus' ministry to and acceptance of women must have been a very important part of the gospel, preserved even "against the grain" of the Jewish and later the Gnostic influences that tended to reduce Jesus' startling freedom with women. The presentation of this material suggests that it was such an integral part of the Gospel tradition that it could not be rejected or weakened. As is said of the woman who anointed Jesus, "whenever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her."⁸² The Gospels talk about the words and works not only of Jesus but of women as well.

TRADITION

"Venerable tradition"⁸³ has been proffered as the reason for excluding women from official ministry, even of a lay character.⁸⁴ Such tradition is not static. Its validity may be measured by such characteristics as the following: whether it (1) derives from the example of Jesus, (2) is constant, (3) is revelatory of sound doctrine, (4) cannot be changed. When the women's issue is studied in the light of these questions, a firmer basis for the influence of tradition on women's ministries may be achieved.

Example of Jesus

The exclusion of women from ministry does not derive from the example of Jesus. There is one saying of Jesus which is most consistently quoted in the Gospels and the writings of Paul: the "great commandment" or the "love command." Both Paul and the Evangelists attempt to show the growth and development of the early Church as evidence of the Christian community's effort to interpret the love command. Fidelity to this command provided the criterion for resolving new disputes as the Church confronted new issues.⁸⁵

⁸² Mt 26:13.

⁸³ See Constitution on Divine Revelation, no. 10 (*Documents*, pp. 117-18): "Sacred tradition and sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God. . . . [The] teaching office is not above the word of God but serves it." No. 8 (p. 116): "This tradition which comes from the apostles develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. For there is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down."

⁸⁴ Paul VI, "Motu Proprio on Minor Orders," *Origins*, Sept 21, 1972, p. 203.

⁸⁵ E.g., Mt 5:44; 19:19; 22:37-39 and par.; Jn 13:34-35; Gal 5:6; 1 Cor 13; 1 Jn 4. See Victor Furnish, *The Love Command in the New Testament* (Nashville, 1972); Ceslaus Spicq, *Charity and Liberty in the New Testament* (Staten Island, N.Y., 1965); *id.*, *Agape in the New Testament* (St. Louis, 1963); Gerard Gillemann, *The Primacy of Charity in Moral Theology* (Westminster, Md., 1959).

Paul demonstrated a prophetic understanding of the role of this mandate when he challenged Peter and the other Jewish Christian authorities for their refusal to allow the Gentiles free entrance into the Church.⁸⁶ Paul chastises Peter for submitting to convention and thus failing to apply the lesson of Jesus' central teaching.⁸⁷ This confrontation and its settlement emphasized the love command as the absolute criterion for settling disputes in the Christian Church. As such, it presents a meaningful model for resolving the question of the role of women in the Church, both as to ways of proceeding and as to content.

No mention is made in the New Testament of any dispute over the baptism of women. But if the narrower view had prevailed and circumcision of the foreskin of males had been made a prerequisite for baptism, women would have been denied Christian baptism. It is interesting that the great Pauline doctrinal proclamation of equality is thought to be part of a baptismal formula:⁸⁸ "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."⁸⁹

The exclusion of women had its origin, however, early in Christian history when the young Church was unable to continue the radicalism of Jesus' position against the ingrained customs of society.⁹⁰ The Gospels hint that the male followers of Jesus had difficulty in understanding and assimilating Jesus' concept of women.⁹¹ Consideration of the depth and extent of antifeminism in the Jewish world of the first century A.D.⁹²

⁸⁶ Acts 15:1-31; Rom 2:25-29; 3:30; 1 Cor 7:17-19; 8:1-13; Gal 2:1-10; 6:15.

⁸⁷ Gal 2:11-21.

⁸⁸ See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "The Letter to the Galatians," *JBC* 49:24, p. 243.

⁸⁹ Gal 3:17-28.

⁹⁰ Jewish society honored women only within the home in subjection to husband or father; cf. de Vaux, *op. cit.*, pp. 39-40. Philo wrote: "The women are best suited to the indoor life, which never strays from the house, within which the middle door is taken by the maidens as their boundary, and the outer door by those who have realized full womanhood" (*De spec. leg.* 3, 169). Josephus insisted: "The woman, says the Lord, is in all things inferior to the man. Let her accordingly be submissive, not for her humiliation but that she may be directed; for the authority has been given by God to the man" (*In Flaccum* 89). The common physiological knowledge of the time emphasized the inferiority of woman, her passivity in procreation, and the need of the female for longer embryonic development; see Tavard, *op. cit.*, p. 62. The dualistic philosophy of Plato exaggerated the differences between men and women, leading later to St. Augustine's conclusion that spirit was symbolized by man, flesh by woman (*Expositio in Joannem* 1, 13 [*PL* 35, 1395]).

⁹¹ Jn 4:27; Mt 26:7-10; Lk 24:9-11. Note the apocryphal *Gospel of Thomas*: "Simon Peter said to them, 'Let Mary go out from among us, because women are not worthy of the Life.' Jesus said, 'See, I shall lead her, so that I will make her a male, that she too may become a living spirit, resembling you males. For every woman who makes herself a male will enter the kingdom of heaven'" (E. Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, Logion 14, pl. 99, 18-26, ed. W. Schneemelcher [London, 1963] p. 299).

⁹² See de Vaux, *op. cit.*, pp. 39-40.

causes the "remembering" (inclusion in the writings which became the New Testament) of the respectful, nonpatronizing attitude of Jesus toward women to be a miracle in itself—a testimony to biblical inspiration. Jesus' approach to woman as person is to be distinguished from both streams of thought about women apparent in the Old Testament, that of the accursed temptress and that of the embodiment of heavenly wisdom.⁹³ To some extent in St. Paul and certainly in the Pastorals, Jesus' attitude toward women was being submerged.⁹⁴ A critical turning point in the history of the Church was in process.

Although Paul taught clearly that Christ's redemptive acts broke into history and destroyed the effects of the sin of Adam, his writings reflect an awareness that these effects still dominated society.⁹⁵ Accordingly, comments ascribed to him on the text of Genesis 1, where male and female are declared, as humankind, to be the image and likeness of God, are ambiguous. Is the passage which claims that man "is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. . . . Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man"⁹⁶ an ironic repetition of the argumentation of Paul's times? In the next verses Paul stresses the interdependence of man and woman.⁹⁷ Christian tradition, however, did not see this dictum as irony (if it was) but allowed it to deflect from or deter efforts to realize the ideal of Gal 3:27-28. So also, the injunction that "the women should keep silence in the churches"⁹⁸ is in contradiction to his testimony to women as prophetesses and coworkers with him.⁹⁹ The Pauline community later registered doubts about Paul's Christological vision for all humankind and the freedom of women in ministry which he had promoted. The first letter to Timothy¹⁰⁰ contradicts Paul's first letter to the Corinthians 11:7-10 in attributing sin solely to Eve and thus missing the point of Paul's theology: "Sin entered the world through one

⁹³ See Tavard, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-26.

⁹⁴ Paul: 1 Cor 11:3-10; 14:33b-36; Col 3:18; Eph 5:22-24; Pastorals: Tit 2:3-5; 1 Tim 2:11-15. Robin Scroggs, "Paul: Chauvinist or Liberationist?" *Christian Century* 89 (1972) 307, considers 1 Cor 14:33b-36 as a post-Pauline gloss. He also considers Col and Eph deuterio-Pauline.

⁹⁵ Gn 3:1-16. See Tavard, *op. cit.*, p. 31. Note *ibid.*, p. 45: "the advent of the New Creation has, in principle, restored mankind to a paradisiac, prelapsarian state. The Christian woman is no longer under the curse by which she was made servant to her husband and bound to a chain of painful pregnancies triggered by her desire for him." Cf. Robin Scroggs, "Paul and the Eschatological Woman," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 40 (1972) 291.

⁹⁶ 1 Cor 11:7,9. See the commentary of Scroggs, "Paul and the Eschatological Woman," pp. 294-95, 297-303.

⁹⁷ 1 Cor 11:11-12.

⁹⁸ 1 Cor 14:34; see note 75 above.

⁹⁹ Rom 16; 1 Cor 11:5; Phil 4:2-3; see also Acts 21:9.

¹⁰⁰ 1 Tim 2:14.

man" (Adam-humankind) whose countertype is Christ, the savior of all humankind.¹⁰¹ This letter also indicates that woman is to be saved by childbearing (by the fulfilment of her curse), not by baptism.¹⁰² The letters to Titus and to Timothy make no mention of prophecy (testified to as an office of women in Acts and Corinthians),¹⁰³ but rather forbid women to teach¹⁰⁴ and restrict widows and deaconesses to the totally private functions common in Jewish society in the first century A.D.¹⁰⁵

Unfortunately, such positions were put forward at the period when the Church was organizing, beginning to institutionalize its ministry.¹⁰⁶ The exclusion of women which had been so marked in Hellenistic Jewish religion therefore affected Christian patterns decisively.¹⁰⁷

The ministry of women through the ages developed under the shadow of sexual bias in society reinforced by the institutionalization in the first and second centuries of an all-male hierarchical priesthood. This shadow blighted the development of a tradition of equality of sexes as achieved through baptism.

Inconstancy of the Tradition

The tradition of the exclusion of women from official ministry in the Church is not constant. It is not constant because at root there are two traditions: that of Jesus and the earliest Church, which had some partial echoes in history, and that of the institutionalizing period of the Church (about 60 to 100 A.D.), which limited women in ministry and excluded them from priesthood. In the first tradition is Phoebe, revered by Paul as coworker and *prostasis* (one who has authority, who rules) in the Church. This tradition is partially continued in the diaconate of women. It is revived in the Middle Ages in the attribution of powers of episcopal jurisdiction to certain abbesses. But most ecclesiastical practice has followed the second tradition. The Church has been unable to incorporate women into its government structures.

A strong constant in ecclesiastical structures has been the need to separate the sexes, modified by the responsibility the Church assumed to

¹⁰¹ See Tavad, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-35.

¹⁰² 1 Tim 2:15.

¹⁰³ Acts 21:9; 1 Cor 11:5.

¹⁰⁴ 1 Tim 2:12.

¹⁰⁵ 1 Tim 5:3-16; 3:11.

¹⁰⁶ The pastoral letters reflect the complex situation of the Church between 60 and 100 A.D. Of this period Tavad comments: "The liberty recognized by Paul must now be channelled through regular institutions: that of widowhood stands out, that of matrimony offers the only proper way of life, since it is through motherhood that they will obtain salvation" (*op. cit.*, p. 35). See Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 35-38.

¹⁰⁷ For worship, Jewish women entered only the outer court, the women's court of Herod's temple; see de Vaux, *op. cit.*, p. 317.

provide "care of souls." Strongly affecting that constant and affected by it is the presumed inferiority of women. It was segregation of sexes and the need to care for women in ways which would not threaten the purity of priests which led to the development of orders of widows and deaconesses, widows dominantly in the Western Church, deaconesses in the Eastern. The widows,¹⁰⁸ gathered at first as recipients of the Church's bounty, grew in importance from apostolic times through the third century as the Church's chief representatives into the world of women: teaching, nursing, praying, providing works of charity.¹⁰⁹ Though within the limits specified the widows exercised a ministry broad and useful, honored by the Church, they had no part in the sacramental system, no influence upon the total structure or policies of the Church, and depended for their livelihood upon the charitable contributions of the faithful as dispensed by the clerics.

In the Eastern Church segregation of women extended even to the sacramental system. Therefore deaconesses,¹¹⁰ besides undertaking a ministry to women like that of the widows in the west, were also deliberately incorporated into the clerical rank alongside the deacon to assist with ministry to women. The deaconesses were chosen and ordained by the bishop with imposition of hands, and prayer invoking the Holy Spirit for grace to discharge the office properly. Their main liturgical function was assisting at the baptism of women, though they also distributed Communion to women and children, administered extreme unction to women, and performed auxiliary tasks at the Eucharist. Their service was directed always to women, instructing them for baptism, providing spiritual guidance, visiting the sick, nursing, acting as their advocate and companion in approaching the bishop or deacon.¹¹¹ Like the widows, the deaconesses were obviously a response to the social segregation of the sexes.

That the deaconesses were not to be given any assignment which gave them authority outranking man¹¹² is a manifestation of male superiority not quite in the spirit of Christ; that they were not to function at the altar

¹⁰⁸ M. L. McKenna, *op. cit.* (n. 77 above) pp. 35-63; H. Leclercq, "Veuvage, Veuve," *DACL* 15/2, 3015.

¹⁰⁹ In some circumstances, as in the entourage of St. Jerome, these women became really learned in the Scriptures and courageous in the scope of work undertaken; see M. L. McKenna, *op. cit.*, pp. 126-29.

¹¹⁰ "Deaconess" (*diakonissa*) is an ecclesiastical term deliberately coined in the third century; cf. M. L. McKenna, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-94; also Hünermann, *op. cit.*, pp. 325-33. The deaconesses never became popular in the West, though some canons deal with them. See M. L. McKenna, *op. cit.*, pp. 129-40.

¹¹¹ M. L. McKenna, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-73, 76-79. See *Constitutiones apostolorum* 3, 2, 3 (ed. F. X. Funk [Paderborn, 1905] p. 185).

¹¹² Hünermann, *art. cit.*, p. 328.

during the consecration of the Eucharist¹¹³ may well have been a continuation of the Old Testament menstrual taboo.¹¹⁴ Nonetheless, from the third to the sixth centuries women played a vital role in the extensive and intensive missionary and charitable activity of the Church; some (deaconesses) served within the ordained clergy.

The ascetical ethos which elevated chastity as the Christian priority began to assume structural forms in the third century. The "companies of virgins,"¹¹⁵ begun as a positive response to the gospel call to virginal discipleship of Christ, interacted with and finally absorbed the orders of widows and deaconesses, giving promise of fruitful patterns of clerical and nonclerical service.

The persistent tradition of woman as temptress was, however, given new life, accompanied by the myth that man, though powerful against the devil, was powerless before a woman.¹¹⁶ As celibacy became a more pronounced ideal for the clergy,¹¹⁷ the easy solution was to banish women from their companionship and even their sight. Separation from the world became not only a spiritual and psychological self-perception; it was materialized in habit, wall, and enclosure.¹¹⁸ Theoretically, all channels to active ministry were closed to women. Yet the medieval ruralism provided even for cloistered nuns opportunities for social and religious influences. Some abbesses, continuing the tradition of deaconesses, exercised ecclesiastical as well as manorial jurisdiction over towns and parishes.¹¹⁹ As the cloister became less common for men religious, it was formally imposed on all women wishing officially to serve the Church.

¹¹³ Epiphanius, *Adversus haereses* 79 (PG 42, 743 f.).

¹¹⁴ Lv 15:19-29. Origen forbids women to enter a church building at the time of their menstrual period; see Tavard, *op. cit.*, p. 95; Roger Gryson, *Les origines du célibat ecclésiastique* (Paris, 1970).

¹¹⁵ M. L. McKenna, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-110.

¹¹⁶ Tertullian's "you are she who enticed the man whom the devil dare not approach" (*De cultu feminarum* 1, 1) continues on even into the twentieth century; see van der Meer, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

¹¹⁷ Legislation forbidding priests to have intercourse began as early as the fourth century in regional councils. In 1050 Pope Leo IX began the effort to abolish the marriage of priests throughout the Church. In 1123 ordination became an impediment nullifying marriage. Clerical celibacy was reaffirmed by the Council of Trent. See Tavard, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

¹¹⁸ See Valentine Schaff, *The Cloister* (Cincinnati, 1921) pp. 26-56. The sixth-century rule for women of Caesarius of Arles prescribes strict cloister. Before the twelfth century, regulations of cloister were issued by various regional councils. Boniface VIII imposed perpetual cloister on all women who had made profession. The Council of Trent confirmed the legislation of Boniface VIII and extended it to all women religious. Efforts to enforce and tighten this legislation were made by Pius V. In 1900 bishops were directed to enforce cloister even on sisters in simple vows.

¹¹⁹ Joan Morris, *The Lady Was a Bishop* (New York, 1973); see van der Meer, *op. cit.*, pp. 106-128, for discussion on the nature of this jurisdiction.

With the rise of cities, the functions which monasteries had performed for people on their own estates became irrelevant. Yet new structures to allow women to make a contribution as Church of social and spiritual assistance were frustrated.¹²⁰ During the Renaissance, women tried to respond in forms like the Oratory of Divine Love, where men and women devoted themselves to the appallingly bad social conditions of Italy.¹²¹ Despite the needs of society and the good work accomplished by women, the Council of Trent reiterated the imposition of cloister upon all women who wished to serve the Church.¹²²

The long struggle of women in the Church from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century for greater opportunities for service eventuated in the recognition within canon law of "active" congregations of women religious—still, however, dominated by a cloistral mentality.¹²³ Their position in the Church never rose above that of "widows," did not even attain the ecclesiastical importance of deaconesses. The opportunity for higher ecclesiastical studies was closed to women.¹²⁴ All theology and canon law have been solely male in source and outlook. Official documents since Vatican II have reiterated the exclusion of women from ministry or assigned them an inferior place within it.¹²⁵ It is this second tradition that is becoming untenable. Events, including concern for human rights and for the fullest implementation of justice as part of the

¹²⁰ Women associated with both St. Francis and St. Dominic were strictly cloistered and did not participate in the peripatetic preaching of men. Yet, in the thirteenth century large numbers of women participated in new forms of "apostolic life," in chastity and poverty. These groups perplexed the Church, because they did not fit into established categories. A struggle ensued. Pressure was brought on the Curia to recognize and incorporate these women into the Church. The Curia sought to place them under the jurisdiction of the male orders. When these latter opposed such an arrangement, the Curia eventually turned to the bishops to provide pastoral care and impose discipline. See Brenda M. Bolton, "Mulieres sanctae," in *Sanctity and Secularity: The Church and the World*, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford, 1973) pp. 77-95. Bolton concludes: "The general ecclesiastical attitude to women was, at best, negative if not actively hostile. Nor, indeed, was a women's vocation necessarily regarded in a serious light." See also R. W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (Baltimore, 1970) pp. 240-272.

¹²¹ Richard L. De Molen, "The Age of Renaissance and Reformation," in *The Meaning of the Renaissance and Reformation*, ed. De Molen (Boston, 1974) pp. 22-23.

¹²² Session 25, *De regularibus*, c. 5. Yet see Georges Goyau, *La femme dans missions* (Paris, 1933) for a survey of the beneficent missionary work of women religious.

¹²³ See Leon Joseph Suenens, *The Nun in the World* (Westminster, Md., 1963). The struggle of women religious against this cloistral mentality since Vatican II has influenced the proposed New Code for Religious, where equality is posited between men and women save for contemplative women, who still have obligations not imposed on contemplative men. See *Review for Religious* 34 (1975) 63-65.

¹²⁴ Pontifical faculties of theology have been opened to women only in the last decade.

¹²⁵ Paul VI, "Motu Proprio on Minor Orders," *Origins*, Sept. 21, 1972, p. 203.

love command, call for a re-examination of the first tradition.

Sound Doctrine

The tradition of the exclusion of women from official ministry in the Church does not rest upon sound doctrine. This structure of the subordination of women and their exclusion from the active ministry of the Church flourished upon a substructure of scriptural commentaries and canonical legislation¹²⁶ which helped the men of the Church to justify their exclusivism and the women of the Church to interiorize their inferiority. Though certainly no one today would teach as sound, unchanging doctrine views such as these of Thomas Aquinas (admittedly taken out of context), they do represent a chain of commentary which has persisted through the ages and is therefore bound to influence attitudes, even unconsciously.

[Woman is] something deficient or accidental. For the active power of the male intends to produce a perfect likeness of itself with male sex. If a female is conceived, this is due to lack of strength in the active power, to a defect in the mother, or to some external influence like that of a humid wind from the south. . . .¹²⁷

Nature has given men more intelligence.¹²⁸

The reason why women are in a subordinate and not a commanding position is because they lack sufficient reason, which a leader above all needs.¹²⁹

It was necessary for woman to be made, as the Scripture says, not as a helpmate in other works than generation, as some say, since man can be more efficiently helped by another man in other works, but as a helper in the work of generation.¹³⁰

. . . since it is not possible in the female sex to signify eminence of degree, for a woman is in the state of subjection, it follows that she cannot receive the sacrament of orders.¹³¹

Contemporary women are reminded of the thought of Duns Scotus: "The Church would not presume to deprive the entire female sex, without any guilt on its part, of an act which might licitly pertain to it [Scotus is speaking of ordination], being directed toward the salvation of women

¹²⁶ Canon 968, 1: "A baptized male alone can validly receive sacred ordination."

¹²⁷ *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 92, a. 1, ad 1m.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, ad 2m.

¹²⁹ *In 1 ad Cor. lectio 7, Super ep. s. Pauli lectura* (ed. R. Cai [Rome, 1953] 1, 402).

¹³⁰ *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 92, a. 1.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, *Supplementum*, q. 39, a. 1.

and of others in the Church through her. For this would be an extreme injustice, not only toward the whole Church but also toward specific persons."¹³² So huge is the injustice that Duns Scotus cannot conceive of the Church being responsible for it. He traces its source to the inscrutable will of Christ. The solution of an unjust God is unacceptable as a doctrinal basis for the continued exclusion of women from official ministry.

Tradition Not Unchangeable

The tradition of the exclusion of woman from ministry is not unchangeable. It is response to the world and its antifeminine culture that caused the Church to delimit the role of woman from what it had been with Jesus and in the earliest Church. It is response to the world and the cultural aspirations of personhood, equality, and feminism which should lead the Church to reconnect its tradition with its earliest sources.

The Church cannot be taken seriously as being "in the modern world" unless it takes the aspirations of women seriously. Vatican II (unintentionally indeed) forced on the Catholic mind the issue of transformational reform, discontinuity.¹³³ The Church must examine sinfulness and grace in its own structures as well as in persons and worldly society.¹³⁴

HOPE

The women's movement affords a providential opportunity for the Church to move into a better confrontation with the gospel concerning both women and ministry. The fundamental dynamic of the movement in its Christian aspects stresses personhood as a value for women and men, and envisages structures respectful of persons.¹³⁵ It thus seems consonant with God's design in creating humankind, male and female, "in the image and likeness of God." It affords our Church the opportunity to become "a clearer revelation of Christ" by imitating Jesus in cutting through societal role fixations and dealing with persons, male and female, as real and gifted human beings. Pope Paul has said: "In the contemporary effort to promote 'the advancement of women' the Church

¹³² John Duns Scotus, *In librum 4 sententiarum*, d 25, q 2, scol 2 (*Opera omnia*, ed L Vives [Paris, 1894] 19, 140)

¹³³ Cf Walter J Burghardt, "A Theologian's Challenge to Liturgy," *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 35 (1974) 235, Michael A Fahey, "Continuity in the Church amid Structural Changes," *ibid*, pp 427-28

¹³⁴ Fahey, *art cit*, p 421 Note *General Catechetical Directory*, nos 65-67

¹³⁵ Dorothy L Sayers, *Are Women Human?* (Grand Rapids, 1971), Sally Cunneen, *Sex Female, Religion Catholic* (New York, 1968) esp pp 22-46

has already recognized a 'sign of the times' and has seen in it a call of the Spirit."¹³⁶

Call of Women to Personhood

The women's movement calls woman to define herself as a human person, equal in capacity, in aspiration, and in sinfulness with men. Modern women reject definition of themselves by role and are unwilling to have their physiological differences from men serve to express their total reality or to limit it arbitrarily. Aware of the potential for diverse human development which they share with men, they see their sexuality as a gift but do not accept the role limitations of "the feminine" imposed upon them by Church and society. Created, equally with men, as image of God, to exercise creative intellect, freedom of choice, and affectivity in a wide variety of roles, they think of themselves as autonomous,¹³⁷ not merely relational. As autonomous, they strive to build honest relationships and to fulfil vocational roles as free persons.

Contemporary Catholic women have felt impelled by the Spirit to respond to human needs, not only in the personal expression of prayer or in other interpersonal spheres of immediate care and concern, but in the public domain. They seek to be sharers of interpersonal grace and channels of societal grace, whether this grace is shown forth in ecclesiastical or in secular forms.

Women are actually serving as associate pastors, members of pastoral teams, and even as administrators of parishes. In many parishes they act as directors of religious education, conducting much of the preparation of adults as well as children for the sacraments. Many undertake programs for the elderly which include community organizing, personal counseling, prayer, and liturgical participation. As extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist, many women bring the Sacrament to the aging and bed-ridden. Hospital chaplaincies and campus ministries include and are often headed by women. The preaching of retreats, work with the Christian Family Movement, Cursillos, Marriage Encounter groups,

¹³⁶ Paul VI, "Address on International Women's Year," *Origins*, May 1, 1975, p. 718.

¹³⁷ For this approach to herself, modern woman finds confirmation in the attitude depicted in the Scriptures of Jesus toward women. In the preparation for his incarnation, Mary is approached not relationally, as a minor, through her father or her fiancé, but as an autonomous woman, fully capable of an intelligent, free, loving response. Jesus expresses the desire that she be revered not because she is physically his mother but because she is a woman of faith. So also with other women. We know nothing of the marital status of Mary and Martha. What was important to the Evangelists was that Jesus loved them, trusted them, taught them, found them worthy to share his ministry. Reverence for the Samaritan woman even in her sinfulness caused Jesus to ignore roles and to encourage her initiative and sense of responsibility.

teen-age organizations, and charismatic prayer groups engage the skills of many women. Hispanic women and black women offer general and specialized ministry to their people. Some women, particularly in campus ministry, preach homilies, distribute Holy Communion, arrange and participate in communal penance services, prepare students for marriage, teach inquiry classes, plan liturgies, do private and group counseling.

With the same motivation of ministry, other women are studying and seeking to change the political, economic, and social structures which anonymously and pervasively cause great poverty and alienation. They undertake advocacy roles for the poor, for prisoners, for the dependent and helpless. Whether through Catholic Charities or in a federal or state office or staff position or in a public interest capacity, women undertake to put into practice the goals of the *Call to Action* of Pope Paul and the Synod of 1971.¹³⁸

Through the demands of such ministries women become aware of their personal needs and weaknesses, out of which, if they are able to be faithful, they must grow. In a less artificial setting than formerly characterized women, they find in openness to pain and struggle an access to the grace of the Spirit which alone makes ministry effective.

Call of Men to Personhood

The women's movement looks upon men as victims of role distortion equally destructive to them as to women.¹³⁹ The masculine image sets priority upon being in control, dominating, winning. The economic system asks men that they be single-mindedly competitive and profit-oriented. They are expected to be the all-successful providers for wife and family, with work as their justification for living. Such roles must be questioned. Men in ministry will ask whether the roles established for them in the Church are derived from social custom or from the gospel.

The women's movement calls men to accept their sexuality,¹⁴⁰ to deal with it in ways which do not entail the exclusion or belittlement of women. It asks them to deal honestly with women as human beings with the same human range of hopes and fears, capabilities and defects, sensitivities and goals as they have. Whereas in women the imaging of God in freedom and intellectual development has often been hindered, in men it is the affective which society tends to crush. Sensitivity to the

¹³⁸ M. Thomas Aquinas Carroll, *Experience of Women Religious in the Ministry of the Church* (Chicago, 1974).

¹³⁹ Walter Farrell, *The Liberated Man* (New York, 1974); Jack Nichols, *Men's Liberation* (New York, 1975); Gene Marine, *A Male Guide to Women's Liberation* (New York, 1972).

¹⁴⁰ See esp. Don Goergen, *The Sexual Celibate* (New York, 1975).

feelings and needs of others must be seen as neither male nor female, but as human. Intuitive as well as rational forms of intellectual process must be respected.

Call of Women and Men to New Relationships

The appeal of the women's movement to Christians is the hope it holds forth of translating into concrete experience Jesus' command to human beings to love one another.

When relationships between men and women are not truly mutual, relationships among women as well as those among men are distorted. If men are cast in a role which expects of them that they "put down" women face to face or among their male friends, their respect for themselves and for each other is bound to be diminished. If they feel they can only praise women for performing in ways that are essentially subservient or anonymous, then women's attitudes toward one another will be negatively affected and men may base their self-respect on a false superiority.

The consequences of this lack of genuine mutuality in male-female relations are not insignificant. Distortions in relationships bring about distorted personalities. Women become deviously submissive or hostile in a desperate effort to survive psychically. Men become insensitive, even violent in their modes of self-expression.

Because women suffer from an all-pervasive domination by men, they have learned to retrieve some sense of mastery by manipulating men. Manipulation is nondevelopmental for the one who practices it and the one on whom it is practiced. If Christian values (and the ideals of the women's movement) are to inform male-female relations, both the need to manipulate and the act of manipulation must be overcome. Otherwise man and woman are treating each other as things.

The alternative for both man and woman is the cultivation of a basic reverence, an approach to each other in mutual honesty and trust. There seems no reason why men and women who are mature in their sexuality, faithful to the commitments they have made, should not enter into relationships of deep friendship and build support groups for one another. This would seem to be a natural step to the ideal of community which Jesus preached and lived. Mutuality of spiritual direction could be immensely helpful in promoting the wholeness of both men and women.

Such mature, honest, developmental relationships are indispensable if real co-operation in the ministry is to be attained. Women must be accepted as working *with* others for the promotion of the kingdom, not working *for* men. The call of the women's movement, then, which at least in this regard coincides with Jesus' call to love and to community, urges women and men so to assimilate their sexuality that they can look upon

one another as persons, partners in the divine enterprise of promoting charity.

Call of Church to Structural Reform in Ministry

Human beings create structures.¹⁴¹ Structures are ways of being together (or not being together) and of working together (or not working together) which in their origins are subject to all the manifold motivations of humankind. Structures readily become objectified, take on a life of their own, and to a great extent control the human beings within them. Structures become interiorized to such a degree that alternative ways of relating seem unthinkable. Yet, as persons break through societal myths which have formed them, they find themselves in tension with the structures. The women's movement is provoking such a tension.

The Church is a social structure, formed and reformed by human decisions through the ages.¹⁴² Christ founded the Church on men and women who responded to his call, determined in particular ways how they would pray and celebrate the Eucharist, how they would be ministered to and governed.¹⁴³ Vatican II profited from a new historical consciousness to make radical changes in the Church's self-understanding¹⁴⁴ and thereby performed the most human (and divine) task a community can undertake: to create structures wherein persons are freed for responsible action in service, justice, and love. The Council modeled or eulogized such qualities as freedom of spirit, respect for persons, community, and such processes as subsidiarity, collegiality, and an accountability which is growth-productive.

Despite striking initiatives toward change, the image still projected by ministry in the Church is that its structures promote fear and apathy rather than freedom of spirit. In law, the Church is identified with the clergy. "Office" means hierarchical office. Elements which do not have an "official" character are neglected. Societal demands of position, advancement, power, the responsibilities of hierarchical control appear to weigh heavily upon and to limit personal fulfilment of ministry. The attribution of jurisdiction only to the clerical order successfully elimi-

¹⁴¹ Andrew Greeley, "Sociology and Church Structure," *Concilium* 58 (1970) 26.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 27: "the greatest problem the Church as an organization faces is the pervasive human temptation to canonize as essential relationship patterns that evolved to meet the needs of one era. . . ." See William F. Ryan, "Mindsets and New Horizons for Discernment," in *Soundings* (Washington, D.C., 1974) pp. 4-6; William R. Callahan, "The Impact of Culture on Religious Values and Decision Making," *ibid.*, pp. 8-12.

¹⁴³ Brown, *op. cit.*; cf. the biblical evidence in Acts on Peter, who "went here and there among them all," obviously exercised authority (9:32), but in conjunction with "the apostles and the elders" (14:2).

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Burghardt, *art. cit.*, p. 235.

nates laymen and all women from decision-making roles in the Church. The relationships are those of a power structure, wherein conformity is rewarded and obedience becomes the primary virtue.

Women who wish to minister hesitate to move into this structure. They consider it depersonalizing, destructive of the Christian spirit of ministry. They find that Jesus directed his most frequent warnings against the manifestations of this structural model. In alternative personnel models proposed, obedience is not discarded but emphasis is placed upon each person's obedience to God through searching out "the needy and the poor," through internal submission to the Spirit in identifying talents and weaknesses, and through confirming the personal and communal discernment with appropriate person or board. Personal responsibility for choices is thus established. The will of God becomes the object of a dynamic search into self and into the needs of Church and society. Initiative and zeal are set free. The "mission spirit" is not restricted to foreign lands. In such a process, authority performs the absolutely necessary function of setting free and developing the talents of others, of establishing a climate in which freedom before the Spirit and co-operative endeavors can grow.

As those who minister experience the effects of such a climate, the fostering of community will become a more realizable goal. Expectations upon ministry will change as churchgoers discover what it means to "be church." Those individual ministries will thrive which have their basis in concern for humanizing persons as well as perpetuating sacramental channels of grace.

In a setting of respect for persons and personal decisions, subsidiarity will allow many needs to surface and be met by co-operative effort in a small localized area. Collegiality in goal-setting and decision-making flourishes in an atmosphere of trust. This total freeing up of persons through confidence in them and trust in God's working with them is not a neat, orderly process, but it can be unified, as the level of self-responsibility rises, to a system of accountability which is not fear-filled but looked upon as a means to further growth.

If the Church would reorganize its structure in a model such as this, the integration of women would be facilitated, and women would greatly strengthen ministry. If discernment and full development of talents as related to needs is the goal, each member of a team, man or woman, does what he or she is most skilled in. Leadership is not fixed, but shifts as special expertise is needed. As the Church takes seriously its functions of service, proclamation of the word, and community building as a necessary base for the administration of the sacraments, it will have to legitimize the ministry of women. Such a legitimation, involving change

of one of the oldest mind-sets in the Church, can be accomplished only if there is profound trust in the Holy Spirit and awareness of the discontinuity which has been as much a providential mark of the Church as has continuity.¹⁴⁵

The hierarchical order is itself a structure devised by men over the ages. Jesus did not establish orders of priesthood.¹⁴⁶ He taught, encouraged, ordered persons—men and women—to serve. He established a community of “priestly people” symbolized as the New Israel by the Twelve. In various local churches the Christians developed methods of organizing themselves, in some places through collegial bodies of “overseers,” the *presbyteroi-episkopoi*, in others through leaders appointed by Paul and his disciples. The development of this ordering was especially marked in the second century. During the third century a redistribution of ecclesial functions was undertaken, entailing the creation of the entire lower clergy, priests, deacons, deaconesses, and the minor orders (only recently discontinued).

A first step required if women are to be fully integrated into the Church is to legitimate their present ministries. The kind of legitimation that is needed is not a paraliturgical or even a liturgical service. What is primarily needed is a forthright and total acceptance of women in the positions they occupy as human persons with human and professional rights and responsibilities, including the right to education. Furthermore, women need that legitimation which enables them to complete, vis-à-vis those they serve, the ministry they exercise toward those in need. Women serving in ministry to the dying teach, counsel, comfort, inspire, then step aside for the often mechanical rendering of the sacrament of the sick by a priest. Women in counseling of youth or the alienated enter into a truly sacramental relationship of sharing and are prevented from the sacramental sign of absolution. Women whose ministry is to the sick and the aging need to be legitimized as extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist, so that the reception of the body of the Lord might, in the context of an already established relationship of shared faith and prayer, be a real communion.¹⁴⁷ The sacraments would thus fit naturally into the whole movement of conversion and humanization which is the object of ministry, and would be rescued from the magical interpretation that commonly results from the often too hurried and formal intervention imposed on the ordained

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Fahey, *art. cit.*, pp. 426–28.

¹⁴⁶ Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 13–20.

¹⁴⁷ At one time in the Church, women were not permitted to baptize even in emergencies when a layman might. This discipline has been altered. Women are acknowledged as ministers of the sacrament of matrimony.

priest.

The ordained minister functions in an especially symbolic way in the Eucharist. The bishop and later the priest were seen to act in the person of Christ, especially in pronouncing the words of institution.¹⁴⁸ Women were said to be excluded from these offices because only males were thought to be able to represent the male Jesus.¹⁴⁹ This line of thought would lead logically to the conclusion that women do not share in the redemptive acts of Jesus, a view which the Church never embraced. The reality of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, however, derives from his resurrection as the culmination of his self-offering and sacrifice on the cross. It is the risen Christ who is rendered present by the Spirit evoking faith from the "faithful" at the Eucharist.¹⁵⁰

The president draws together the faith expression of the assembly in helping them to be present to the word of God proclaimed, to remember the saving acts of Jesus, and to deepen confidence that the Spirit will bring the risen Christ to reality within and among them.¹⁵¹ The president then represents Christ because and to the extent that he represents the faith of the Church.¹⁵²

From this insight into the Eucharistic mystery it follows that the faith of the whole Church would be better represented if women as well as men were called forth to preside.¹⁵³ Such a representation would fulfil the many initiatives of Jesus in associating women as well as men with his ministry. It would be for women a validation of their personhood, a legitimizing of whatever partial ministrations of sacraments might be accorded to their particular form of service.

This vision of the Eucharist and of the place of women in its ministry provides a wholeness to theological anthropology which is otherwise lacking. Avery Dulles, for instance, writes: "Man shares in the divine life, not in a divine, but in a human way, consonantly with his nature as man."¹⁵⁴ But man is male and female. Since "sacraments have a dialogic structure,"¹⁵⁵ they must not perpetuate the dominant-submissive struc-

¹⁴⁸ Kilmartin, *art. cit.*, p. 244.

¹⁴⁹ Van der Meer, *op. cit.*, pp. 128-43.

¹⁵⁰ Kilmartin, *art. cit.*, p. 254.

¹⁵¹ The ordained minister may be seen "as a sort of symbolic point of convergence where Christ's offer of himself and the assembly's believing response to this offer find expression. Nevertheless, it is the whole assembly which, through the ordained minister, calls upon God to make His presence felt here and now. It is through the whole assembly that God realizes the Eucharist" (J. H. McKenna, *art. cit.*, p. 272).

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 255-58.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

¹⁵⁴ Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York, 1974), p. 60.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

ture of man-woman relations. If "man" shares in the divine life in a human way, through "the body with all its movements and gestures,"¹⁵⁶ it must be through the female as well as the male body.

Women are disaffected from the institutional Church because it represents a power relationship and because this power is often insensitively administered. Many women have discovered talents in themselves for building community. In visitation to the aging, in youth retreats and counseling, they experience the fulfilling quality of the ministry of service. The ministry of justice involves them in confrontation with the powers of Church and state and business establishment. Women are gaining confidence in paraliturgical prayer and reflection on the gospel message. All these factors combine to forecast a gradual separation from the Church as sacrament and proclamation of the word if these remain the forbidden land for women as ministers. As sacrament and word are now administered within the law of the institutional Church, they are almost entirely prerogatives of the Church of imposing structures and minimal community, where the faithful congregate, not the Church as service and community model. If men remain the sole representatives of the Church of sacrament and word, and women predominantly the ministers in the Church of service and community, and if man/woman relations in the Church continue to deteriorate, a serious break within the ministry will occur.

Women were created by God as sharers in the same human nature as men. Both men and women were intended to show forth the image of God. The dominance of men over women, however first arrived at, is expressed in Genesis as one of the effects of sin. That Jesus overcame sin is a promise that the effects of such sin will be eliminated through the grace-filled efforts of human beings. Christ's transforming power has been at work through the ages: Jewish male circumcision ceased to be a necessary prerequisite for reception of baptism, which therefore was available also to women; Christians now admit the structural and human evils of slavery; the full empowerment of woman becomes a similar possibility. The Gospels are very much concerned to present women as authentic persons, as dependable witnesses to truth and faith. Jesus promised the action of the Holy Spirit in his Church. The Spirit inspired Peter and Paul to demand the non-Judaizing of Christian Gentiles; the Spirit inspired numerous Christians to end slavery as a creditable Christian institution; the Spirit today is believed by many women to be calling them to the priesthood. Justice would seem to require that these women who feel called by the Spirit to priestly office should have their charisms personally tested, not categorically dismissed. Rejection of

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

women from the ordained ministry by men seems to women an obvious contradiction of the gospel.

The renewal of the Church would profit from the renewal of ministry brought about by the full acceptance of women into ministry. The fostering of more honest relationships between men and women, wherein women would be freed from the need to manipulate and men would be freed from the need to dominate, would reveal new sources of energy and fresh ways of looking at structures. The Church in its humility, its sense of serving persons, the love it would thereby witness, would give, as is its profound destiny, a clearer revelation of Christ.