

PATRISTIC TESTIMONY ON WOMEN'S ORDINATION IN *INTER INSIGNIORES*

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*[Editor's Note: The author studies the testimony of the Church Fathers cited in *Inter insigniores*, the 1976 document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. He inquires to what extent the Fathers of the Church support the 1995 response of the CDF that the teaching on the inability of the Church to ordain women is infallible by reason of the ordinary and universal magisterium. He concludes that the eight patristic citations provide meager support for the response.]*

ON OCTOBER 28, 1995, the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) responded to a *dubium*: "Whether the teaching that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women, which is presented in the Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio sacerdotalis* to be held definitively, is to be understood as belonging to the deposit of faith." The congregation answered:

In the affirmative. This teaching requires definitive assent, since, founded on the written word of God and from the beginning constantly preserved and applied in the tradition of the church, it has been set forth infallibly by the ordinary and universal magisterium (cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium* 25.2). Thus, in the present circumstances, the Roman Pontiff, exercising his proper office of confirming the brethren (cf. Lk 22:32), has handed on this same teaching by a formal declaration, explicitly stating what is to be held always, everywhere and by all as belonging to the deposit of faith.¹

The congregation here neither claimed to be infallible itself, nor did it attach infallibility directly to Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Letter of May 1994. Rather it appealed to the constant, universal teaching of the Church's magisterium as teaching this infallibly. It did not offer at this time any evidence to show that this is indeed the case. However, the

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¹ "Reply to the *Dubium* Concerning the Teaching Contained in the Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*," October 28, 1995, in *Origins* 25 (November 30, 1995) 401; official text in *Acta apostolicae sedis* [AAS] 87 (1995) 1114.

first section of the congregation's declaration *Inter insigniores* on the ordination of women, issued October 15, 1976,² presented a sampling of the teaching of the Church Fathers on the matter. This section was entitled "The Church's Constant Tradition." Since this is the only place where the CDF has attempted to offer some evidence for constant, universal, and hence infallible, teaching, it seems appropriate in view of the more recent reply to reexamine the evidence given in the earlier document.

We should note at the start that it would be quite unreasonable to expect a document like *Inter insigniores* to present a full patristic argument. That would require extensive citations from every period of patristic teaching and would exceed the unavoidable limits of such a document. However, one could reasonably expect that the citations offered would be among the best and most telling that are available. If these selected texts are weak and inconclusive, the evidence for infallible teaching would be weak and inconclusive.

Inter insigniores offered citations from the Church Fathers in support of two propositions. First, the Fathers noted and condemned the exercise of priestly ministry granted women in some sects, particularly those of the Gnostics, and they considered this unacceptable in the Church. Second, they expressed the central reason for this opposition in the Church's intention to remain faithful to the kind of ordained ministry willed by Christ and carefully maintained by the apostles; the Church showed this faithfulness by calling only men to the priestly order and ministry in its true sense.

OPPOSITION OF THE CHURCH FATHERS

Irenaeus

Inter insigniores offered five authorities in support of the first proposition. The first is Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 1.13.2. The passage describes a Gnostic religious service with overtones of magic:

As he [Marcus] feigns to give thanks over the cup mixed with wine, and draws out at great length the prayer of invocation, he makes the cup appear to be purple or red so that it seems that Grace, who is from the regions which are above all things, dropped her own blood into that cup because of his invocation, and that those who are present greatly desire to taste of that drink, so that Grace, who was invoked by the magician, might rain upon them too. Moreover, having handed mixed cups to the women, he commands them to give thanks over them in his presence. And when this has been done, he himself brings forward another cup much larger than that over which the duped woman gave thanks, and pours from the smaller cup, over which thanks had been given by the woman, into the one which he himself brought forward. At the same time he says over it these words: "May Grace who is before all things, unthinkable and unspeakable, fill your inner self and increase in you her own knowledge,

² AAS 69 (1977) 98-116.

by planting the mustard seed in good ground." By saying some such words and driving the wretched woman to madness, he appears to have worked wonders, namely, that the large cup was filled from the small one, even to overflowing. Still other acts similar to these he performed and deceived many and drew them after himself.³

In this Gnostic ritual a certain Marcus pretends to make the blood of the divine Charis or Grace present in a cup. Some women give thanks over a smaller cup, which then appears to fill a much larger cup to overflowing. What Irenaeus objects to is that the whole thing is a blasphemous hoax. He raises no special objection to the involvement of women. He would be no less opposed if men were performing this rite. Furthermore, it is difficult to see in what sense women are here exercising priestly ministry. It may well be that Irenaeus objected to women exercising priestly ministry in the Church, but this passage does not show it.

Tertullian

The second passage is Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum* 41.5. Tertullian is objecting to the slipshod procedures of certain heretics:

All [the heretics] are puffed up, all promise knowledge. Their catechumens are perfect before they are fully instructed. The very women of these heretics, how insolent they are! They dare to teach, to dispute, to enact exorcisms, to offer cures—perhaps even to baptize. Their ordinations are thoughtless, capricious, unstable . . . For even on laymen they enjoy priestly functions.⁴

Tertullian is objecting to the frivolous conduct of certain heretical groups. One instance of this is the way some women teach, dispute, exorcise, heal, and may even baptize. That is all he says about women. His further talk about ordinations has nothing to do with women. He is objecting to the frivolous conduct of men, to the capricious and changeable character of their ordinations. He would certainly object to the ordination of women, but that is not what he is doing here. However, scarcely anyone today would object to women doing, at least under some circumstances, the things Tertullian objects to them doing. Pontifical Faculties grant women academic degrees to teach theology. Women, just as the members of the laity who are men, may baptize licitly in danger of death, and validly at any time. No doubt an argument could be constructed from this passage that if Tertullian objects to women doing these things, he would much more object to priestly ordination. However, since no one today admits the foundation of such

³ *Patrologia Graeca*, J. Migne, ed., 7.580–81; *St. Irenaeus of Lyons against the Heresies*, vol. 1, *Ancient Christian Writers* 55, trans. Dominic J. Unger, O.F.M. Cap. (New York: Paulist, 1992) 55–56.

⁴ My translation of Tertullian is based on the critical edition found in *Sources Chrétiennes* 46, ed. R. F. Refoulé, O.P. (Paris: Cerf, 1957) 147–48. See also CC 1, 221.

an argument (the inability of women to do these things), it is not really convincing to appeal to an argument based on it.

Firmilian

The third citation is from Firmilian, bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia (d. ca. 268), who opposed Pope Stephen I in the matter of the rebaptism of heretics. In Firmilian's letter to Cyprian,⁵ he offers an argument against Pope Stephen in defense of Cyprian's position that those baptized by heretics should be rebaptized.

Suddenly, a certain woman started up in our midst: she presented herself as a prophetess, being in a state of ecstasy and acting as if she were filled with the Holy Spirit. But she was so deeply under the sway of the principal demons that she managed to disturb and deceive the brethren for a long time by performing astonishing and preternatural feats. . . . And that woman, through the illusions and trickeries of the devil, had devised a number of ways for deceiving the faithful. Among other practices by which she deceived many, she frequently dared even to use this one: employing a by no means despicable form of invocation, she would pretend to sanctify the bread and celebrate the Eucharist, and she would offer the sacrifice to the Lord not without the sacred recitation of the wonted ritual formula. And she would baptize many also, adopting the customary and legitimate wording of the baptismal interrogation. And all this she did in such a way that she appeared to deviate in no particular from ecclesiastical discipline. What, then, are we to say about such a baptism, where an evil demon baptized through the agency of a woman? Can it be that Stephen and his adherents extend their approval even to this baptism, especially as it came complete with Trinitarian credal formula and the legitimate invocation of the Church? Is it credible that forgiveness of sins was granted or that the rebirth of the saving waters was duly accomplished in a case where everything may have been done in semblance of the truth but was in fact done though the agency of a demon?⁶

It should be noted that the heart of Firmilian's objection is that the person baptizing is the instrument of a demon, not that she is a woman. Even a man baptizing under similar circumstances would be baptizing invalidly in Firmilian's view. The same thing should be said about the performance of the eucharistic rite: the person presuming to do this acts "through the illusions and trickeries of the devil." That she is a woman may aggravate the matter in Firmilian's view, but it is not the point of his objection. It cannot in context be taken as an argument against the possibility of ordaining women.

Origen

The fourth citation adduced to show that the Church Fathers considered the ordination of women unacceptable is found in fragments of

⁵ Cyprian, Letter 75, 10.2–5 and 11.1, in *Sancti Cypriani Epistularium*, G. F. Diercks, ed. (Turnhout: Brepols, 1976) 590–93.

⁶ *The Letters of Cyprian of Carthage*, vol. 4, Ancient Christian Writers 47, trans. G. W. Clarke (New York: Newman, 1989) 85–86.

Origen's commentary on 1 Corinthians.⁷ Origen is commenting on the text of 1 Cor 14:34–35: "Women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church." This is his comment:

For insofar as all speak and can speak if a revelation should come to them (cf. 1 Cor 14:30–31), he says: "Let the women be silent in the Churches" (1 Cor 14:34). But the disciples of the women, who were instructed by Priscilla and Maximilla, not by Christ the husband of the bride (cf. John 3:29), were not obedient to this command. But nevertheless let us be reasonable also as we reply to the arguments they find plausible. "Philip the evangelist had four daughters," they say, "and they prophesied (cf. Acts 21:9). And if they prophesied, why is it strange that our prophetesses also prophesy?" as they say. But we shall put an end to these arguments. First, when you say that your prophetesses have prophesied, demonstrate the signs of prophecy among them. And second, even if Philip's daughters prophesied, they did not speak in the churches, for we do not have this in the Acts of the Apostles; nor do we find it even in the Old Testament. It is attested that Deborah was a prophetess (cf. Judg 4:4). And Mariam, the sister of Aaron, took the timbrel and led the women (cf. Exod 14:20). But you would not find that Deborah addressed the people as Jeremiah and Isaiah did; you would not find that Huldah spoke to the people, although she was a prophetess; she spoke to a certain individual who came to her (cf. 2 Kgs 22:14). And Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher has been mentioned in the Gospel (cf. Luke 2:36), but she did not speak in the church. Therefore, even though a woman be granted to be a prophetess by a prophetic sign, nevertheless she is not permitted to speak in church. When Mariam the prophetess spoke she was leading some women. "For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church" (1 Cor 14:35), and "I do not permit a woman to teach in general nor to have authority over a man" (cf. 1 Tim 2:12).⁸

Once again, the basis of Origen's argument is not admitted today. Women speak in church on many occasions. Not only do they read the Scriptures in church, there are frequent occasions where they offer reflections to the assembled faithful. Canon Law (Can. 766) says without distinction: "Lay persons can be admitted to preach in a church or oratory if it is necessary in certain circumstances, or if it is useful in particular cases according to the prescriptions of the conference of bishops and with due regard for can. 767, §1." Canon 767, §1, referred to here, reserves the preaching of the homily to a priest or deacon, so it is still officially forbidden for a woman, as well as a lay man, to preach in this way at a eucharistic celebration. But this is to some degree a technicality. She may comment on the readings at some time

⁷ Greek text in "Fragmentum in 1 Cor. 74," *Journal of Theological Studies* 10 (Oct. 1908—not 1909, as cited in the AAS) 41–42.

⁸ *The Montanist Oracles and Testimonia*, Ronald E. Heine, ed. (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University; Leuven: Peeters, 1989) 99.

other than immediately after they are proclaimed, or her words may be called something else, e.g. a catechetical instruction. Hence Origen's prohibition has no relevance to the ability of the Church to ordain women to the priesthood.

Epiphanius

The fifth citation is from Epiphanius, *Panarion* 49.2–3, 78.23, and 79.2–4.⁹ Here we have clear and strong opposition to the priestly ordination of women.

49.2.1: They [the heretics] use the Old and the New Testaments, and likewise affirm the resurrection of the dead. Their founder is Quintilla, along with Priscilla who was also a Phrygian prophetess. [2.2] They cite many texts which have no relevance, and give thanks to Eve because she was the first to eat from the tree of wisdom. And as scriptural support for their ordination of women as clergy, they say that Moses' sister was a prophetess. What is more, they say, Philip had four daughters who prophesied. . . . [2.5] They have woman bishops, presbyters and the rest; they say that none of this makes any difference because "In Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female (Gal 3:28)." This is what I have learned [about them]. However, they call them Artotyrites because they set bread and cheese on the altar in their mysteries and celebrate their mysteries with them.¹⁰

49.3.1: But every human illusion (comes of) deserting the right faith and opting for something impossible, and for various frenzies and secret rites. For if they do not cling to the anchor of the truth but entrust themselves (to their own reason), their minds are always maddened, and bring them [to frenzy] for any reason at all. [3.2] Even though it is because of Eve that they ordain women to the episcopate and presbyterate, they should listen to the Lord who says, "Thy resort shall be to thine husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Gen 3:16). [3.3] And they have overlooked the command of the apostle, "I suffer not a woman to speak, or to have authority over a man" [1 Tim 2:12], and again, "The man is not of the woman, but the woman of the man" [1 Cor 11:8], and again, "Adam was not deceived, but Eve, deceived first, fell into condemnation" [1 Tim 2:14]. What prolific error there is in this world!¹¹

78.23.3: . . . For (I have heard) in turn that others, who are out of their minds on the subject of this holy Ever-virgin, have done their best and are doing their best, in the grip both of madness and of folly, to substitute her for God. [23.4] For they say that certain Thracian women there in Arabia have introduced this nonsense, and they bake a loaf in the name of the Ever-virgin, gather together, and (both) attempt an excess and undertake a forbidden, blasphemous act in the holy Virgin's name, and offer sacrifice in her name with woman officiants.¹²

⁹ *Griechische christliche Schriftsteller* 2 (37) 473 and 477–79.

¹⁰ *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis*, 3 vols. in 2, trans. Frank Williams (New York: Brill, 1987) 2.22.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 2.22–23.

¹² *Ibid.* 2.618.

The passage 79.2–4 is an extended proof of the fact that women have never exercised priestly office whether in the Old Testament or in the New. The following excerpts from the passage show something of Epiphanius's view of women:

79.2.1 Now then, servants of God, let us adopt a manly frame of mind and dispel the madness of these women. The speculation is entirely feminine, and the malady of the deluded Eve all over again. Or rather, it is the malady of the snake, the seducing beast, and the false promise of the one who spoke in it. This promise made no (sound) suggestion and did not make its undertaking good, but only caused death by calling the untrue true, and encouraging disobedience by the sight of the tree, and aversion to the truth itself by attraction to many things.¹³

79.4.2 But once more, where has this new story come from? The women's pride and female madness. What has nourished the wickedness that—through the female, once more!—pours the feminine habit of speculation into our minds, (and), by encouraging its characteristic luxury, tries to compel the wretched human race to overstep its proper bounds?¹⁴

What emerges from these passages is Epiphanius's conviction that women are simply inferior to men. In a somewhat earlier passage, not cited by the CDF, Epiphanius makes even clearer the reason for his opposition to women's ordination: "And who but women are the teachers of this [excessive glorification of Mary]? Women are unstable, prone to error, and mean-spirited" (79.1.6).¹⁵

If Epiphanius in his writings had shown respect for women and regarded them as equal to men in human dignity, then we might take seriously his unwillingness to ordain women. But he harbors a misogynist spirit from which could come only a negative appraisal of women's capacity for ordination. This profoundly influences his way of interpreting the Scriptures. He is scarcely a noble or credible witness in this matter.

FIDELITY TO CHRIST'S WILL

The second proposition of *Inter insigniores* held that "the central reason for this opposition to the ordination of women [is] the intention of the Church to remain faithful to the type of ordained ministry willed by Christ and carefully maintained by the Apostles." In support of this the document adduced three authorities.

Didascalia Apostolorum

The first citation is from the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, chapter 15. This work originated in Syria between 200 and 250, and presents itself as a composition of the Twelve Apostles. It is an early collection of legal

¹³ *Ibid.* 2.621.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 2.623.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 2.621.

and liturgical matters. The passages referred to object to women teaching and baptizing:

It is neither right nor necessary therefore that women should be teachers, and especially concerning the name of Christ and the redemption of his passion. For you have not been appointed to this, O women, and especially widows, that you should teach, but that you should pray and entreat the Lord God. For He the Lord God, Jesus Christ our Teacher, sent us Twelve to instruct the People and the Gentiles; and there were with us women disciples, Mary Magdalene and Mary the daughter of James and the other Mary; but He did not send them to instruct the people with us. For if it were required that women should teach, our Master Himself would have commanded these to give instruction with us.¹⁶

That a woman should baptize, or that one should be baptized by a woman, we do not counsel, for it is a transgression of the commandment, and a great peril to her who baptizes and to him who is baptized. For if it were lawful to be baptized by a woman, our Lord and Teacher Himself would have been baptized by Mary His mother, whereas He was baptized by John, like others of the people. Do not therefore imperil yourselves, brethren and sisters, by acting beside the law of the Gospel.¹⁷

Once again, we need to observe that today one does not regard women as incapable of teaching or baptizing. Since we do not admit this inability, we cannot argue from it for evidence against the ability of women to receive priestly ordination. No doubt the writer would object to this, but his objection would be founded on an error. The appeal to the fact that Mary, the mother of Jesus, neither taught nor baptized was adduced by some later writers. The failure to discriminate between the baptism of John which Jesus received, and the baptism of Jesus, which the apostles were sent to confer, is a weakness in this argument. The remark that Mary Magdalene was not commissioned to teach overlooks her mission to proclaim the Resurrection of Jesus to the apostles themselves (Jn 20:17-18).

Apostolic Constitutions

The second reference is to the *Apostolic Constitutions*. This work, dating from around the end of the fourth century, is largely a compilation of earlier documents. It incorporated much of the above cited *Didascalia Apostolorum* from the first half of the third century. This reference, being largely a citation from the earlier work, simply confirms the same position without adding anything significant. Thus we read in Bk. III, c. 6:

We do not permit women to teach in the Church, but only to pray and listen to those who teach; for our Master and Lord himself Jesus Christ when he sent

¹⁶ *Didascalia Apostolorum*, trans. R. Hugh Connolly (Oxford: Clarendon, 1929) 3.6.133.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 3.9.142.

us Twelve to make disciples of the people and of the nations, nowhere sent out women to preach although he did not lack them. For there were with us the Mother of the Lord and his sisters; also Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Martha and Mary the sisters of Lazarus, and Salome and certain others. For, if it had been necessary for women to teach, he himself would first have commanded these also to instruct the people with us. For "if the man is the head of his wife (1 Cor 11:3)," it is not right that the rest of the body should govern the head.¹⁸

And in chapter 9 of the same book:

Now, as to a woman baptizing, we assure you there is no small danger to women who undertake this. Therefore we do not advise it; for it is unsafe, or rather unlawful and impious. For if the "man is the head of the woman," and is appointed for the priesthood, it is not just to set aside the act of creation, and leaving the principal to come to the last part of the body. For the woman is the body of the man, taken from his side, and subject to him, from whom she was separated for the bearing of children. For he says, "He shall rule over you" (Gen 3:16). For the ruler of the woman is the man, as being her head. But if in what we wrote earlier we have not permitted them to teach, how will anyone allow them, contrary to nature, to hold the office of a priest? For this is a sin of ignorant godless Gentiles, to ordain women priests for the female deities, not a command of Christ. For if baptism were to be administered by women, certainly our Lord would have been baptized by his own mother, and not by John; or when he sent us to baptize, he would have sent women along with us for this purpose. But, as it is, nowhere did he either prescribe this or hand it on in writing, knowing as he did what nature requires and what decency demands, since he is both the creator of nature, and the lawgiver of the cosmos.¹⁹

It is noteworthy that Jesus' way of acting is explained by the supposed natural inferiority of women. Clearly this work does not teach a distinct but equal dignity of men and women; it teaches the natural subjection of women to men.

John Chrysostom

The third authority adduced to support the proposition that the Fathers objected to the ordination of women out of fidelity to the practice of Jesus is John Chrysostom in his *Six Books on the Priesthood*, 2.2.²⁰ He argues from the greatness of the priestly tasks to the inability of all women and of most men to perform them:

The other things I have mentioned could easily be carried out by many of those under authority, women as well as men. But when someone has to preside over the Church and be entrusted with the care of so many souls, then let all womankind give way before the magnitude of the task—and indeed most men.

¹⁸ My translation is from the Greek critical edition *Constitutiones Apostolorum*, ed. Paul A. de Lagarde (Osnabrück: Otto Zeller, 1966) 100–1.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 105–6.

²⁰ *Patrologia Graeca*, J. Migne, ed., 48.633.

Bring before us those who far excel all others and are as much above the rest in spiritual stature as Saul was above the whole nation of the Hebrews in bodily stature—or rather, far more. Let us not look for a difference only “from the shoulder and upward” but let the difference between shepherd and sheep be as great as the distinction between rational and irrational creatures, not to say even more, since matters of much greater moment are at stake.²¹

This is certainly an unusual passage. We may note to start with that John Chrysostom makes no appeal to the example of Christ and the desire to remain faithful to it, as the CDF stated in citing this passage. Also “priesthood” in this place refers to the office of bishop, not the presbyterate. John is encouraging a certain Basil to accept ordination as a bishop, by explaining what a noble task it is. He maintains that those called to be bishops should be as much superior to the rest of Christians as human beings are superior to irrational animals. All women and most men fail here.

We may make three observations. First, the kind of superiority Chrysostom describes contrasts strangely with Jesus' words to the apostles, “You are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students. And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father—the one in heaven. Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah. The greatest among you will be your servant” (Matt 23:8–11). There is no hint in the New Testament that those who exercise authority in the Christian community are superior to others in the way that Chrysostom suggests. The First Letter to Timothy tells that Church leader: “Do not speak harshly to an older man, but speak to him as a father, to younger men as brothers, to older women as mothers, to younger women as sisters—with absolute purity” (1 Tim 5:1–2). This, of course, is not to deny or question the real authority with which he speaks. Second, it is clear that Chrysostom regards women as inferior to men. All women must give way before the magnitude of the task; some men may be found who are up to it. In other words, the basic reason for Chrysostom's denying the possibility of ordaining women is that he takes them to be fundamentally inferior, and unequal to the task. One who is unwilling to accept this premise must find another reason for saying that women cannot be ordained, if one wishes to maintain this. Third, Chrysostom's remarks in any case apply to the episcopacy. One cannot directly argue from them to the inability of the Church to ordain women to the presbyterate, though Chrysostom would no doubt object to that also on the basis of his conviction of women's inferiority.

CONCLUSION

What may we conclude about these citations from the Fathers? First, much of the evidence cited by the CDF does not directly touch the

²¹ John Chrysostom, *Six Books on the Priesthood*, trans. Graham Neville (London: SPCK, 1964) 54.

ordination of women. Furthermore, arguments drawn from the inability of women to teach and baptize miss the point, since this inability is no longer admitted. Likewise, arguments drawn from the activity of women under diabolic influence also miss the point, since men in the same circumstances would be doing something objectionable; the fact that women are involved is not the point of the objection.

Second, what does emerge from much of the patristic evidence cited by the CDF is the conviction that women by nature, temperament, and social status are inferior to men. For this reason they cannot be ordained priests. Even the practice and intention of Jesus are set within the context of this inferiority. But the CDF does not admit or argue from this inferiority. Why not? The Fathers are clearly teaching it. However, the Second Vatican Council reversed nearly two thousand years of popular teaching when it proclaimed the equality of all human beings and deplored the kinds of discrimination still found in society, particularly in the case of women.²² Thus the CDF recognizes, as all intelligent persons recognize today, that the ancient Fathers were voicing a prejudice they shared with their contemporary society. If the Fathers were wrong regarding the inferiority of women, why may they not have been wrong on the inability of women to be ordained priests, since this inferiority is the basic reason for their stance on ordination?

It seems to me that if the examples cited by the CDF as the testimony of the Church Fathers are at all representative of what tradition has to offer, we must acknowledge that their testimony offers meager support for the claim that the tradition of not ordaining women was motivated primarily by the Church's intention to remain faithful to the will of Christ.

²² "Where they have not yet won it, women claim for themselves equality (*paritatem*) with men before the law and in fact" (*Gaudium et spes* no. 9; see also no. 12). "Nevertheless, with respect to the fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language, or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent. For in truth it must still be regretted that fundamental personal rights are not yet being universally honored. Such is the case of a woman who is denied the right and freedom to choose a husband, to embrace a state of life, or to acquire an education or cultural benefits equal to those recognized for men" (*ibid.* no. 29; see also no. 60). And in speaking of the work of the laity, the council taught: "Since in our times women have an ever more active share in the whole life of society, it is very important that they participate more widely also in the various fields of the Church's apostolate" (*Apostolicam actuositatem* 9). The translations above are all drawn from *The Documents of Vatican II*, Walter M. Abbott, S.J., ed. (New York: Guild, 1966).