

Ordination Into Holy Orders
Addendum #3: Women's Ordination
ICICCEC U.S. Theological Commission
Fall 2022

While affirming the role of women in the Church, the ICCEC believes and practices the tradition of an male ordained ministry composed of deacons, presbyters and bishops in Apostolic Succession in accordance with the teachings from:

The Witness of Holy Scripture and practice of the New Testament Church
The teachings of the Church Fathers
The Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Teachings on Holy Orders

Christian theologians, throughout the centuries have reflected on this issue and the consensus is that the sacrament is exclusively reserved and assigned to men only. Even a cursory reading of the pertinent biblical texts reveals three important observations:

1. There were no definitely known women in Holy Orders in New Testament times;
2. None of the instructions given in scripture regarding Church Order include instructions for women pastors.
3. Some texts on church order explicitly forbid women to occupy the role of the “ordained” by the laying on of hands.

The Witness of Holy Scripture and practice of the New Testament church

St. Paul's gave to St. Timothy a list of the qualifications for bishops and deacons. Both of these orders required recipients to be the husband of one wife and to manage their households and children well.¹ These qualifications indicate that bishops and deacons had to be males.²

Furthermore, St. Paul, in 1 Tim 2:12, states “I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man” (NIV). Hence, a woman did not, and cannot have a pastoral role or even perform a ministerial function in the ordained ministry of the New Testament Church. This and several other New Testament scriptures are variously interpreted by various groups. We in the ICCEC take a conservative position on these scriptures which we have addressed in the first Addendum.

While the Bible does not support the practice of women serving in the Sacramental Orders, many passages speak clearly to the inherent worth and value of women. Women in the New Testament engaged in significant ministry, performing valuable service. This is clearly seen in the Acts of

¹ 1 Tim 3:1-13

² Richards, L. O. (1991). *The Bible Reader's Companion* (electronic ed., p. 835). Victor Books.

the Apostles. (Acts 18:24-26). Further, women played a significant role in the work of the Apostle Paul. In his letter to the Romans, Paul identified sixteen significant helpers in ministry (Rom 16:1-16), and at least ten of them were women. The church at Philippi benefited from the participation of Lydia (Acts 16: 13-15), apparently a benefactor to the church, and others such as Euodia and Syntyche (Phil 4:2-3). Women also made a significant contribution to the ministry of Jesus. Luke recalled with appreciation their financial support and company with the Lord (Lk 8: 1-3). There is no indication that these women were ordained by the Apostles or that they consecrated or administered the sacraments.

The teachings of the Church Fathers

The Apostolic Constitutions expressly attribute to some women the duty of guarding the doors and maintaining order amongst those of their own sex in the church, and they also (II, c. 26) assign to them the duties of acting as intermediaries between the clergy and the women of the congregation; but on the other hand, it is laid down (Const. Apost., VIII, 27) that “the deaconess gives no blessing, she fulfills no function of priest or deacon”, and there can be no doubt that the extravagances permitted in some places, especially in the churches of Syria and Asia, were in contravention of the canons generally accepted.³

Many of the Church Fathers wrote against various heresies, including the roles of women performing unsanctioned ministry that had cropped up in some schismatic churches.. In response to these heresies Irenaeus, Tertillian, Hippolytus, John Chrysostom, and Augustine, testify that the ordination of women to Holy Orders was inadmissible.

Tertullian

“It is of no concern how diverse be their [the heretics’] views, so long as they conspire to erase the one truth. They are puffed up; all offer knowledge. Before they have finished as catechumens, how thoroughly learned they are! And the heretical women themselves, how shameless are they! They make bold to teach, to debate, to work exorcisms, to undertake cures...” (Demurrer Against the Heretics 41:4-5 [A.D. 200]).

“It is not permitted for a woman to speak in the church [1 Cor. 14:34-35], but neither [is it permitted her]... to offer, nor to claim to herself a lot in any manly function, not to say sacerdotal office” (The Veiling of Virgins 9 [A.D. 206]).

Hippolytus

“When a widow is to be appointed, she is not to be ordained, but is designated by being named [a widow]... A widow is appointed by words alone, and is then associated with the other widows. Hands are not imposed on her, because she does not offer the oblation and she does not conduct the liturgy. Ordination is for the clergy because of the liturgy; but a widow is appointed for prayer, and prayer is the duty of all” (The Apostolic Tradition 11 [A.D. 215]).

³ Thurston, H. (1907–1913). *Deaconesses*. C. G. Herbermann, E. A. Pace, C. B. Pallen, T. J. Shahan, & J. J. Wynne (Eds.), *The Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church: Vols. I–XV*. The Encyclopedia Press; The Universal Knowledge Foundation.

The Didascalia

“For it is not to teach that you women...are appointed... For he, God the Lord, Jesus Christ our Teacher, sent us, the twelve [apostles], out to teach the [chosen] people and the pagans. But there were female disciples among us: Mary of Magdala, Mary the daughter of Jacob, and the other Mary; he did not, however, send them out with us to teach the people. For, if it had been necessary that women should teach, then our Teacher would have directed them to instruct along with us” (*Didascalia* 3:6:1-2 [A.D. 225]).

Council of Nicaea I

“Similarly, in regard to the deaconess, as with all who are enrolled in the register, the same procedure is to be observed. We have made mention of the deaconesses, who have been enrolled in this position, although, not have been in any way ordained, they are certainly to be numbered among the laity” (Canon 19 [A.D. 325]).

Council of Laodicea

“[T]he so-called ‘presbyteresses’ or ‘presidentesses’ are not to be ordained in the Church” (Canon 11 [A.D. 360]).

John Chrysostom

“[W]hen one is required to preside over the Church and to be entrusted with the care of so many souls, the whole female sex must retire before the magnitude of the task, and the majority of men also, and we must bring forward those who to a large extent surpass all others and soar as much above them in excellence of spirit as Saul overtopped the whole Hebrew nation in bodily stature” (The Priesthood 2:2 [A.D. 387]).

Augustine

“[The Quintillians are heretics who] give women predominance so that these, too, can be honored with the priesthood among them. They say, namely, that Christ revealed himself... to Quintilla and Priscilla [two Montanist prophetesses] in the form of a woman” (Heresies 1:17 [A.D. 28]).

The Consensus of East and West on Holy Orders

The groups that have traditionally opposed women's ordination tend to be sacerdotal. Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Anglican traditionalists prior to the 1950's opposed the ordination of women and supported an all male priesthood.

As far as the Eastern Orthodox are concerned, the ordination of women to the Holy Priesthood is untenable since it would disregard the symbolic and iconic value of male priesthood, both as representing Christ's maleness and the fatherly role of the Father in the Trinity, by allowing female persons to interchange with male persons a role which cannot be interchanged.

The doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church on ordination, as expressed in current code of Canon Law and the catechism of the Roman Catholic Church, is that only a baptized man (Latin: vir) validly receives sacred ordination. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that this requirement is a matter of divine law and thus doctrinal. The question of whether only males can receive Holy Ordination is answered by these church's belief that there is a fundamental unity between

deacons, presbyters, and bishops in the single sacrament of Holy Orders, which they interpret to mean that women cannot validly be ordained in the Apostolic Order of ministry.

In 1976, the sacred congregation for the doctrine of the faith in the Roman Catholic Church issued the Declaration on the question of the admission of women to the sacred priesthood, which taught that for doctrinal, theological and historical reasons, the church "... does not consider herself authorized to admit women to priestly ordination."⁴ Reasons given were the Church's determination to remain faithful to its constant tradition, its fidelity to Christ's will, and the iconic value of male representation due to the "sacramental" nature of the priesthood. In April, 1976 the Pontifical Biblical Commission released a study examining the exclusion of women from the ministerial priesthood from a biblical perspective: "The masculine character of the hierarchical order which has structured the church since its beginning seems attested to by scripture in an undeniable way. As a matter of fact, we see in the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles that the first Christians communities were always directed by men exercising the apostolic power."⁵

In 1994, Pope John Paul II declared in his letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, stating: "wherefore in order that all doubts may be removed regarding a matter of great importance ... I declare that the church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the church's faithful."⁶ Pope John Paul II, in *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, explained the Roman Catholic understanding that the priesthood is a special role specifically set out by Jesus when he chose twelve men out of his many male and female followers.⁷ John Paul notes that Jesus chose the twelve (Mk 3:13-14; Jn 6:70) after a night in prayer (Lk 6:12) and that the Apostles themselves were careful in the choice of their successors, all of whom were male.

Women in Ministry

While women are not ordained as deacons, priests, or bishops they have always had important roles in the ministry of the Church. Joel 2 and Acts 2 tell us that both men and women should minister in the Gifts of the Spirit and participate in corporate worship. The ICCEC releases both men and women to function in certain critical ministries in addition to operating in the Gifts of the Spirit during worship services. These ministries include: Altar Guild, Lectors, Praise and Worship Ministry, Teaching, Preaching, Missions, Evangelism, Intercession, and Prayer Ministry.

⁴ *Commentary* by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on the *Declaration Inter Insigniones*

⁵ *Codex Iuris Canonici* Canon number 1024. Cf., catechism of the Roman Catholic Church question 1577.

⁶ John Paul II in *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, *Apostolic Exhortation* Christifideles Laici, 1988
Letter Concerning the CDF Reply Regarding *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, www.ourladywarriors.org/teach/ordisace3.htm.

⁷ *Ibid.*, Also see: Mt. 10:1-7, 8; 28:16-20; Mk 3:13-16; 16:14-15

Women operating in these ministries are sanctioned by Church at the discretion of the Diocesan Bishop.

Conclusion

Given the historical data which discuss the question of the ordination of women to the sacred order of the ministries of Bishops, Priests and Deacons, it is clear that given the teachings of Holy Scriptures, Apostolic doctrine, writings of the Church Fathers, and the consensus of the Church Catholic, there is no authority found in antiquity to give consent to the modern practice and teaching of some communities of faith in these times in support of the heretical practice of ordaining women in the sacred orders of ordained ministry.