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Moral Imperatives for the Ordination of Women

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I. THE MORAL QUESTION

I think I understand the reluctance of many women in the Church today to allow the issue of ordination to the priesthood to become central in an overall questioning of roles for women in ministry. That is to say, I understand a concern to challenge the very meaning of ministry in the Church and to reform the patterns of ministry so that women will not be caught in structures which continue to fail to liberate either women or men. I especially understand a concern to press beyond an egalitarian ethic to an ethic which recognizes that equal access to institutional roles is not sufficient to secure justice if the institutions and roles are themselves oppressive to persons as persons.

I nonetheless wish to argue that the question of the ordination of women to the priesthood must indeed be central to any considerations of roles for women in the Church, and that the many moral imperatives which confront the Church regarding women and ministry un-

avoidably converge in the imperative to ordain women to the priesthood. The office of priesthood, in fact, offers a particularly potent focus for addressing directly the sources of sexism in Christian thought. Reasons and attitudes which have kept women from the office of priesthood are remarkably similar to reasons and attitudes which continue to keep them from full participation in the general priesthood of the faithful.

There are some fatal strategic errors which women can make, however, in confronting the issue of ordination. They may, for example, challenge the present form which the office of priesthood takes in the Roman Catholic Church, yet fail to challenge it precisely in the aspects which have heretofore closed it to women. Thus, a challenge to a hierarchical concept of orders which does not reach to the problem of sexism as such may result in a democratization of the priesthood which still fails to consider leadership as an appropriate role for women. Such a failure would be akin to the one wistfully observed in some countries by women who thought that the demise of capitalism would be sufficient to eradicate sexism in society, but who have found it as alive and well after socialist revolutions as before.

Further, women may make the mistake of not taking seriously the power of the symbolic meaning of priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church. Unless the inner elements of the symbol of priesthood cease to be alien to women, no effort on the part of women to share fully in the life and ministry of the Church can be finally successful. Thus, for example, it will not do for women to press for a form of ordained ministry which is only an extension of their present private roles in teaching, healing, and providing for social welfare. As important as those roles are, they can be expanded and even officially blessed without ever touching the underlying barriers to equality and mutuality between women and men in the Church. Something can be learned in this regard from women in other Christian churches where, in at least some instances, ordination was opened to women with deceptively little struggle. Formal barriers to ordination fell when women proved themselves competent in various social ministries of the Church. As long as women did not aspire to move into the symbolic center of the life of the churches—represented by preaching and teaching—there was relatively little objection to their ordination. The real issues were never joined, however, until it became clear that ordination might entail granting to women not only responsibility for caring for children and other women and the sick, but responsibility

for tasks which were assumed to require powers of full critical intelligence.¹

Fundamental theological and cultural presuppositions which lie at the root of women's exclusion from ordained ministry can, then, remain intact if ministry is redefined and restructured without shattering the gender-specification which has attached precisely to the content of the historically developed meaning of priesthood. But what are the inner elements in the meaning of priesthood which must be addressed specifically if the possibility of ordination is to be open to women in a way that conduces to full equality and mutuality in the life of the Church? Women from other churches have suggested that these elements are importantly different in a church such as the Roman Catholic Church "where orders and ordination are still principally understood in terms of public sacramental ministry."² I am doubtful that finally the elements of meaning that have been penetrated by sexism are really so different in the different churches, though it is surely true that they are intensified and given a unique emphasis in a tradition which intertwines patriarchy and the public mediation of grace as closely and deeply as does the Roman Catholic Church.

In any case, in the Roman Catholic tradition the office of priesthood combines the tasks of making visible the relation of human persons to God, and rendering present God's self-revelation to human persons. The priest symbolizes what is true of the Church as a whole and each individual member of the Church. Ordained to the community, the priest's function is to realize and to serve publicly, "officially," the meeting between God and the human person which characterizes the Christian life. On almost any model of the Church which still proves fruitful for describing and interpreting the life of the Church, at least three elements emerge in the meaning of ordained ministry which are particularly crucial to understanding both the problems and possibilities for the ordination of women.³ These are the elements of (1) leadership, (2) representation—of God to human persons and human persons to God and to one another, and (3) the capacity to enter and to stand in the presence of God, in the realm of the sacred.

These elements are crucial not because they are mistaken or false or even inadequate (however much they may need serious critique when they are embodied in forms which inhibit the life of the Church or when an overemphasis on one rather than another causes distortion in ministry and in the life of the Church); they are crucial, rather, because they have been judged in the past as unable to be affirmed of

women. They must be reappraised, then, not so much in themselves, as from the vantage point of better understandings of the nature and role of women. It is, I suggest, only by juxtaposing our understandings of the nature and role of women with these three elements of the inner meaning of priesthood that we shall begin to see the moral imperatives confronting us regarding the ordination of women.

II. THE MORAL SITUATION

To experience a moral imperative is to experience an unconditional claim upon one's action. Though the question of ordaining women is a concern of more and more persons in the Church, I am not sure that it has gained sufficient clarity to issue in experiences of moral obligation on the part of many. When it comes to specific concrete action in this regard, the Roman Catholic community as a whole is at best at the point of asking "what ought we to do" regarding the ordination of women. But if we are serious in asking the moral question "what ought we to do" regarding the ordination of women in the Roman Catholic Church, then we must be about the task of clarifying the theological understandings which bear on this question, the moral principles which are relevant to it, the capabilities and responsibilities of persons who have choices to make in its regard, and the context out of which options for action now arise.⁴ In order to contribute to this task, I would like simply to describe what I will call the "moral situation" presently obtaining in the Roman Catholic community vis-a-vis the ordination of women.

By "moral situation" I mean something at once less and more than what is ordinarily meant by moral "context." There is not, on the one hand, the opportunity or the need here to include a full description of, e.g., societal factors which impinge on the contemporary experience of the Church, or a careful analysis of the complex dynamic between conflicting views current within the Church, or a comparative study of the varying needs of the Church in different economic and geographical settings. On the other hand, the "moral situation" in the Church regarding the ordination of women cannot be understood at all without examining the present status of theological understandings regarding women and priesthood, or without taking into account the effects of the contemporary experience of women on their perceived capabilities and responsibilities for action. Hence, the moral situation which I will describe is a situation in which (1)

past understandings of the nature and role of women as alien to the inner meaning of priesthood are contradicted by present understandings of both woman and priesthood; and (2) the continued affirmation of past understandings by a continued refusal to ordain women results in harmful consequences for individuals and for the Church as a whole. I shall try to focus my description of the confrontation between past and present understandings in terms of the three elements in the inner meaning of priesthood which I have suggested above—namely, the elements of leadership, representation, and sacramentality.

A. UNDERSTANDINGS FROM THE PAST

1. *Women and Leadership*

However the leadership role of the ordained priest varies from century to century or from culture to culture, it remains an important element in the concept of priesthood. When the Church is perceived largely as an institution, the priest is expected to administer or to "govern" in some way. If the Church is understood primarily as a community of persons, the priest still functions as a "congregational leader," catalyst, or facilitator. When the Church is thought of as sacramental or as the proclaimer of the Word of God, the priest's leadership is the leadership of the mediator, the inspirer, the prophet. Not even a view of the Church on the model of "servant" removes the element of leadership from the role of the ordained priest. For service in such a context is precisely a special form of agency meant to help in the transformation of individuals and society.⁵

It is perhaps obvious how the element of leadership in the role of priesthood has been itself a major stumbling block to the ordination of women. Centuries of excluding women from the priesthood mirror centuries of belief that women cannot appropriately fill roles of leadership—whether in the family, church, or society. Arguments for relegating women to subordinate roles are well known, so that we need only recall briefly the appeals to Scripture, to biology and anthropology, to theories of Christian love and justice, which have served to ground those arguments. Whether it was because Eve was thought to be derivative from Adam, or female infants only misbegotten males, or women subordinated to men as a punishment for original sin; or whether it was because women were thought to be essentially passive not active, emotional not intellectual, destined to contribute

to the human community through reproduction not production; always the conclusion came that women were to be followers not leaders, helpers not primary agents, responders not initiators.

Furthermore, Christian theological ethics offered principles of love and justice which systematically excluded the possibility of criticising the hierarchical relation between men and women. Granted interpretations of women's "nature" as inferior, there was no question of violating the principle of giving "to each her due" when women were placed in subordinate positions. Given notions of "equal regard" which affirmed persons as equal before God but not equal before one another, gradations among persons based on gender differentiation could not be ruled out. Given a concept of "order" in which one person should hold authority over others, justice was served precisely by the maintenance of a hierarchy—whether in the family, church, or society—in which a male person stood at the head.⁶

If priesthood entails leadership, then on the strength of past understandings it is clear why women could not be priests. They could not govern nor administer; they could not be decision-makers nor public teachers; they could not even be servants in a way that implied an equal share of responsibility for the life of the community.⁷

2. Women and Representation

The judgment that women could not be leaders in the church was inseparable from and perhaps rendered inevitable by the more fundamental judgment that women could not represent God to human persons nor human persons to God.⁸ Christian theology for centuries refused to attribute the fullness of the *imago dei* to women. All persons are created in the image and likeness of God, but men were thought to participate in the *imago dei* primarily and fully, while women participated in it secondarily and partially. The Judaeo-Christian God was wholly transcendent, neither male nor female. But when a human analogue was looked for, such transcendence was portrayed in masculine terms. It was, after all, masculinity that stood for strength in relation to feminine weakness, fullness in relation to emptiness, spirit in relation to body, autonomy in relation to dependence.⁹ No wonder, then, that men could be understood as representatives of God, but women as only lovers of God. No wonder that public witness of God's self-revelation seemed appropriately given only by

men, and authorization for relating to the community as the human manifestation of God's providence and power seemed to be given only to men.

Not only could women not represent God to the Christian community, they could not represent the generically human—before God or before the community. The use of the masculine to refer to the human (whether in theology or liturgy) always implied that women were a special kind of human being, never able to represent humanity as such, never in fact sharing in the fullness of the human. Thus, even as lovers of God they could not stand for all human persons, could not sacrifice for all human persons, could not hold the prayer of all human persons. It is not, then, by chance that no one perceived the contradiction (or even the irony) in such assertions as *Pacem in Terris* "human beings have . . . the right to follow a vocation to the priesthood. . . ."¹⁰

3. Women and the Sacred

Finally, there were reasons other than essential inferiority or failure to share fully in the *imago dei* that kept women from fulfilling the role of the priest. The office of priesthood always implied the privilege and the responsibility of entering into the sphere of the sacred, of touching the most sacred thing, of mediating sacramentally the grace which was poured forth from the life of the godhead itself.¹¹ While all persons in the Church dwell somehow in the city of God, are somehow transformed by grace, and are somehow sources of grace to one another, it is the priest whose "office" symbolizes Christ's leading of the whole Church into the inner sanctuary, and who bears the symbolic weight attached to special sacramental agency.

Once again, however, throughout the tradition of the Church, men rather than women seemed the only appropriate subjects for so sacred a responsibility. Women could not be given the symbolic role of entering the holy of holies because they continued to be associated with images of pollution and sin. Ancient myths identifying woman with chaos, darkness, mystery, matter, and sin echoed clearly in Christian interpretations of concupiscence, of the body as defiled, of sexuality as contaminating, and thence of woman as temptress, as a symbol of evil.

Hopelessly entangled in the prohibition of women from the office of priesthood are not only myths of the Fall and Stoic fears of pas-

sion as the enemy of contemplation, but also ancient blood taboos and views of childbirth as defiling. However vaguely such notions remained in the consciousness of Christians through the centuries, this understanding of women became theoretically entrenched in sophisticated theologies of original sin, in anthropological theories of higher and lower nature, of mind and body, rationality and desire, and in spiritualistic eschatologies.¹² But there is no need here to repeat in detail what has now been so often rehearsed regarding woman as a special agent of evil.

B. DISSONANCE IN THE PRESENT

If there still linger today fears of women as symbols of evil or judgments of the basic inferiority of women to men or refusals to find in women the fullness of the *imago dei*, nonetheless past understandings of the nature and role of women have come into sharp conflict with a growing new self-understanding on the part of women. Both women and men have come to challenge the pastoral adequacy and the theological accuracy of past interpretations of the nature and role of women and of the patterns of relationship called for and possible to women and men. There is a growing perception of a "new order" in which all the arguments which maintained the essential inferiority of women or the relevance of sex-differentiation for hierarchically determined roles in the Church or society are judged to be simply false, and all the laws and structures that relegated women *qua* women to subordinate roles and to circumscribed spheres are judged to be simply wrong.

1. Correcting Untruths

(a) *Leadership and Representation*: Theology (consistent with its method of extrapolating from biological and socio-psychological data in order to interpret the nature and role of women) today has overwhelming evidence to the contrary of its former conclusions regarding leadership roles for women. Old claims regarding the intellectual superiority of men, the passivity of women's role in reproduction, the innateness of gender-specific divisions of labor, etc., are no longer tenable. New exegetical studies of Scripture offer more "seriously imaginable" ways of construing the meaning and use of both Old and New Testament texts vis-a-vis the relation between men and women.¹³ And new theories of society render anachronistic a view of "order" which depends utterly on the unity achieved through

one male at the head of every community of persons. Leadership roles, then, are no longer in principle closed to women.

Nor is it the case that women can any longer be thought to be less able to represent the generically human than are men. On the one hand, neither men nor women hold the whole of humanity within themselves; and neither men's experience nor women's experience can be universalized without some limit.¹⁴ On the other hand, both women and men know themselves to be autonomous in a radical sense, responsible for their own lives, capable of and called to the realization of the fully human which characterizes their being. If women's experience today has told them anything it has told them that they, no less than men, must lay claim to their identity as human persons, resisting the temptation to remain forever without selves. Rilke's projection of a time when "there will be girls and women whose name will no longer signify merely an opposite of the masculine, but something in itself, something that makes one think not of any complement and limit but only of life and existence: the feminine human being," is according to many Christian women here at hand.¹⁵

Similarly, reconstructive efforts regarding the theology of the *imago dei* challenge the notion that God can be represented only or more fittingly by men. A more adequate understanding of the nature of human persons, male and female, largely dispossesses theology of the possibility of yielding to women only a derivative share in the image of God. Equally important in this regard are efforts to look again at the nature of God as it has been revealed by and interpreted by the Christian community. Despite the limitations to any attempts to attribute either masculine or feminine imagery to God,¹⁶ it is probably the case that past problems in women's serving as representatives of God cannot be overcome without a process wherein women can know themselves and be known, *qua* women, as images of God.

Hence, important efforts have been made to look anew at the use of feminine imagery in God's self-revelation through Scripture. Beyond this, grounds have been offered from traditional trinitarian theology (where the Christian community has attempted to articulate its understanding of the inner life of the godhead) for naming each of the persons of the Trinity feminine as well as masculine. Attempts to find a feminine identity in the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, are well known.¹⁷ Such efforts do not, however, exhaust the possibilities for discovering a "feminine" principle in God.

"Fatherhood" is the image traditionally used for the first person

of the Trinity, and "sonship" for the second. But only in an age when the male principle is thought to be the only active principle, the only self-contributing principle, in human generation, is there any necessity for naming the first person "father" and not also "mother." And only in an age when sons are given preeminence as offspring is there any strong constraint to name the second person "son" and not also "daughter."

Further, given the long history of efforts to avoid subordinationism in the doctrine of the Trinity, it is clear that "fatherhood" and "sonship" cannot carry the whole burden of imaging the equality and unity of the two persons. Augustine went to images of mind, self-knowledge, self-love, and memory, understanding, and will, to try to express a triune life in which all that the Father is is communicated to the Son, and all that the Son receives is returned to the Father, so that their one life is a life of infinite mutuality and communion, the life of the Spirit. In such a relationship, it is not impossible to understand the first and second persons as masculine and feminine principles, in each of whom there is infinite activity and infinite receptivity. Infinite giving and receiving coincide in one reality constituted by utter mutuality.¹⁸

Femininity, then, expresses as well as sonship the relation of the second person to the first. And receptivity is revealed at its peak to be infinitely active and in no way passive. In any case, a model of relationship is revealed which is not hierarchical but marked by total equality and infinite mutuality. Such is the model offered for relationships in the Church—including relationships between women and men.

The conclusion of such ponderings is not that God must be imaged as feminine and not masculine, but that it is a serious distortion to image God in exclusively either masculine or feminine terms. From this it follows, however, that it is false to think that God cannot be represented by women as well as men, and hence equally false to conclude that on such grounds women are to be excluded from the office of priesthood.

(b) *Symbolism and the Sacred*: The invalidity of the symbolic connection between body and evil, sexuality and evil, and hence woman and evil, has become clearer and clearer as the history of this symbolism has been more and more starkly disclosed. Such disclosure surprised and even shocked many contemporary women, though it rang bells in long dismissed memories and provided missing pieces to long standing puzzles. Given an awareness of the history of the

symbolic connection between woman and evil, it has been as easy to assert its falsehood (and as difficult to eliminate it from the collective unconscious and the implicit consciousness of persons) as it was in other times to assert the falsehood of a connection between evil and matter. On the basis of women's own experience of themselves, simple denials have seemed self-evidently true, though backing has not been wanting in the form of doctrines of creation or theologies of baptism or evidence from the behavioral sciences regarding the tendency of men to project fears of the evil within themselves on an "other."

De-symbolization is a more difficult enterprise, however, than can be accomplished by simple denial or even reasoned argument. Thus, studies in the symbolism of evil have helped to provide clues for the gradual transformation of symbolic structures. Paul Ricoeur's analysis, for example, of the consciousness of evil unfolds a possible evolution (in the individual and the community) from a sense of defilement (symbolized by bodily stain) to a sense of sin (symbolized by the breaking of a personal bond) to a sense of guilt (symbolized by the captivity of one's own will).¹⁹ Now it is at the level of a sense of evil as defilement that the human body, and human sexuality, and woman, have functioned as symbols of evil. But the sense of defilement is, according to Ricoeur, a pre-ethical, irrational, quasi-material sense of "something" that contaminates by contact, that leaves a symbolic stain. Belief in the defilement of sexuality as such, then, or the uncleanness of woman as woman, is pre-ethical and irrational. Once a reflective process is introduced whereby the blind sense of defilement is subjected to criticism, ideas of the defiling nature of sexuality yield to judgments that wherever there is fault in the realm of sexuality it must be understood rather as an offense against a personal bond and as a failure in human freedom. Thus does there cease to be the entailment of ideas of the defiling nature of woman.²⁰

Analyses such as those of Ricoeur give women a rational base from which to challenge vague feelings among both men and women that women are indeed somehow less suited than men to enter the realm of the sacred. Such a base becomes especially important when the challenge is directed to the continued exclusion of women from the ordained sacramental ministry.

2. Preventing Harm

The dissonance between past and present understandings of

or falsehood. The continued choice on the part of the Church not to ordain women symbolizes the continued affirmation of what, from a present theological perspective, is a false interpretation of the nature and role of women. But such a continued affirmation not only engages the Church in speculative falsehood; it also entails harmful consequences for individuals in the Church and the Church as a whole. Such consequences are complex and multiple, but it may be sufficient here to describe briefly only four of them.

1. The first can be focused through an event which took place in a parish in Detroit. The parish council decided not to consider the question of introducing altar girls into the liturgical celebrations of the parish. Interestingly enough, it was women on the council who opposed it. Their reason for opposing it is of even greater interest, for they maintained that "If we let the girls do it, we will never be able to get the boys to do it again." It is possible to dismiss such reasoning as simply taking realistic account of the ways in which preadolescent girls and boys relate to one another. I suspect it represents something much more profound than that, however. It is at least analogous to what would be a general fear that an opening of ordination to women would result in an ultimate transfer of the role of priesthood from men to women. This might be predicted either on the basis that women, after all, are more religious than men (a myth not without its ironies), or that any social role loses status when it is opened to women. It is surely true that parish congregations tend to be constituted by a majority of women. One might conclude, then, that it is important to continue to grant access to the priesthood only to men, for only if they are granted sole rights to leadership will men participate actively in the life of the Church at all.

There is some insight to be gained regarding this, however, from the observable fact that the churches whose clergy (and hence leadership) are most totally male are the churches whose congregations tend to be more largely female. This is not surprising if we consider that where the clergy-congregation relationship is conceived of on the stereotypical model of masculine-feminine polarity (where, therefore, the congregation is characterized as led, guided, cared for, taught, governed, receptive, docile, passive), it is difficult for men to identify with the congregation (for it conflicts with their identity formation as male and offers a role for which they have no preparation) and relatively easy for women to identify as members of the congregation (for it fits the identity they have internalized and offers a role for which their conditioning provides an affinity).

What emerges from such observations is the strong suggestion that fullness of shared Christian life by both men and women in the Church cannot be had as long as the ordained ministry is characterized as male and the Church *qua* congregation is characterized as female. This means not only that images of priesthood as only masculine must be foregone, but images of the Church as only feminine must also be foregone or transformed. Where there is not collaboration between men and women at the level of leadership, there will not be true collaboration within the Church as a whole. Only with mutuality of relationships at all levels in the Church will we be able to open to a Christian life which is characterized by creative union, by a life which is modeled on the life of the triune God. As long as we fail to do this, we inhibit the life of the faith, and both women and men are harmed.

2. Since the continued exclusion of women from the ordained priesthood powerfully symbolizes the maintenance of false interpretations of the nature and role of women, it prevents changes in patterns of relationship between women and men not only within the Church but in all dimensions of human life. Thus, for example, it encourages the exclusion of women from leadership roles in society, inhibits full participation by women in the self-determination of society,²¹ and retards the possibilities of new understandings of structures of justice and patterns of shared life and love in the institution of marriage.²² Despite the continued move forward of culture and society without the church, the life of faith and human life in general is inhibited, and men and women are harmed.

3. Since what the nonordination of women symbolizes is so powerful, its failure to come to terms with sexuality and the symbolism of evil constitutes a failure on the part of the Christian community to integrate the powers of human life in the wholeness of the Christian life. If Ricoeur is right in insisting that

it is not from meditation on sexuality that a refinement of consciousness of fault will be able to proceed, but from the nonsexual sphere of existence: from the relations created by work, appropriation, politics. It is there that an ethics of relations to others will be formed, an ethics of justice and love, capable of turning back toward sexuality, of re-evaluating and transvaluing it²³

then to miss the opportunity of introducing considerations of justice

into the inclusion of women in the ordained sacramental priesthood is to miss the opportunity of raising by indirection the pre-ethical to the ethical, the concern for the pure to a concern for fidelity to personal bonds, the fear of passion to a sense of freedom subject to principles of justice. To miss such an opportunity is at least to harm by omission; to continue to undergird an unreflective belief in the relation of woman to evil is clearly to harm by commission.

4. Finally, feminist theologians have begun to suggest that new work must be done on a theology of sin—work which takes into account the cardinal tendency of women not to the sin of pride but to the sin of failure to take responsibility for their lives, for becoming personal selves, for using their freedom to help make a better world.²⁴ To continue to refuse ordination to women is to reinforce this tendency—by reinforcing a view of woman which identifies her as follower not leader, responder not initiator. To do so is to harm women, and inevitably also to harm men.

III. THE MORAL IMPERATIVE

When the Roman Catholic community reflects on the question “what ought we to do” regarding the ordination of women, it has the same sources of moral illumination that it has for any other ethical reflection on how its faith is to be lived. It must look to its tradition, to the Scripture and theology which are part of that tradition, to other disciplines which can inform its theology, and to its own contemporary experience as a Christian community. We have explored some of the sources of which it must take account, seen some of the places of insight and some of the places of impoverishment of insight, discovered some of what must be incorporated and embraced and some of what must be transformed or abandoned. Through all, I have implicitly assumed that part of the richness of the Roman Catholic tradition of theological ethics, of moral thought and moral teaching, is the refusal to retreat to voluntarism, and the insistence that laws and policies should be inherently intelligible, should make inherently good sense in the Church’s efforts to love truthfully and faithfully. What, then, is the answer to the question “what ought we to do” regarding the ordination of women in the Roman Catholic Church? Two general imperatives, it seems to me, are already clear: First, the Church ought to open its ordained sacramental ministry to women. It ought to do so because not to do so is to affirm a policy, a system, a

structure, whose presuppositions are false (for the nonordination of women is premised on the denial in women of a capacity for leadership, a call to represent God to the community and the community to God, and a worthiness to approach the sacred in the fullness of their womanhood). It ought also to do so because not to do so is to harm individual persons and the Church (by choking off the life of faith which is possible in a Christian church modeled on the life of God; by perpetuating unjust patterns of relationship between women and men; by failing to speak a word of healing to persons as yet fragmented in the powers of their own selves; and by reinforcing inadequate notions of freedom and destiny for women and for men).

Secondly, women in the Church ought to seek ordination—for the same reasons that obligate the Church to ordain women, and because some women will have received a unique imperative by the power of the Holy Spirit and from the Christian community in which they find life. They should seek it without bitterness (though they will know the meaning of Naomi’s complaint, “Call me not Naomi, for that is beautiful; but call me Mara, for that is bitter”). They should seek it in spite of weariness (though they can say, too, “I am so tired . . . and also tired of the future before it comes,”²⁵ and though they are subject to the cardinal temptation to weaken and not to struggle forward in freedom and responsibility). They should seek it in a way that does not alienate them from one another, whatever their pasts and whatever their present contexts. They should seek it because now ripens the time when they must say to the Church, for all women, words reminiscent of the words of Jesus Christ to his disciples (under the continued query for a revelation of his true reality), “Have we been so long with you, and you have not known us?”

Notes

1. See the brief but relevant observations in this regard by Beverly Wildung Harrison, “Sexism and the Contemporary Church: When Evasion Becomes Complicity,” in Alice L. Hageman (ed), *Sexist Religion and Women in the Church: No More Silence!* (N.Y.: Association Press, 1974), p. 200.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 204.

3. I would argue, for example, that these three elements are all present in some form in each of the models of the Church offered in the typology which Avery Dulles draws in *Models of the Church* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1974).

4. In other words, the now famous "four base points" of Christian ethics are relevant here as elsewhere. See James M. Gustafson, "Context vs. Principles: A Misplaced Debate in Christian Ethics," *Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 58 (April, 1965), pp. 171-202.

5. See Dulles, chap. 6 (especially his discussion of the relevant positions of Hans Kung, Richard McBrien, and Yves Congar); see also Karl Rahner, "On the Diaconate," *Theological Investigations*, vol. 12 (N.Y.: The Seabury Press, 1974), p. 72.

6. Thomas Aquinas offers one of the clearest theories of the created order in this regard. See, for example, *Summa Theologiae* I, 92, 1; 96, 3; *On Kingship* 2, 17-20; *Summa Contra Gentiles* III, 123, 3-4.

7. See *Summa Theologiae* II-II, 172, 2.

8. Of course, everyone in the Church has always been thought to manifest God in Jesus Christ in some way. Women, however, were not considered capable of manifesting God to such a degree that they could serve to do so at a symbolic level.

9. I have treated this question in fuller detail in my article, "New Patterns of Relationship: Beginnings of A Moral Revolution," *Theological Studies*, vol. 36 (December, 1975).

10. *Pacem in Terris*, section 15 (Paulist Press, 1963).

11. This is true, it seems to me, even when the cultic aspects of priesthood are considerably deemphasized.

12. The fact that woman has also been placed on a "pedestal," revered as a special bearer of virtue, etc., has served to reinforce rather than to counter her position of inferiority and even her association with evil. After all, one who is on a pedestal has little force in appealing for elevation from inferior status. And one who is expected to be especially virtuous can be made to feel evil by the simple fact that she cannot fulfil unrealistic expectations.

13. "Seriously imaginable" is a condition offered by David Kelsey for theological interpretations of Scripture: see *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Fortress Press, 1975), chap. 8. Its function is well illustrated by such efforts as those of Robin Scroggs, "Paul and the Eschatological Woman," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 40 (1972), pp. 283-303; Elaine H. Pagels, "Paul and Women: A Response to Recent Discussion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 42 (1974), pp. 538-49; Phyllis Trible, "Eve and Adam: Genesis 2-3 Reread," *Andover Newton Quarterly*, vol. 13 (March, 1973), pp. 251-58.

14. This point has been especially well delineated by Judith E. Plaskow in *Sex, Sin and Grace: Women's Experience and the Theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich*. Unpublished dissertation, Yale University, 1975. See esp. pp. 8-11.

15. Rainer, Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, trans. M. D. H. Norton (N.Y.: Norton, 1962), p. 59.

16. Such limitations include importantly the need for continual affirmation of the transcendence of God beyond either masculine or feminine characteristics and the continual reminder of the danger of rigidifying stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity.

17. See, for example, George Tavard, *Woman and the Christian Tradition* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1973).

18. I have expanded on these notions in two other articles: "New Patterns of Relationship: Beginnings of a Moral Revolution," *Theological Studies*, vol. 36 (December, 1975), pp. 640-43; "Sources of Sexual Inequality in the History of Christian Thought," *Journal of Religion* (April, 1976).

19. Paul Ricoeur, *Symbolism of Evil* (N.Y.: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1967).

20. See article cited above, "Sources of Sexual Inequality in the History of Christian Thought."

21. Leaders and groups in the Roman Catholic Church were among those who, for example, opposed women's suffrage (see the Sophia Smith Collection of Documents of the Catholic Bishops against Women's Suffrage, 1910-1920).

22. Those who favor new patterns of relationship between women and men are often accused of being against the family and for such procedures as abortion. In fact, under some unexamined old patterns of relationship the family has come upon hard times, and abortion is often symptomatic of deep-seated problems in heretofore accepted structures of society. New patterns of relationship which are based upon principles of equality and mutuality will, indeed, mark a change in some models of the family (for no longer will a man be considered the sole head of the family). If, however, equality and mutuality prove more fruitful as bases for relationship (because more true to the reality of the persons involved), then the family which incorporates those principles will be less threatened in modern society than will other models of family. Thus will the "liberation" of women and men serve to support, not destroy, family life. Similarly, a society in which women are not left with the whole burden of child-bearing and child-rearing (but where women and men share these human experiences and responsibilities), will at least move toward being a society in which abortion is no longer offered as the solution to problems which it cannot finally solve. I have considered this possibility in my article, "Liberation, Abortion and Responsibility," *Reflection*, vol. 71 (May, 1974), pp. 9-13.

23. Ricoeur, p. 29.

24. I have been much influenced in this view by the work of Judith Plaskow, *Sex, Sin and Grace: Women's Experience and the Theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich* (Yale diss., 1975).

25. Doris Lessing, *Martha Quest* (London: Panther Books, 1972), p. 7.