Women and the Ordained Ministry

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Introduction

Having grown up in Canada and having been ordained there, the image I have of women’s ordination may be somewhat different from the dominant icon in American Episcopal Church history. In the States, the dominant events, which for many conservative Christians have become paradigmatic of the wrong way to approach this question of women’s orders, are the illegal ordinations of the so-called Philadelphia eleven whose theology was notoriously liberal, and the ordination of the former Suffragan Bishop of Massachusetts, who was not only one of the more liberal members of The Episcopal Church (which is saying something) but seems, according to many reports, to have lied about her educational background, and finally the election of the first woman Primate of the Anglican Communion, who has certainly been no friend of any kind of traditional Anglicanism. In Canada, by contrast, the most well-known ordained woman was not actually ordained in Canada but in Hong Kong, to do ministry in China. Her name was Florence Li. She was a godly woman who only wanted to serve Jesus. She suffered greatly for her faith, long imprisoned for being a Christian under Communist rule. Her final years were spent in Toronto where she assisted in a Chinese congregation. She often upset many of the more liberal advocates of women’s ordination who attempted to use her and her story for political purposes, because she just kept talking about Jesus all the time. Perhaps if more of the women ordained in Canada and the U.S.A. had been like Florence, our perception of this issue might be somewhat different.

But this is to put the cart before the horse, for surely if we are to have a theological discussion about the propriety of women’s ordination, our “experience” of women in holy orders should not be the primary criterion for decision-making. In fact it is this very problem – the problem of putting our own fallen, limited human experience ahead of scripture and tradition – which has landed the Anglican Communion, and so much of western Christianity into the crisis and decline in which the churches in the west are now living.

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1 Versions of this paper were given at the College of Bishops of the Anglican Church of North America, June 11, 2010, and at the ACNA-Lutheran Church Missouri-Synod dialog, October 27, 2011.

Neither can we take the short cut around the hard work of thinking through this issue theologically by asserting that the Spirit has led the church in such and such a way. Now I am not saying that we should neglect the work of the Spirit in our midst. In fact I think we need more, not less, dependence on the Spirit in our corporate life as Anglicans. I consider myself a “charismatic!” And if anyone has a claim to be a charismatic – I have more: a charismatic of charismatics, converted to Christ at a charismatic revival meeting, filled with the Spirit as a teenager in a Pentecostal church, a witness of healing (and other!) miracles, a speaker in tongues (“I speak as a mad man” – let the reader understand). My concern, however, is that the claim to being led by the Spirit has been made by many who seem to have been led in opposite directions. The Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church recently claimed (in her 2010 Pentecost letter) that The Episcopal Church was led by the Spirit to its position on homosexual practice. If one claims to be led by the Spirit, however, one is saddled with the burden of proof to demonstrate how the alleged movement of the Spirit of God coheres with the written word of God in scripture. Any claim to the Spirit’s inspiration or guidance must be consistent with what God has already revealed in Christ and in the scriptures.

I propose, therefore, that on this issue of women’s ordination, as with any issue in the church, we put scripture first and examine the biblical text in order to discover what God would have us think and do. In this quest I believe that tradition can also be helpful in clarifying the biblical message, but I must confess at the outset that I am one of those evangelical types who believe that the canon trumps tradition and that if we must chose, it is scripture which must prevail. I believe that the church must always be reforming (semper reformanda) because God continually puts new situations and issues before us which require careful, patient discernment, but also courageous action.

And so, to scripture.

**Scriptural Foundations**

**Creation**

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them. (Gen 1:26-27)

These verses from the Genesis creation story make it clear that God not only made human beings in his image, but that a major part of the concept of being in God’s image is that humans are male and female. Orthodox theology has always affirmed that God is not male but beyond gender. Only a humanity which is both male and female can adequately image God in his world.
Closely related to the statement that humanity, both male and female, is created in God’s image is the mandate given to humanity – the mandate to have authority over God’s creation, to rule as stewards of God’s world. We should note that the text of Genesis is clear that authority to rule is not given to the man alone but to both the man and the woman: “let them have dominion.”

Some will argue that since the woman was created second, and (according to Genesis 2:18-23) since she is called his “helper,” (the KJV says “helpmate”) that some kind of leadership is given to the man, implying that an unequal relationship between the genders is built into creation itself. It is true that the Hebrew word (ezer) can imply a hierarchical relationship. Of the 128 uses of the word in the Old Testament, approximately 70% describe the “helper” as an inferior helping a superior. This is certainly not always the case, however. At times the “helper” and the one helped are clearly perceived as equals, and in other texts, the “helper” is the superior partner. In some texts it is even God himself who is described as our “helper.” The context of a given passage must provide the interpretative clues for making a decision in a case like this, not the word itself. And in this case, it seems clear that the man and the woman, after they are put together by God, are not put into a hierarchical relationship, but are described by God as equals – in the sense that they are made in his image and together they are given the authority to rule the earth.

Fall

The third chapter of Genesis describes the Fall, the entry of sin into the world through the human rebellion. Among the many implications of the entry of sin and death into the world is the reality that relations between the genders are now damaged. Although the curses pronounced by God to the man and the woman differ, they are balanced – both are cursed with ‘labour’: the man with labour in his work in the field, the woman with labour in childbirth. But along with the balanced curses comes an unbalanced hierarchy. The woman is told: “your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.” We should take note: the hierarchy of genders which is so ingrained in most cultures of the world in various ways is not a part of the created order, but a part of the fallen state. Patriarchy, the authority of males over females, enters into the world as a consequence of sin.

Israel

The story of Israel takes place in the midst of the world’s fallen reality. Unequal and unjust gender relations characterize the life of Israel as well as its neighbours. In the midst of this situation, laws were given which protect women, especially widows, from the power of men. The laws of Israel are not only commands to be obeyed, they are a revelation of God’s compassionate

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and merciful character. The Torah reveals a God who cares for the weakest in society – the stranger, the slave, the indebted, the poor, the orphan, the widow. Among other effects, God’s Torah provides a context in which, in spite of living in a fallen and a patriarchal world, women would be given a community in which they are respected and protected.

But even in the context of patriarchal Israelite society not all leaders in Israel are men. A multiplicity of leadership roles is given to women by God throughout the Old Testament narratives. Miriam is one Israel’s first prophets and a leader of worship; Deborah is called to be a judge; Hannah is shown to be a faithful pray-er in the house of the Lord even though the male priesthood has become corrupt; in the Song of Songs we hear the voice of a female author, a theologian-teacher; the “woman of worth” in Proverbs 31 has a clear gift of administration; the courageous actions of Naomi and Ruth are used by God as part of his plan to give his nation a just king.

There are of course no women priests in the Old Testament. We must keep in mind, however, that in the Old Testament period there were also no priests who were gentiles, no priests who were eunuchs or had any disability or deformity of any kind, and no priests from any tribe except Levi. As the book of Hebrews makes clear, even Jesus would not have been qualified to be a priest of Israel. We cannot simply argue that on the basis of the Old Testament priesthood being male, that ordination to ministry in the Church ought to be restricted to males.

In fact, I would argue that the Old Testament priesthood is a very different form of leadership from any new covenant ministry. The Old Testament priesthood was responsible for that set of things which characterized Israel as a nation under the old covenant: sacrifice, food laws, and so forth. Now that Israel has been redefined around the crucified and risen Christ, there is no need for a sacrificial system presided over by “priests” in that Old Testament sense, that is, priests who function as mediators between God and human beings.

**Ministry of Jesus**

Mary the mother of Jesus was not simply a vessel for the incarnate Son of God. Mary was not merely a passive recipient, but an active and willing servant of the Lord, following the pattern of the suffering servant in Isaiah, exemplified, of course, by her Son. Mary’s willing participation in the incarnation provides a model for discipleship: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to thy word.” (Lk 1:38)

Mary the willing servant is also a theologian. An examination of the Magnificat reveals a brilliant, carefully constructed re-working of the Song of the Sea in Ex 15 and Hannah’s prayer in 1 Samuel which ties together the hopes of the people of Israel with God’s new work of salvation for whole world. Because of Mary’s unique, pivotal role in the history of salvation, we

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5 See Ken Bailey……
have, perhaps, been distracted from her ministry as a teacher, a theologian who has provided us with one of the most beautiful pieces of poetic theology in the history of the church.

Another woman mentioned in the infancy narratives is the prophet Anna (Lk 2:36) who is paired with the prophet Simeon in what is one of at least thirty instances in the third gospel in which Luke pairs a story of a man with a story of a woman. It is a commonplace in New Testament scholarship to note Luke’s pairing as a characteristic of his composition which functions to draw attention to the central roles played by women in the ministry of Jesus. According to Luke 2, Anna fasts and prays and gives thanks to God in the temple (vv. 37-38), but she also prefigures the work of the early Jerusalem church in the book of Acts who use the temple as the primary locus of proclamation. In Luke 2:38 “she spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.” That is, in the gospel of Luke a woman is the first person to publicly proclaim the gospel of Jesus, in function paralleling the preaching of Peter on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2.

“The twelve and the women.” Another characteristic feature of Lukan style is his inclusion of summary statements which form points of transition in the action of his narrative. One of these transition/summary statements is found in Luke 6:12-16, which functions in the text to bring the story up to that point to a conclusion and introducing a section of teaching (Lk 6:17-49) and healing stories (Lk 7). Luke 6:12-16 portray Jesus praying (another prominent theme of Luke’s gospel), and then choosing “from” his disciples. The implication here is that the disciples were a rather large group from which “the twelve” are chosen and named. The consistent impression we have from the third gospel is that most of Jesus’ peripatetic ministry is carried on in the presence of a large group of disciples who travel with Jesus from place to place, the twelve being a special group called out from among the disciples for a special symbolic purpose (as representatives of the twelve tribes of Israel now being renewed in Jesus’ ministry), as well as for some unspecified leadership role or roles among the larger group of disciples.

The very next Lukan summary statement specifies another group of disciples, some of whom are also named:

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Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means. (Lk 8:1-3)
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It seems clear that some of the women among Jesus’ disciples were benefactors – they “provided” for this large group of disciples “out of their means.” Joanna, wife of Chuza, may have been a key figure in this group. The translation used above says that Chuza (the name is
Nabatean) was Herod’s “household manager.” A more accurate translation would be “minister of finance, probably sent to Tiberius (Herod’s Galilean headquarters) as part of a political treaty arrangement, where he met and married the daughter of a Jewish aristocrat. He may have converted to Judaism or he may have been a god-fearer. Perhaps he was the “royal official” mentioned in John 4:43 whose son (and, on this theory, also Joanna’s son) was healed by Jesus and whose entire household came to believe in Jesus. Such an historical reconstruction would explain how Joanna had become a disciple and how she was able to provide for Jesus and his followers (perhaps with funds from her husband, perhaps from her own personal finances).  

The women who followed Jesus, including but not limited to the ones named in Luke 6 were more just the servants and benefactors. These women were most probably members of the 70 (or 72, there is a textual variant at that point in the manuscript tradition) whose mission of preaching the kingdom and healing is described in Luke 10:1-24. Note that this group seems to grow. In Luke 10 it is 70 (or so). At the triumphal entry it is a “multitude of disciples” (Lk 19:37); on the day that Judas is replaced at least 120 gather to deliberate, pray and cast lots (Acts 1:15-26), a group which seems to include the eleven, and also “the women and Mary the mother of Jesus and his brothers” (Acts 1:14); it is presumably this same group who “are all together in one place” (Acts 2:1) on the Pentecost, and therefore preach in tongues and aid in the baptism of the thousands who believe that day.

The women, according to Luke, accompany Jesus during the time of his ministry, follow him into Jerusalem at the beginning of passion week, and become witnesses of,

- his death: “And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance and saw these things,” (Lk 23:49),
- his burial: “The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and saw the tomb, and how his body was laid; then returned, and prepared spices and ointments,” (Lk 23:55-56),
- and his resurrection: “But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. 2 And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3 but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4 While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. 5 And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? 6 He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, 7 that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise." 8 And they remembered

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his words, and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.” (Lk 24:1-11)

The significance of these female disciples of Jesus is often missed or glossed over. They were with Jesus throughout his three years of ministry, they heard his teaching, witnessed his mighty acts and were full participants in the mission work which Jesus sent his disciples to do. (Note the words of the angels at the tombs: “remember how he told you when he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered…” [24:7] – the women, in other words, were present for Jesus’ passion predictions.) At least some of them made a significant contribution to the support of the band of disciples – especially Joanna, wife of Chuza. They were the primary witnesses of the saving events of Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection. All four of the gospel writers are careful to mention the presence of the women at these events, even when most of the twelve, except for the beloved disciple (according to John’s gospel) have fled the scene. Mark’s gospel, indeed, underlines the courage of the women as opposed to the flight of the twelve.

But what is the significance of women being ‘disciples’?

The story of Jesus in the home of Mary and Martha of Bethany helps to clarify this question. The story is well-known; Martha is working in the kitchen while Mary “sat at the Lord’s feet.” (v. 39) Although many have attempted to portray this story as exemplifying two kinds of good and helpful dispositions towards the Lord (service and contemplation), there is much more significance to Mary of Bethany’s behaviour than that she was exhibiting an example of a godly woman at prayer. Two things are to be noted. First, Mary is transgressing into male space. In the first century world, the kitchen is the place for the women when there are male visitors in the house; the gathering room is male space. Second, the phrase “sitting at the feet” is code language for the behaviour of a disciple who is learning from a Rabbi. Note that the same phrase is used in the book of Acts to describe Paul whose credentials include that he had “sat at the feet of Gamaliel.” (Acts 22:5) Far from being the archetype of the submissive woman, Mary of Bethany is acting with great presumption – she is in male space, and taking upon herself a male role, that of training as a disciple of a Rabbi in order to become a Rabbi herself. (To be a disciple is to take on an apprenticeship to be a Rabbi; one does not become a disciple merely for one’s own personal spiritual benefit!) Martha is scandalized about Mary not just because she needs an extra pair of hands in the kitchen, but because Mary is transgressing gender roles – and Jesus is encouraging it. Women disciples of Jesus, in other words, were in training to be missionary preachers and healers, rabbis of the good news of the rabbi Jesus.

And, in fact, the female witnesses of the resurrection, especially Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18), become the first preachers of the message of the resurrection. The disciples who met Jesus on the road to Emmaus (a married couple, perhaps?) say:
“Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive” (Lk 24:22-23).

They become the apostles to the apostles. Mary Magdalene herself, according to John, used the phrase “I have seen the Lord.” (Jn 20:18) This is exactly what the other disciples later say to Thomas: “We have seen the Lord” (20:25). In Paul this is the defining content and terminology of the apostolic witness: “Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen the Lord?” (1 Cor 9:1).

The work of witness and proclamation by Mary and the other witnesses of Jesus ministry, death, burial and resurrection is apostolic work, apostolic work which continues past the first post-resurrection days into the post-Pentecost period.

**Early Church**

We must turn now to the practice of the earliest church, and especially to the letters of Paul where we find texts often used and misused by advocates of both sides of this discussion of women’s orders. There are some obvious texts that we must examine, but let me begin (having spoken of the women at the tomb as ‘apostles to the apostles’) with a text that may seem perhaps a bit more obscure – the list of greetings in Romans 16.

Several women are named in the greetings of Romans 16. This is significant in itself, since Paul’s usual practice is to greet the leaders of the congregation to whom he is writing. The first person named in the list is Phoebe, who is described as a deacon (v. 1) of the church of Cenchreae. It is difficult to assess exactly what the function of deacons was at this stage in the church’s history. The book of Acts, of course, has them set aside as administrators who perform a particular ministry for which they need to be filled with the Spirit – but at least two of them, Stephen and Philip, have significant preaching ministries. As well as being called a “deacon” Phoebe is also described as a “benefactor” (v. 2: *prostatis*). The RSV has the very weak translation of “helper” at this point. A benefactor is one who provides the material needs for a person or organization. Phoebe is the ‘patron,’ (or, rather, ‘matron’) it seems, of her church in the suburbs of Corinth. As such it would have been expected for her to preside at the community meal, which for Christians was the Eucharist. Certainly, other benefactors in the Greco-Roman world, who hosted organizations in their homes, would have been expected to host the meal.8

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7 For the history of the use of this phrase, especially as regards Mary Magdalene, see Raymond Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist, 1979), 190.

8 For more on patronage and the role of Phoebe as a patron see, Bruce W. Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 193-99.
The next people named are Prisca (or Priscilla) and Aquila, also known to us from the book of Acts. Significantly Prisca is named first, as she is three out of the four times the couple is mentioned in Acts. This may be because she has had the more significant ministry. The two are known to us as the teachers of the already eloquent Apollos (Acts 18:26). Apollos has sometimes been suggested as the author of the epistle to the Hebrews – a suggestion which led Adolf von Harnack to argue that since Priscilla was the teacher of Apollos, perhaps she was the actual author of Hebrews. Harnack’s suggestion has not always been followed of course (since it lacks any real evidence!) but it might explain why Hebrews is an anonymous work – who would have believed the work of a woman? What we do know, whether Priscilla authored Hebrews or not, is that she is known as a woman with a significant teaching and leadership ministry.

There are several other women mentioned in Romans 16, including Mary (v. 6). Sadly we don’t know which Mary this is. The gospel writers are always careful to distinguish between women named Mary since at least a third of all the women in Palestine in the time of Jesus had that name. Sadly, for us, Paul does not help us with this question.

Of great importance to us for our discussion is v. 7. The RSV is now widely regarded as the worst of translations on this verse. It reads:

Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners; they are men of note among the apostles, and they were in Christ before me. (RSV)

Several things should be noted about the RSV translation. The second member of the pair is given a masculine name (Junias) even though the masculine form of this name is completely unattested in the ancient world and is found in no ancient texts. Most scholars have abandoned any attempt to argue that Paul was referring to a man. Most likely Andronicus and Junia were a married couple. The RSV makes it worse, of course, by calling them ‘kinsmen’ and ‘men of note’ terms which (wrongly) emphasize the masculine gender.

Correctly, however, the RSV says that these two are “of note among the apostles.” As we will see the ESV corrects one problem of the RSV translation, only to introduce another:

Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me. (ESV)

The ESV leaves out the second masculine note, but keeps one. ‘Junia’ (a feminine name rightly included in the ESV) is still (surprisingly) called a “kinsman.” Of course what Paul means is that these two are both Jewish – an interesting piece of data since neither name is Jewish – but then

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neither is the name “Paul.” Most Jews living in the diaspora were given or adopted Greek or Latin names which were similar to their Jewish name (thus: Saul/Paul; Cleopas/Clopas; Simeon/Simon; Joseph/Justus, etc, etc).\(^\text{10}\)

The ESV describes Andronicus and Junia as “well know to the apostles” thereby implying that they may not be apostles themselves. The exegetical question is whether the Greek preposition “ev” should be considered inclusive (“among”) or exclusive (“to”). Aside from the observation that Paul would probably have used a different preposition if he had wanted to make it clear that his meaning was exclusive, perhaps the strongest argument in favour of the inclusive meaning is found in one of the early Greek fathers (who, after all, spoke the language fluently and would have understood the nuance intended. The father I have in mind is Chrysostom, who, in a sermon on Romans 16 stated the following,

“Greet Andronicus and Junia…who are outstanding among the apostles”: To be an apostle is something great. But to be outstanding among the apostles – just think what a wonderful song of praise that is! They were outstanding on the basis of their works and virtuous actions. Indeed how great the wisdom of this woman must have been that she was deemed worthy of the title of apostle.\(^\text{11}\)

Paul had a wider view of what apostolic ministry was than is portrayed in Acts 1. In Acts 1 the term apostle is limited to the twelve. The criteria for replacing Judas, however, (including it seems that the replacement should be male) include that the person has been a member of the wider group of disciples from the time of Jesus’ baptism until his Ascension, and was a witness of the resurrection. Paul’s use of term seems to be similar in that an apostle (like Paul himself) should have “seen the Lord.” Junia (whether or not she is the same person known in Luke as Joanna)\(^\text{12}\) must at least have been one of the “more than five hundred” to whom Jesus appeared after the resurrection. More likely, she and her husband were probably followers of Jesus before the passion and have now become missionaries to the church in Rome.

For Paul to call a woman an apostle has important implications. First, it is clear that for Paul apostles are in a special category. They are the first “eyewitnesses and ministers of the word” as Luke puts it. (Lk 1:2) If the New Testament says that a woman was an apostle it is difficult to see how we can refuse ordination to any order of ministry to a woman. This might especially be true

\(^\text{10}\) As an aside, it may be the case (and it has been argued cogently by Richard Bauckham) that this Junia’s Hebrew name may have been the sound-alike name ‘Joanna, that woman from Galilee who was a prominent member of “the women” among Jesus’ disciples and also a witness to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. See Bauckham, *Gospel Women*, chapter 5.

\(^\text{11}\) In *Ep. Ad Romanos* 31.2; PG 60.669-670.

\(^\text{12}\) This is the suggestion of Richard Bauckham in his *Gospel Women*. 
for more Catholic-minded Anglicans who see continuity between the apostles and their successors in the episcopate. An more evangelically minded person like myself might not see apostolic succession in those terms at all, seeing the true apostolic succession to be a succession of teaching rather that persons in Episcopal office, but I would still argue that the presence of a woman apostle in the pages of the New Testament appears to me to remove all objections to the ordination of women. I think it is already clear that the New Testament calls Phoebe a “deacon” and that she probably presided at the Eucharistic table in her Corinthian house church. That women are, in the New Testament, leaders, presiders at the communal table, preachers, eyewitnesses of the saving events would, to my mind, remove any objections to the ordination of women as presbyters.

But what of the texts in Paul that are often used to argue against the ordination of women.

1 Corinthians 14:34-35

The women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.

On any account this is a difficult passage. Does this mean that women must not preach? Many argue that, especially those who believe that ordination is the setting aside of a person to preach which is common among Reformed Christians, including the Anglican groups like ‘Reform’ in the UK and the diocese of Sydney. However, a surface reading of this text actually seems to say much more than ‘women shouldn’t preach.’ It seems to imply that women should not be lectors, or give announcements, or lead the prayers of the people.

The text has other problems. Numerous scholars (not just liberal ones who want to avoid the ordination of women question) argue on good grounds that this text is not an original part of Paul’s letter. These verses do not appear in all of the ancient manuscripts (see Fee’s commentary for a vigorous argument excluding this text from the NT). I tend to agree with that evidence.

However, even if it was not written by Paul, some will still say that it is canonical on other grounds, as part of the textus receptus. So it needs to be discussed (just as the story of the woman caught in adultery needs to be discussed).

But it is highly doubtful that the text means that women must be silent all the time. In 1 Corinthians 11 (another difficult passage for some women since it discusses head covering), Paul is clearly talking about the correct way for women to ‘pray’ and to ‘prophesy’ in church. If Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 says that women may pray and prophesy (and the term prophesy itself

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13 This is why, by the way, that Sydney opposes women’s ordination, but is in favour of lay presidency, even by women, at the Lord’s Supper. They don’t consider ordination to be ordination to the table, but to the pulpit.
probably includes preaching as well as other more spontaneous Spirit-inspired speech\textsuperscript{14}), how can he turn around three chapters later and say they must always be silent. The answer appears to lie (as it always does) in the context, in this case, the cultural context. Ken Bailey suggests (based on years of experience in the Middle East) that some of the women in Corinth and other places, would have been less educated and therefore have had a more difficult time following the teaching in church. If the sermon was long (Paul’s sometimes were – remember Eutyches) the women may have become impatient and begun to ask their husbands questions or to talk among themselves. Paul’s answer (if this is a Pauline text) is that they should ask at home. Here is the important point: Paul wants them to be taught so that they will be able to pray and prophesy and participate more intelligently in the future.\textsuperscript{15}

\textbf{1 Timothy 2:8-15}

I suggest that a similar situation is behind Paul’s (yes, I think Paul wrote the Pastorals!) words in 1 Timothy: “I permit no woman to teach or to have authority (or “be authoritarian”) over men; she is to keep silent.” (v. 12) Some who are opposed to the ordination of women take heart from Paul’s words here because it sounds as if he is reinforcing and (literally) giving sanction to their prejudices against women. After all, men and women are not from earth are they, they are from Mars and Venus respectively. There are some, therefore, who argue that Paul’s words reinforce the view that men are strong, macho leader types, and that women are air-headed, shallow, indecisive and must be led. Women should stay at home and take care of the children and the house work. I have heard these views expressed in my classroom by students from time to time (and certainly on the blogs!), and 1 Timothy 2:8-15 is sometimes used as the proof text.

The key to understanding the text, once more, is to understand the context. Verse 11 says the issue is that women \textbf{should learn.} Learning, Paul says, precedes any teaching. Verses 13-14 seems at first to make things work against those in favour of women in the pulpit, because Paul’s admonition ‘to learn in silence and not to teach’ is given biblical (Old Testament) sanction as Paul’s provides the theological reason – Eve sinned first. For many, this means that Paul is appealing to the order of creation (Adam came first, then Eve) and the order of the Fall (Eve sinned first, then Adam) to bolster an argument to have only men in teaching authority in church.

\textsuperscript{14} For this discussion see the commentaries by Gordon Fee, \textit{(The First Epistle to the Corinthians, [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987])} and by Anthony Thiselton, \textit{(The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text, [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000]).}

Paul’s argument would then be: ‘Eve sinned first, therefore, if we allow women to be in charge, we will be back in the same trouble we got ourselves into in the garden.’ This would imply that, according to Paul, women are weaker not just physically, but morally and spiritually, and that they are, therefore a danger to men.

But we must pay careful attention to the purpose of Paul’s admonition. The issue which Paul is addressing has to do with those who have the qualifications to teach in church. Those who do not know must learn before they can teach. The problem that Paul is addressing is that most women (not all – see Joanna, Junia, Priscilla, the Corinthian women prophets, and Philip’s daughters) in his day lacked the appropriate education to teach. So they must learn first (v. 11). The problem that Eve had was that she was ‘deceived.’ (v. 13) What women need, therefore, is the opportunity to study and learn and therefore not be deceived as Eve was.\(^\text{16}\)

We may conclude, therefore that, like the Gospels and the book of Acts, Paul has no objection to women serving in any leadership positions in the church, so long as they are appropriately called, gifted and trained.

**Theological concerns**

**Christ and culture**

We can agree, I believe, that The Episcopal Church in concert with many churches in the west have become conformed to a certain spirit of the age. The liberal Zeitgeist which has made idols of self-expression, unregulated so-called freedom, and so forth have led us to the point TEC supports freedom of choice to abort babies over the need to protect the most vulnerable, and supports freedom of sexual expression no matter what letter of the alphabet may describe that behaviour. I am deeply aware that many who would call themselves theologically conservative believe that the ordination of women fits into this same basic category. We have all certainly heard bad arguments for the ordination of women – arguments based on particular ideas of freedom or notions of human rights or ‘equality’ in the sense that since men and women are equal they should not be barred from ordination. Christians is all stripes must avoid this way of thinking - ordination is not a ‘right’, but a gift and call of God. (Anyway, I myself have never believed in the equality of men and women – I have always considered women to be superior beings in almost every way!).

I would like to suggest that the argument against the church conforming to the culture of the day rather than to the mind of Christ is an argument which cuts both ways. Are we willing to say, for

\(^{16}\) I am grateful to Tom Wright, former Bishop of Durham, for this basic line of reasoning. See his “Women’s Service in the Church: The Biblical Basis,” a conference paper for the Symposium, ‘Men, Women and the Church,’ St John’s College, Durham, September 4, 2004, which can be accessed online on the “N.T. Wright Page”: http://www.ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Women_Service_Church.htm>
example, that the conservative theological agenda must conform to a conservative political agenda? If so, then, perhaps (as some of my students sometimes suggest to me) I ought to switch my views on capital punishment, gun control, the Iraq war and a number of issues. But is it not the way of the evil one that he has more than one demon running around attempting to highjack the faithful, and that there may be more than one Zeitgeist attempting to conform us to its spirit rather than to the Spirit of Christ. To be theologically orthodox will not always mean that we should adopt the platform of the Republican Party. Spiritual discernment requires much more careful study and prayerful listening to God.

**Tradition**

By far the strongest argument against my position is that I have not demonstrated how the tradition of the post-New Testament church came to exclude women from ordained ministry. The answer to this question is beyond my area of expertise, but let me make a few suggestions. First, for me the Bible is a trump card. If the Bible teaches that women were ministers of the gospel in the New Testament period, then the church must restore that ministry or, at the very least, allow those who believe that the ministry of the priesthood is open to women to ordain those who are so called.

Second, there do seem to be some indications that women were ordained in the post-apostolic period. A late second century Orthodox document, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, probably from Asia Minor, but which circulated widely in the early church (texts are found in Greek, Coptic, Ethiopic and Armenian) and was even found in some of the early biblical canons of the Armenian and Syrian Churches, portrays Thecla as baptizing and as being sent by Paul to teach and evangelize. Icons of Thecla were defaced when, at a later date, it became clear that women were not going to be ordained. Similarly the alpha at the end of the word “Episcopa” in the icon of “Episcopa Theodora” in a 9th century mosaic in Rome has been defaced, probably because the iconoclast understood the word to mean “a (female) bishop.” Some have argued that the word meant that she was “the wife of a bishop,” but the fact that it was defaced would surely imply that the term was understood to mean “bishop” and that this was found offensive. There is, of course, much more evidence that women’s ministry has been accepted in Protestant, especially holiness traditions. John Wesley commissioned women preachers, General Boothe of the Salvation Army said that his best men were women, the Pentecostal movement has long ordained women pastors, the 19th century missionary movement sent at least as many women to the field as men. This too, I would argue, is a part of the ‘tradition’ which we must consider.

Third, although it is clear that women could not be ordained during most of the post-apostolic and medieval periods, I have not yet seen any convincing arguments from those periods as to why women are excluded.

**What is ordination?**
I think it is clear that I have barely touched an issue which is of crucial importance for many who oppose women in orders, which is that limiting the priesthood to males is seen as right and proper because the priest stands “in the place of Christ” as a sort of mediator figure between God and his people. I have not addressed this, except perhaps by implication in a few places in my paper, because I do not see ordination referred to in those terms in the pages of the New Testament. I understand the English word “priest” to be derived from the Greek term *presbyteros* (elder) rather than *hiereus* (a sacrificing priest). In my understanding, therefore, the presbyter is ordained to lead in various capacities, especially in equipping the saints for the work of ministry (Eph 4). That is, the priest is the primary missionary of the congregation who teaches, gathers the assembly for worship, helps the congregation to discover its mission in the community and to discover each one’s own gifts to participate in that mission.

The ministry of leading sacramental worship is one part of that ordained ministry, but I would be extremely hesitant to describe the function of the priest as mediatory. And even if the priest is a mediator in some sense, should we speak of the priest standing in the place of Christ, or should we lean towards what has been, until recently, the eastern view – that the priest stands “in the place of the Church.” Surprisingly, although the Church is the bride of Christ, this eastern emphasis did not lead the Eastern Orthodox churches to insist that all priests be female in order to fulfill that role of standing “in the place of the Church.” Why, then, should we insist that only a male priesthood could stand “in the place of Christ”? For me, of course, these are moot points since I see ordination as the setting aside of a person for ministries of equipping, leading and teaching. But if we must speak of a mediatorial role for the priest in Christ’s church, would the female priesthood not remind us all of the church as Christ’s bride; would the female priesthood not also remind us that God made us in his image – male and female he made us; and especially would the female priest not remind us all that actually Christ is the only mediator between God and humanity?