

ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM AND ST. OLYMPIAS, DEACONESS  
A MODEL FOR THE COLLABORATION OF MEN AND WOMEN  
IN CHURCH MINISTRY

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## ABSTRACT

### ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM AND ST. OLYMPIAS, DEACONESS A MODEL FOR THE COLLABORATION OF MEN AND WOMEN IN CHURCH MINISTRY

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The purpose of this thesis is to contribute to the conversation concerning the role of women in the Church. The basis for this thesis is the 2004 document by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and the World*. The letter is explored through a dialogue between the Magisterium and feminists. The purpose of the dialogue approach is to encourage unity between feminists and the Magisterium. This thesis defines collaborative ministry as a means for men and women to increase efforts in evangelization and the practice of charity.

This thesis addresses the issue of gender differences. Differences do not imply inferiority rather gifts bestowed by the creator for use in building up the kingdom of God

on earth. In working toward the full collaboration of men and women in the Church and world it is necessary to explore some gender specific gifts. The newest scientific research on the female brain is explored in order to consider the full person of woman when identifying female gifts to accentuate in collaborative ministry. Scientific evidence suggests that women have the gifts within their proper nature to serve the Church in diaconal ministry. In addition, it is within the authority of the Church to ordain women in this ministry.

The relationship of John Chrysostom and Deaconess Olympias is presented as a model of collaboration in Church ministry. The thesis argues against claims that Chrysostom was misogynist. A significant component of this defense includes an evaluation of several extant letters that Chrysostom wrote to Olympias. The extant letters are reflective of some of the differences between men and women.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Purpose, Thesis and Method

The issue of the role of women in the Church is one that I approach with great personal interest and passion. I approach this topic as a woman, a wife, a mother, a student and a teacher of theology, a person active in parish ministry, and as a baptized member of the Roman Catholic Church. This issue has been a catalyst for great debate within the Church in recent years. The debate has led to contention and division within the Church community.

Undoubtedly, the equal dignity of women has not been consistently recognized by all members of the body throughout the history of the Church. It could be argued that multiple factors have played a part in the lack of appreciation and celebration of the gift of woman to the Church. Great strides have been made in recognizing the innate dignity and equal value of women in the Church and world. I believe that study, discussion, and awareness must continue to be given to the topic. The pursuit of the divine truth regarding the role of women in the Church should not encourage division within the Church. Rather, the truth should be sought with a spirit of *caritas* and *philia* which serves to give witness to the Christian life and mission.

The world needs the witness and strength of a unified Church. As members of Christ's Church we are called to reach out and make the love of Christ present in the world. Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit we are called to pay attention to one



another and hear the cry of the poor and vulnerable. The cry of the poor should move us to action so that we reach out to our marginalized brothers and sisters in a spirit of solidarity. We must work to foster a culture of life which is so desperately needed.

Our mission of evangelization requires us to bring the life-giving message of the gospel to men and women who are in great need of hope.

In order to advance the mission of the Church the unified collaboration of men and women is essential. Men and women have been created differently for a purpose. The differences between men and women must be recognized, celebrated, and fully incorporated into the life of the Church.

## **Purpose**

My purpose in writing this thesis is to contribute to the discussion on the role of women in the Church in a manner that will encourage unity rather than division. It is my hope to maintain faithfulness to tradition while acknowledging the fact that women must be more fully incorporated into the life of the church. *Gaudium est spes* says, “Women now work in almost all spheres. It is fitting that they are able to assume their proper role in accordance with their own nature.”<sup>1</sup> I will identify some gifts proper to the nature of woman. In consideration of these gifts, I will suggest that women be ordained as deacons. I believe that this will allow women to minister in a “fitting manor” according to their proper nature.<sup>2</sup>

1. *Gaudium est spes*, 60.

2. In Church documents and this thesis “proper” as in “proper nature” refers to what is distinctive to a particular gender. This term is not intended to limit women to certain roles. The term is used to recognize what distinct abilities God has granted women for the mission of the Church. It seems necessary for the Church to provide women with the ability to serve according to what is “fitting” to their proper nature.

## **Thesis**

The argument of this thesis will unfold through four points. (1) Women and their gifts are not fully incorporated into the life and mission of the Church. This factor has led to anger and disunity within the Church prompting the magisterium to encourage dialogue on ways to promote greater collaboration between men and women in the Church; (2) Differences between men and women are clearly part of the divine plan. Differences must be considered when determining ways to work for greater collaboration in the Church. Scientific studies have shown that women are organically created to experience a greater sense of empathy for others. This empathy has the potential to move them to an active ministry in the service of the marginalized. In the Church, ministry of service to the marginalized is synonymous with diaconal ministry; (3) John Chrysostom and Deaconess Olympias are a model of collaborative ministry in the Church primarily because their gifts were recognized and highlighted for the benefit of the mission of the Church. They supported and assisted one another whenever possible so that their ministries would thrive. Respect overcame competitiveness and hostility which yielded fruitful ministries. (4) Ordaining women to diaconal ministry is within the authority of the Church and would serve to fully incorporate women into the life of the Church. The ordination of women to diaconal ministry would provide the Church with greater access to the gifts of women for use in meeting fundamental Church objectives such as evangelization and the practice of charity. In addition, due to the diversity of the members of the Church, female deacons would reflect the recognition of the need for a variety of official ministers in the Church. John Chrysostom and Deaconess Olympias

provide evidence of the fruit that the Church will produce should female deacons, once again, be a part of Church life.

## **Method**

My method will consist of exploring the *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and the World*. In this exploration I will provide a dialogue between feminists and the magisterium. I will then define Christian collaboration and show how collaboration requires the full and active participation of men and women for the maximum benefit of the Church.

This thesis will consider the controversial issue of differences between men and women. I do not believe that the recognition of differences implies an inferiority of women. However, for a great period of time women were considered to be inferior to men because of an incorrect understanding of differences. I do not believe that the recognition of differences should exclude a man or a woman from certain roles in society. Indeed both men and women are capable of caring for children, working outside of the home, taking on political leadership and are capable of having superior intellectual ability. However, women and men seem to have some differences and this is somehow reflective of God's plan for the Church and the world.

I will explore what science is saying about these differences and how this information can be used to enhance the collaboration between men and women in the Church. I will show that the natural gifts of women provide them with an organic ability to serve the Church through the ministry of *diakonia*. I will briefly present the diaconal

role that women have taken in the Church. This exploration will begin in the Letters of St. Paul and proceed through a look at ordained deaconesses.

I believe that a critical component of this thesis is the ability to provide a model of an ideal collaborative relationship in church ministry. I believe that St. John Chrysostom and Deaconess Olympias serve as a model for the collaboration of men and women in church ministry. In this thesis I will provide an historical narrative based on the ministries and relationship of John Chrysostom and Deaconess Olympias. I will analyze their relationship through the use of primary source writings to identify components that reflect Christian collaboration between a man and a woman in Church ministry. Through the use of primary source writings by Chrysostom, I will explore his view of the role and value of women in the Church. While Chrysostom has been accused of being misogynist, I believe that a full exploration of his writings will show that he was by no means sexist. When kept in context, several of his writings show that he was supportive of women and their inclusion in ordained diaconal ministry within the Church. Of significance to this thesis will be several extant letters written to Deaconess Olympias by John Chrysostom. The letters, and other sources, highlight the honor, respect, and collaborative support that they gave to one another as members of the body working to build up the Church.

I will conclude this thesis with an exploration of the practical implications of reinstating the ministry of the deaconess. I will address arguments against the reinstatement of the deaconess. Ultimately, I will show that it is fully within the authority of the Church to ordain women to the permanent diaconate.

I have prayed for guidance and inspiration from the Holy Spirit in the writing of this thesis. I hope that it is received with a spirit of openness and good will. A quote by Peter Lombard sums up my understanding of ideal collaborative ministry between men and women. “God did not create woman from Adam’s head because she was not to be his master, nor from his foot because she was not to be his slave, but from his side because she was to be his companion and friend.”<sup>1</sup>

1. Quoted in Francis Martin, *The Feminist Question: Feminist Theology In The Light of Christian Tradition*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdsman, 1994).

## CHAPTER 1

### The Magisterium Speaks: A Call for the Collaboration of Men and Women

On July 31, 2004 the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith released the letter *On the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World*. The impetus which prompted the writing of this letter was arguably the feminist movement. Fergus Kerr suggests that “The letter’s purpose is to outline the theological framework for a properly Catholic understanding of the relationship between women and men.”<sup>1</sup> The letter was scrutinized by many feminists, and ultimately it received mixed reviews with many feminists arguing that it fell short of promoting a truly egalitarian spirit in the Church. Feminists were hoping to see some conversation on the issue of female ordination.<sup>2</sup> While female ordination was not addressed it is difficult to deny that the letter had a tone not previously exhibited in documents concerning the role of women. Clearly the magisterium is reaching out to women with a desire to work for unity rather than division. While feminists were disappointed in the end result of the letter, some women were excited about the opportunities initiated by the letter. Pia de Solenni, a

1. Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007) 193.

2. In 1976 the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith released *Inter Insigniores*, in which it stated that both Scripture and Tradition supported a male only priesthood. The document cited the tradition that Jesus only chose twelve men as apostles and the apostles continued to only choose men for sacramental duties. In addition it argued that Jesus would not have been sexist in choosing only men because he was free from sin. It also pointed out that Jesus had an extremely high regard for his mother, Mary, and she was not called to priestly ministry. The document added a new concept, “the analogy of faith.” This concept argued that because the priest represents Christ and Christ was a man, priests must be male. The document was met with resistance from many theologians. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Inter Insigniores* (15 October, 1976). Dennis Doyle points out that the analogy of faith was presented in a speculative manner, addressing the question of what might Jesus have been intending when he passed on the ability to preside at the Eucharist to men only. In 2004 John Paul II released *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* which declared “Wherefore, in order that all doubt may be removed regarding a matter of great importance a matter that pertains to the Church’s divine constitution itself in virtue of my ministry of confirming the brethren I declare that the Church has not authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church’s faithful.” The issue of female ordination to the diaconate has not been definitively decided.

writer for National Catholic Reporter, suggests that the letter serves to set the groundwork for theological discussion on the differences between men and women. Moreover, she states, “In a time when sexual differences have been downplayed and even disregarded, this element of our theology takes on an even more striking significance.”<sup>3</sup>

Undeniably the feminist movement has done great things for women. This movement has served as a catalyst to remind some in the Church and the world of the natural dignity and equality given to women on the very basis of their personhood. In addition, the feminist movement has worked to recover much of the history and significance of women in the Church and the world. Feminists have also worked tirelessly to raise awareness of justice issues that continue to plague women such as the need for equal pay for equal work, equal educational opportunities, and protection from domestic abuse.<sup>4</sup> Yet, with all of the good that has come from this movement some would argue that feminism has also served as a divisive mechanism in the Church. Division in the Church is a significant concern. I would like to suggest that the letter is specifically addressing the division between some women and a *specific* group of men. I believe the division addressed is

3. Pia de Solenni “Beginning a Serious Conversation about Sexual Difference,” National Catholic Reporter (August 13, 2004) 6.

4. Sara Butler points out that throughout the “history” of feminism several forms of feminism have evolved and that feminism has occurred in two waves. The first wave, occurred primarily from the late 1800’s through the mid 1900’s. At this time, Socialist feminism which was a reaction to Marxism socialism and the Industrial Revolution developed. Socialist feminism called for economic liberation of women. Leo XIII in *Rerum Novarum* responded by arguing for the protection of the right of women to stay home and raise a family vs. being objectified as a means for industrialists to get wealthy. Liberal feminism embraced the Enlightenment doctrine of egalitarianism and can be linked to the civil rights movement and objection of sex role stereotyping, equal pay for equal work and reproductive rights. Pope Pius XII responded by stating that women and men have equal dignity but have different and complementary roles. Pius encouraged women to embrace their role as mothers. Paul VI responded with *Humanae Vitae* arguing the equal dignity of husbands and wives. Cultural Feminism extolled the moral superiority and special gifts of women. Through the work of Edith Stein, Pius X, Benedict XV and Pius XI many Catholic women were educated and encouraged to participate in the mission of the Church by becoming agents of social change. Women’s proper role based on personhood was not really addressed. After Vatican II a second wave of feminism began. The new wave gained momentum from the second Vatican Council’s emphasis on the equal dignity of men and women in the Church. With this wave, liberal feminism rejected sex role stereotyping in the Church and pushed for the ordination of female priests. This movement led to what is considered a radical feminism which calls for a total revamping of Christianity. Radical Feminism sees Christianity as patriarchal and oppressive to women. The Magisterium cannot endorse radical feminism as it rejects biblical revelation and suggests that the Church has betrayed the gospel message since post apostolic times. This movement works to offer feminist liturgies, thus this movement is in significant tension, if not opposition, to Catholic doctrine. The Magisterium has suggested a “New Feminism” which offers support for women in areas of child-raising, daycare, divorce, abandonment and sexual violence. For more on the waves of feminism and the response of the Church see Sara Butler, Women in the Church, in *The Gift of the Church*, eds. Patrick Grainfield, Peter C. Phan (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000) 415-433.

that between feminists and the magisterium. The magisterium, a male only group, has the ability to limit or increase the role of women in the Church.

My objective in this chapter is to explore the document while incorporating a dialogue between the magisterium and feminists. It is my hope that I will add to the conversation between “men and women of good will” on the collaboration of men and women in the Church and world. I will conclude the chapter with characteristics of Christian collaboration.

### **The Document: A Tone is Set**

The letter *On the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and World* does not simply address the need for collaboration between men and women. The letter also proposes an invitation to engage in theological discussion concerning how to improve the collaboration between men and women. The introduction of the letter states:

These reflections are meant as a starting point for further examination in the Church, as well as an impetus for dialogue with all men and women of good will, in a sincere search for the truth, and in a common commitment to the development of ever more authentic relationships. (1)

A striking feature to note in the introduction is the beautiful implementation of the spirit of the Second Vatican Council. The introduction appears to be responding to the council’s emphasis of the Church as the “People of God.”<sup>5</sup> In addition, one will note the recognition and consideration of the Second Vatican Council’s teaching on the sense of the faithful.<sup>6</sup> This letter was not written with an authoritarian stance. It was written from the heart of the Church with a desire to promote good will and healthy theological discussion in search of the truth.

5. In the document *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, the term “People of God” emerged as the image used to describe all members of the Church. Dennis Doyle suggests that this was significant because it signaled a shift away from an emphasis on the hierarchical nature of the Church to a new emphasis on the Church as made up in a primary sense by all of its members. For more on the significance of the term “People of God” see Dennis Doyle, *The Church Emerging From Vatican II: A Popular Approach to Contemporary Catholicism* (New London: Twenty Third Publications, 2002).

6. The sense of the faithful or *sensus fidei* is the supernatural sense or instinct of the faith possessed by all the believers through baptism.



## **The Letter Explored: A Conversation between the Magisterium and Feminists**

As previously indicated the magisterium is concerned that men and women are becoming adversaries. The letter specifically cites a concern that a feminist tendency has become that of emphasizing areas of subordination which leads to antagonism. “Faced with an abuse of power, the answer for women is to seek power.” (2) The letter continues by suggesting that ultimately this pursuit of power leads to an opposition between men and women. In an attempt to avoid the domination of one sex over the other, it is suggested that some women deny differences. (3)

Upon initial review of the letter several feminists indicated anger at the suggestion that they were interested in a power struggle or in denying their differences.

Sidney Callahan responded:

Those of us in the Church who dissent from current Vatican views should, in the spirit of dialogue, also be acknowledged as sincere seekers of God’s truth. I, as a “gospel feminist,” am saddened and made impatient by Cardinal Ratzinger’s dismissals and accusations of bad motives. The Christian feminists I know are not “seeking power,” or trying to make themselves “the adversaries of men” much less seeking to dominate them. Nor does my disagreement spring from a “deeper motivation” to be freed from one’s biological conditioning.” I embrace the gift of embodiment, which includes brain cells, breasts and a uterus. I take great joy in having borne and nurtured six sons and a daughter in over fifty years of monogamous marriage. My problems with the Vatican views on women arise from my life experience as well as from my professional teaching and study of psychology and moral theology. . . I find the views of this document, however idealistic and heartfelt, too limited. They present a superficially skewed version of biological and theological reality.<sup>7</sup>

The Magisterium should recognize that not all feminists are interested in a power struggle

7. Sidney Callahan, “Ratzinger, Feminist, Not Quite”, *Commonweal* (September 10, 2004) 9. In addition Elizabeth Johnson supports the fact that feminists are not interested in a power struggle with men. Johnson states “In the perspective I am delineating two options are ruled out: reverse sexism, which would place women in dominant positions to the diminishment of men, and a sameness, which would level out genuine variety and particularity, disrespecting uniqueness. Instead the goal is the flourishing of all beings in their uniqueness and interrelation—both sexes, all races and social groups, all creatures in the universe. This calls for a new model of relationship, neither a hierarchical one that requires an over-under structure, nor a univocal one that reduces all to a given norm. The model rather is inclusive, celebratory of difference. . . The goal of feminist theology, in other words is not to make women equal partners in an oppressive system. Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Theological Feminist Discourse* (New York, NY.: Crossroad Publishing, 1992) 32.

or ignoring differences. I will address the issue of differences later in the thesis. I believe that it suffices to say that Christian feminists do not approach the issue of the role of women in the Church with malicious intent; nor is it their desire to seek vengeance due to centuries of oppression. Christian feminists seek to find a way in which the Church will recognize women as complete persons rather than limit women to roles that only emphasize their reproductive ability.

The letter also claims that feminists have become too critical of sacred Scripture.

The letter states:

In addition there arises the idea that the liberation of women requires a criticism of Sacred Scripture which becomes simply another means of handing down a patriarchal conception of God nourished by a male-dominated culture. This train of thought leads to the irrelevance of the idea that the Son of God assumed human nature as a male person. (3)

Indeed feminists do believe that the current roles designated to women in the Church and world are very limiting, and this is primarily due to the patriarchal culture in which the Scriptures were written. Elizabeth Johnson offers some insight on the feminist view of Sacred Scripture, “Feminist interpretation makes piercingly clear that although egalitarian impulses are discernible in the Bible, the texts as such were written mostly by men and for men in a patriarchal cultural context and reflect this fact.”<sup>8</sup> Moreover, many feminists

8. Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Theological Feminist Discourse* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing, 1992) 76. The topic of feminism and Scripture is beyond the scope of this paper, but the Pontifical Biblical Commission has said of the feminist approach “Feminist exegesis has brought many benefits. Women have played a more active part in exegetical research. They have succeeded, often better than men, in detecting the presence, the significance and the role of women in the Bible, in Christian origins and in the church. The worldview of today, because of its greater attention to the dignity of women and to their role in society and in the church, ensures that new questions are put to the biblical text, which in turn occasions new discoveries. Feminine sensitivity helps to unmask and correct certain commonly accepted interpretations which were tendentious and sought to justify the male domination of women. . . . Feminist exegesis often raises questions of power within the church, questions which, as is obvious, are matters of discussion and even of confrontation. In this area, feminist exegesis can be useful to the church only to the degree that it does not fall into the very traps it denounces and that it does not lose sight of the evangelical teaching concerning power as service, a teaching addressed by Jesus to all disciples, men and women.” *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church, Origins, January 6, 1994.*

I believe that Sacred Scripture is indeed divine revelation. Yet, one cannot deny that social influences are also seen in Scripture. When St. Paul was writing his letters to the early Church communities there were some social issues that the Church was facing and thus these social issues influenced his letters. For example, the Church was trying to blend into a pagan society thus issues came up regarding mixed marriages between Christian women and pagans. Catherine Roth points out that in Paul’s epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians we find exhortations to all members of a household to maintain their traditional roles. What was originally a survival strategy for Christian women in pagan households now becomes the norm for families where all the members are Christians. Catherine Roth, *St. John Chrysostom on Marriage and Family Life* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003) 10.

find much of the Tradition of the Church, which is rooted in the Scriptures and frequently expounded on by the Church Fathers, to also fall under this patriarchal “oppressive” category.<sup>9</sup> Yet, in the letter, *On the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and World*, we see the issue of Scripture addressed in a very diplomatic manner. Cathleen Kaveny makes an interesting observation regarding the use of Sacred Scripture in the letter. She states:

The first major section of the letter, on the “biblical vision” of humanity, appears designed to correct the impression that the Scriptures sanction “a patriarchal conception of God nourished by a male-dominated culture.” Ratzinger’s reading of the two accounts of creation in the Book of Genesis stresses their support for the equality of men and women.<sup>10</sup>

The letter does emphasize the equality of men and women based on their personhood and the fact that they are created in the image and likeness of God. For his discussion on this topic Ratzinger relies on John Paul II’s commentary of the first three chapters of Genesis, which he refers to as the “immutable basis of all Christian anthropology.” We are reminded that man is created in the image and likeness of God (Gn 1:26). In addition, we are told that God created them male and female (Gn 1:27), and Adam experienced loneliness. God created a helpmate to be his partner. The term used for helpmate [*ezer*] does not refer to an inferior, but a vital helper. We are told that Adam entered into a relationship with woman because she was on his same level. It was only the woman who was created from the same “flesh” and cloaked in the same mystery who could give a future to the life of man. (6)

While the above passage implies a biblical egalitarianism between men and women

9. I have placed oppressive in quotations because, as Silviu Bunta suggests, while Scripture is considered to be patriarchal, it was not necessarily oppressive. Feminism must be more careful in extrapolating modern realities into a world that does not, and maybe even cannot, relate to its high ideals, a world that is on a different map altogether.

10. Cathleen Kaveny, *What Is the Vatican Saying About Women? Conservative Catholics Might Be Surprised*, The Washington Post (August 15, 2004) B03.

we also see referenced in the letter the nuptial analogy. This analogy is used in order to emphasize sexual complementarity between men and women. The concept of complementarity, based primarily on the nuptial analogy, is an issue for many feminists.<sup>11</sup> Sidney Callahan voices frustration over the letter's use of what she believes to be "selective use of Scripture," specifically with the emphasis on the Nuptial analogy.

Ratzinger selectively uses Old Testament sexual images of God as a bridegroom relating to his erring people as an "adulterous bride or prostitute." He ignores the host of other rich Hebrew imagery of God. Certainly, I am Who Am, a being beyond all gender, is absent. Also tactfully overlooked is the blatant misogyny in many Old Testament "texts of terror." In interpreting the New Testament, Ratzinger endorses a similar sexualized focus, one that gives too much weight to the gendered image of Christ as bridegroom. Other images of Christ- as Word, light, friend, shepherd, physician, mother hen, vine, living bread, or the Way, the Truth, and the Life are omitted. St. Paul's words that "In Christ there is neither male nor female" show, according to Ratzinger, that "the distinction between man and woman is reaffirmed more than ever."<sup>12</sup>

The included Scripture passages do tend to support Ratzinger's point that Scripture is not patriarchal nor oppressive to women. Moreover, the letter does emphasize the nuptial analogy to stress differences. Yet, Kavney points out that a Scripture passage typically used by the Vatican to discuss women is glaringly missing.

11. Prudence Allan explains that there are two types of sex complementarity, integral and fractional. Fractional implies that the man and woman are incomplete without the other. Integral implies that each are whole persons and together equal more than their sum parts. Sex complementarity suggests that, as in the sexual act, man gives his body and woman receives his body. Feminists have been troubled by the fact that some in the Church have applied this theory to depict men as being superior and women as being inferior in the Church. Sex complementarity, as most greatly exemplified in the Church, depicts man as representative of Christ who gave his body and blood for the Church and woman as the Church who receives the gift of Christ's body and blood. Indeed for feminists, this analogy is too close to the oppressive Aristotelian theory (discussed later in the thesis) which claimed that the man is the active creator in pro-creation and the woman is passive, and therefore, the inferior gender. In addition an analogy that focuses on nuptial love tends to focus on recognizing men and women for their biological roles, which has ultimately limited the role of women to the domestic sphere. The nuptial analogy is very complicated, and the scope of the paper does not allow us to discuss it at length. Yet, feminists believe that while the roles of wife and mother are significant and crucial to the life of the Church and the world, when we search for the truth regarding the role of women in the Church, women must be considered for more than just their reproductive ability. As previously mentioned science is showing that the brain is significantly different in men and women, and is another means by which men and women can complement one another. Moreover, by primarily depicting women as being reflective of the Church and men as being reflective of Christ, in the nuptial analogy, we are misrepresenting a significant part of our theology. Our theology states that men and women are both encompassed in the symbol of Church in the nuptial analogy. I believe that women have been more closely associated with Church in this analogy and men to Christ because of the theory of recapitulation, based on the letter to the Ephesians, but greatly associated with Irenaeus. Irenaeus emphasized the connection of Jesus as the new Adam and the Mary as the new Eve. Yet, Fathers, like Chrysostom and Methodius of Olympus depicted the Church as the new Eve. Indeed, many of the Church Fathers emphasized a sacramental, thus necessitating both genders be considered, aspect of Church in the nuptial analogy. John Chrysostom describes his understanding of this analogy "This is a great mystery – I mean the reference to Christ and the Church (Eph. 5:31-32). Hence, after He came into the dwelling and found her filthy, unwashed, naked and befouled with blood, He bathed her, anointed her, nourished her, and clothed her with a garment, the like of which could never be found." Delores Greeley states that the combination of bathed, anointed and nourished seems to be a clear reference to the three sacraments of baptism, confirmation and Eucharist. See Delores Greeley, *The Church As "Body of Christ" According To The Teaching of Saint John Chrysostom*, (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame Dept. of Theology, 1977) 40. It seems, therefore, that a more accurate emphasis of the nuptial analogy would be to recognize both men and women as equal and collaborative members of the Church, in which case both men and women would be recognized by virtue of their complete personhood as active participants in the Sacraments.

12. Sidney Callahan, "Ratzinger, Feminist, Not Quite", *Commonweal* (September 10, 2004) 9-10.

More significant, however, is what Ratzinger leaves out of his biblical exegesis: the famous passage from St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians affirming a husband's headship over his wife. Previous popes read the passage as straightforwardly requiring wifely submission. John Paul II interprets it in *Mulieris Dignitatem* as requiring mutual submission from both husband and wife. Ratzinger omits it entirely; leaving no doubt that "the yoke of domination of one sex over the other" is to be rejected as sinful.<sup>13</sup>

I would also add that Ratzinger is not only sensitive to the fact that feminists believe that Scripture is patriarchal and oppressive to women but so too is Tradition.

Interestingly, Ratzinger refers to the theory of recapitulation by the Church Father, Irenaeus to "liberate" women from subordination. Recapitulation is based on the writings of St. Paul who is frequently viewed by many feminists as being misogynist. Ratzinger points out that women are no longer restrained under the yoke of domination that resulted in the sin of the first couple. We are reminded that when original sin entered the world woman was told, "Your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you." The letter then states:

As St. Irenaeus wrote, with Jesus Christ "all newness" appears . . . in Christ the rivalry, enmity and violence that disfigured the relationship between men and women can be overcome and has been overcome. . . In this way, man's relationship with woman is transformed, and the threefold concupiscence described in the First Letter of John (1 Jn 2:16) ceases to have the upper hand. The witness of women's lives must be received with respect and appreciation. . . (10,17)

While men and women are equal in dignity there are clearly differences as well.

The letter states:

From the first moment of their creation, man and woman are distinct, and will remain so for all eternity. Placed within Christ's Paschal mystery, they no longer see their difference as a source of discord to be overcome by denial or eradication, but rather as the possibility for collaboration, to be cultivated with mutual respect for their difference. From here, new perspectives open up for a deeper understanding of the dignity of women and their role in human society and in the Church. (12)

13. M. Cathleen Kaveny, *What Is the Vatican Saying About Women? Conservative Catholics Might Be Surprised*, The Washington Post (August 15, 2004) B03.

## **The Issue of Differences**

Perhaps the most complex issue discussed in the letter is that of differences between men and women. Contained within the letter there is an emphasis on the fact differences between men and women should not be denied or eradicated. As indicated by some of the feminists quoted above, the denial of differences is not necessarily part of the feminist agenda. Rather, feminists reject the fact that the Church overemphasizes the reproductive capacity of women. This emphasis has been used to theologically depict women as inferior and passive. Thus, the gifts and abilities that women possess have been marginalized.

There is growing scientific evidence that the brain in men and women reflect sexual differentiation. I will explore some of what science is discovering concerning the differences that exist in men and women later in the thesis. However, the issue of differences between men and women has been a significant area of contention in the Church. The letter states:

Furthermore the importance, and the meaning of sexual difference as a reality deeply inscribed in man and woman needs to be noted. Sexuality characterizes man and woman not only on the physical level, but also on the psychological and spiritual, making its mark on each of their expressions. It cannot be reduced to a pure and insignificant biological fact, but rather is a fundamental component of personality, one of its modes of being, of manifestation, of communicating with others, of feeling, of expressing and of living human love. This capacity to love, reflection and image of God who is Love, is disclosed in the spousal character of the body, in which masculinity or femininity of the person is expressed. The human dimension of sexuality is inseparable from the theological dimension. (8)

There are a couple of theological risks that come into play when one begins discussing differences between men and women. Francis Martin nicely articulates the concerns. “A risk in emphasizing differences is to undermine the fundamental unity and

equality between men and women. In addition, when sex differences are seen to be rooted in human nature itself the fundamental unity of humanity as created and redeemed seems to be jeopardized.”<sup>14</sup> In addition to Martin’s concerns, we must also acknowledge that historically when differences have been emphasized women have been depicted as being physically and intellectually inferior. This inferiority has led to their marginalization in the Church and world. The anger and fear that stem from this marginalization causes many feminists to proceed with extreme caution when theories or analogies are used that emphasize differences between men and women. Yet, the magisterium believes that differences are critical to understanding the “fittingness” of certain roles for men and women in the Church and world. Therefore, in order to continue our work toward the collaboration of men and women, I will explore the issue of differences.

The philosophical history of gender differences is lengthy and complicated. I will offer a brief summary to contextualize the issue as addressed in the letter *On the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World*.

### **The Philosophical Context of the Issue**

The two most influential philosophers regarding sex identity are Plato and Aristotle. These two men took significantly different positions on gender roles. Plato’s theory on the role of women and the differences between men and women is frequently conflicting and difficult to follow. At times he argues women and men have minimal differences, and at other times women appear to be passive and inferior to men. For example, in the *Timaeus* Plato states that Mother Earth is passive and simply receives formed elements.<sup>15</sup>

14. Francis Martin, *The Feminist Question: Feminist Theology In The Light of Christian Tradition*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdsman, 1994) 387.

15. Plato, *Timaeus* in Edith Hamilton, *The Collected Dialogues of Plato, trans.* Ben Jowett (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005) 1151. Prior to this time, Mother Earth was dynamic and active in creation as articulated by the poet Hesiod.

In the *Republic* Plato argues his theory of reincarnation and states that the same soul lives at different times in male and female bodies. He argues that the soul itself has no sexual identity; it is only the material body that gives it specification of male or female.<sup>16</sup> Plato appears to believe that there are no significant differences between men and women. However, in the *Timaeus* Plato argues that men who are cowards come into the world in female bodies.<sup>17</sup> Plato seems to be saying, that from the perspective of the soul, men and women have similar natures. However, with regard to bodies the male body is superior. In addition, Plato's philosophy gives more significance to the soul. Plato believes that perfection is achieved when the soul escapes from the body and sexless souls result.

Aristotle came onto the scene and his philosophy of gender differences ruled for centuries. Aristotle believed that differences between men and women exist, and women are clearly inferior. Aristotle concluded that generation consisted of the woman providing the matter and the man providing the form. The form is equivalent to the soul and matter to the body. Ultimately, he concluded that the role of the man, in providing the form, is more significant. This concept also allowed for some to see man's role as being similar to the activity of the divine creator. Woman's passive role in generation was believed to prove her inferiority to man. Aristotle believed that the body and soul were connected and somehow important to the human person. In *On the Soul*, Aristotle argues that the soul cannot exist without the body.<sup>18</sup>

16. Plato, *Republic* in Edith Hamilton, *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, trans. Paul Shorey (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005) 575.

17. Plato, *Timaeus* *ibid*

18. Aristotle, *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon, (New York: Random House, 1968).



The most influential philosopher in the Church was Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas was significantly influenced by Aristotle. Aquinas believed in the significance of the body and the soul. He had confidence that the body and the soul would both be resurrected, and women and men would co-exist in heaven. Unfortunately, Aquinas accepted that the female body was inferior to the male body. Aquinas trusted the theory of Aristotle concerning the role of men and women in generation. Ultimately, Aquinas believed that the woman was passive in generation, and the man was active. In addition, man, since he took the role of father, shared in the active power with God the Father. Woman did not share in this activity.<sup>19</sup> It may not have been the intent of Aquinas to limit the role of women based on her reproductive ability, but that was the result of his theory. Sr. Prudence Allen points out that “in this theory of generation, a basic relationship of superior to inferior resulted from the characterization of one sex as containing the active principle and the other the passive one.”<sup>20</sup> Ultimately Aquinas took this understanding and applied it to the generation of Christ. Sr. Prudence Allen suggests that Aquinas was clearly misled in his theory, but nonetheless the theory stood for centuries. I would argue that women are still struggling to be liberated from a misunderstanding that women are purely passive agents by divine plan.

Aquinas argued that the active power in the divine generation was provided by the Holy Spirit and Mary was simply the “patient” who was passive. With the role of women in the Church being ultimately based on the role of Mary, women in the Church are expected to be passive. In addition, Aquinas argued that grace builds on nature. If the full nature of woman, thus her “proper” nature is not considered, women will not be

19. Thomas Aquinas *Summa Contra Gentiles Book Two Creation*, trans. James Anderson, (Notre Dame: University Notre Dame Press 1992).

20. Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman: The Aristotelian Revolution, 750 B.C. – A.D. 1250*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdsman, 1997) 396.

granted their authentic role in the Church. Unfortunately all of these theories of generation were based on incorrect science. The role of women in generation is not passive. Women also play an active role in generation. If the role of women in the Church is going to be based primarily on an understanding of their proper biological nature, women's active role in generation must be considered. The active, life-giving contribution of women in procreation must be acknowledged. Women receive, but they also contribute a part of themselves to new life. Undoubtedly, the influence of these philosophers has had significant and ultimately negative ramifications for women trying to find a place in the Church and the world. Using the differences between men and women to theologially place women in a subordinate position to men has alienated some women from the Church. Moreover, feminists are obviously leery of theology that uses embodiment to limit the roles of women in the Church. As we search for the truth, it seems reasonable to consider that a unified man and woman actively reflect Christ's love for the Church through their love for one another. Therefore, men and women should have equally significant roles in the Church that allow them to manifest Christ's love in the world.

### **The Body in Catholic Theology**

The body is incredibly important to the Church, the *body* of Christ, and our understanding of the human person. Aquinas said that the soul's nature cannot be perfect unless it is united to the body.<sup>21</sup> Historically, the Church has rejected sects that attempt to ignore the significance of the body. We are promised a resurrection of the body, not an escape from it.

21. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Question 70.

The fact that flesh embodies the human person and God became incarnate requires that human flesh never be seen as insignificant or inferior. Flesh links humanity to the divine. Within Sacramental theology, that which is most spiritual takes place in the most corporeal. Louis-Marie Chauvet states:

But are not all these things the “flesh” which Christ assumed to save it? On the basis of faith in the incarnation of God in Jesus, Christians confess that they go to God not in spite of the heavy ambiguity of their humanity but at the very core of it; not in spite of their bodies . . . but in their very bodies which through faith in Christ have become “temples of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 6:19, 3:16); therefore not in spite of historical and social mediations, but within them. . . The sacraments state that the Word of God wants to enter our bodies, that is, our lives, and that for anyone in-dwelt by the Spirit the road of the God of Jesus Christ necessarily uses the human road.<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, our bodies are at the heart of our theology. Thus, in our conversation on the collaboration of men and women in the Church and world we must consider the significance of our bodies and the differences that exist. Yet, even with the significance of the body to the Christian tradition, Fergus Kerr suggests that this letter is unique because of the extreme emphasis placed on the body. Prior to this letter, theologians followed the Thomistic philosophy that argued the image of God is found in the human being “solely in virtue of mind;” through reason and will. In the letter, Ratzinger argues that it is not in our rationality but in sexual difference that we image God. Kerr states, “In our genitalia, not our heads, so to speak.”<sup>23</sup> John Paul II and Benedict XVI, then Ratzinger, have had an intense inclination toward the significance of complementarity and the role of men and women in the Church. This emphasis has been used to limit the roles of women in the Church. I believe that it is possible, even necessary, to increase the role of women in the Church while still considering their distinct nature.

22. Louis-Marie Chauvet, *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1997) 113. In addition ignoring the body has serious ramifications for our social teaching. When the Church is only concerned with the soul and the body is not given due respect we run the risk of falling lax in our implementation of our social justice work. Indeed only if the body is recognized as theologically significant will the life and dignity of the human person and, consequently, an appreciation of that which leads to the care of the physical need of our brothers and sisters be a priority.

23. Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007) 194.

I would argue that the philosopher who has most significantly influenced their ideas on the issue of woman's role in complementarity was Edith Stein.

Stein developed a philosophy that recognized the differences of men and women in consideration of the equal significance and interconnectedness of the body and the soul. In her work, *Spirituality of the Christian Soul*, Stein argues a woman's soul will have a spiritual quality distinct from a man's soul. She reasoned that because the human soul is the form of the body, and the form of humanity is individuated by being united with a particular body there are two ways of being human, as man or as woman.

Stein did not believe that women were only capable of certain professions. She argued that, "One could say that in case of need, every normal and healthy woman is able to hold a position. And there is no profession which cannot be practiced by a woman."

Moreover, Stein did not believe that women should be limited to the domestic sphere. Yet, Stein did believe that there were certain characteristics that marked a woman's soul and thus there were natural vocations for women. Stein claimed:

With the woman there are capabilities of caring, protecting, and promoting that which is becoming and growing. She has the gift thereby to live in an intimately bound physical compass and to collect her forces in silence; on the other hand, she is created to endure pain, to adapt and abnegate herself. She is psychically directed to the concrete, the individual, and the personal: she has the ability to grasp the concrete in its individuality and to adapt herself to it, and she has the longing to help this peculiarity to its development . . . The nature and destiny of woman requires an education which can inspire works of effective love. . . Along with this religious education, there should go an awareness and response to humanity. . . So conceived the medical profession is a truly charitable one and belongs together with other social professions. In all such vocations, it is a matter of actions which are truly maternal in the care of a large "family": parishioners, the poor or sick of a rural parish or of a municipal precinct, the inmates of a prison, endangered or neglected youth. There is always the potentiality, and basically the necessity, of understanding and helping the whole person whether one initially encounters these human beings to care for them in bodily sickness or to assist them financially, or to give them legal counsel. Demands here on the power of love are even

greater than in one's own family: the natural bond is lacking, the number of people in need is greater, and preponderantly there are people who repel rather than attract by their disposition and frame of mind.<sup>24</sup>

In chapter two we will see that Stein's understanding of woman, regarding her innate gifts, are supported by science. In addition, many of the activities that Stein argues are proper to the nature of women are synonymous with the office of the deacon. Yet, many feminists don't accept the idea that women are different from men in body and soul. Sidney Callahan argues:

Embodied life from infancy through old age is made up of far too many innate developmental processes that are far too complex to be shoehorned into a simplistic dualistic sexual schema of essential male and female sexual differences. As biological human beings, men and women are more alike than different; and individual differences outweigh group differences.<sup>25</sup>

It is important to note that feminists believe that experience is a significant factor in determining the make-up of a person. Yet, as previously indicated the most recent view reflected by the magisterium is that bodily differences cannot be ignored in discerning the roles of men and women in the Church.<sup>26</sup> Francis Martin suggests that if bodily differences between men and women indicate equal yet different gifts and capabilities both genders must be fully incorporated into the life of the Church. Emphasis must be placed on the idea that the contributions of both are equally valuable and necessary for the proper functioning of the family, society and church.<sup>27</sup> Yet, the current emphasis from the Vatican is on the maternal nature of women. However, we must recognize that all women are not biological mothers.

24. Edith Stein, *Spirituality of the Christian Soul*. The Collected Works of Edith Stein Vol 2 Essays on Women trans. Freda Mary Oben (Washington DC: ICS Publications, 1996).

25. Sidney Callahan, "Ratzinger, Feminist, Not Quite", *Commonweal* (September 10, 2004) 9-10.

26. Karl Wojtyla's *The Acting Person* offers some interesting ideas concerning the action of the body in determining the person. He suggests, among many things, that the body and bodily action serve to reveal the person as a whole. Unfortunately the scope of this paper does not allow too much exploration in this area.

27. See Francis Martin, *The Feminist Question: Feminist Theology In The Light of Christian Tradition*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdsman, 1994) 386.

The ability to bear children is nonetheless distinctive to women. It seems logical to consider the fact that women are created with the ability to conceive, gestate, bear and nourish children. Moreover, as feminists would agree, the experience of doing so would somehow impact women. Paul Evdokimov suggests:

Her charism of interiorized and universal “maternity” carries every woman toward the hungry and the needy and admirably defines the feminine essence: virgin or spouse, every woman is a mother for all eternity (*in aeternum*). The structure of her soul predisposes her “to protect” all that crosses her path, to discover in the strongest and most virile being, a weak, defenseless child.<sup>28</sup>

We must recognize, however, that when women see others in need, they are capable to act. Von Balthasar believed in the need for women to be active agents to insure equality of the sexes. Von Balthasar’s explanation of separate but equal in activity follows:

Man and woman are face to face. Here their equal rank is given even more emphasis: Man looks around him and meets with an answering gaze that turns the one-who-sees into the one-who-is-seen... Thus the woman, who is both ‘answer’ and ‘face,’ is not only man’s delight: she is the help, the security, the home man needs; she is the vessel of fulfillment specially designed for him. Nor is she simply the vessel of his fruitfulness: she is equipped with her own explicit fruitfulness. Yet her fruitfulness is not a primary fruitfulness: it is an answering fruitfulness, designed to receive man’s fruitfulness (which, in itself is helpless) and bring it to ‘fullness’.<sup>29</sup>

In addition, participation in the sacraments confirms the equality in bodily activity between men and women. Pope Benedict XVI discusses the impact on the body and the bodily activity of the person who participates in the Eucharist in *Deus Caritas Est* “Eucharist draws us into Jesus’ act of self-oblation. More than just statically receiving the incarnate Logos, we enter into the very dynamic of self giving.”<sup>30</sup>

28. Paul Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love*, (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2001) 33.

29. Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol.2: *The Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992).

30. Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, (25 December, 2005)13.

Men and women receive Christ's body, and men and women give of themselves in service to the Church. Men and women are equally passive and equally active. Women, as well as men, actively make Christ present in the world through giving and receiving love. Women, as well as men, give their bodies in the service of Christ. Men and women receive the love of Christ as poured out in the Eucharist, and they give back that love in the form of service or *caritas*. The letter seems to recognize the need for the active function of women in the world, thus recognizing their full personhood.

### **Feminine Values in Society and the Church**

While differences are emphasized in the letter, ultimately the letter suggests that both men and women have responsibilities that have previously been delegated to women. While the letter acknowledges that women do have a unique "capacity for the other," the letter concludes that ultimately, "In the final analysis, every human being, man or woman, is destined to be "for the other." In this perspective that which is called "femininity" is more than simply an attribute of the female sex. The world designates the fundamental human capacity to live for the other and because of the other."(14) Feminists should be happy to see that men are not taken off the hook from fully living our shared baptismal call of serving others. In addition, the sacramental emphasis in which both men and women are called to serve, like Christ served, is supported in this point.

While the letter upholds the belief of the Church that motherhood is a significant part of woman's vocation, it is not the only part. The letter addresses feminists' concern that the Church only values the person of woman because of her biological ability to have children.

Although motherhood is a key element of women's identity, this does not mean that women should be considered from the sole perspective of physical procreation. In this area, there can be serious distortions, which extol biological fecundity in purely quantitative terms and are often accompanied by dangerous disrespect for women. (14) Moreover, while the letter supports the significance of the woman in family life it also states that fathers are equally responsible for loving their child unconditionally. Fathers are called to teach their child respect and be the first "face of God" in the life of their child. Thus, equal collaboration between men and women in parenting is crucial.

In addition, the letter is very clear to articulate that women should have the choice to stay at home or work outside of the home without being stigmatized or punished financially. (19) The letter also states that "women should be present in the world of work and in the organization of society and that women should have access to positions of responsibility which allow them to inspire the policies of nations and to promote innovative solutions to economic and social problems." (20) This is a far cry from the position that the sole place for women is in the home or the convent.

While most feminists would be hard pressed to take issue with statements in the letter concerning the role of women in society, many were not happy with the section discussing the role of women in the Church. As was previously discussed, feminists believe that once again women are being confined to a passive role. This limitation seems unjust and inconsiderate of women's equal dignity and full personhood. The letter states:

In the Church, woman as "sign" is more than ever central and fruitful, following as it does from the very identity of the Church, as received from God and accepted in faith. It is this "mystical" identity, profound and essential, which needs to be kept in mind when reflecting on the respective roles of men and women in the Church.

In other words, women do not have an ordinary role or active role in the Church. Women are to reflect the love that Christ has for his Church in the world. Yet, as indicated previously this is also the responsibility of men in the Church. Ultimately, however, the



magisterium would say that women do this more naturally than men because of their ability to conceive and bear children. Interestingly, it seems that this natural “capacity for the other” that women seem to have enhances their ability to serve in the name of Christ. Yet, this connection is not made in the letter. Women, rather, are encouraged to look to Mary, the mother of God, as their model to emulate in Church ministry.

It is from Mary that the Church always learns the intimacy of Christ. Mary, who carried the small child of Bethlehem in her arms, teaches us to recognize the infinite humility of God. She who received the broken body of Jesus from the Cross shows the Church how to receive all those in this world whose lives have been wounded by violence and sin. (15)

Ratzinger anticipated that feminists would look at this negatively. While Mary is a beautiful model for the Church, she is nonetheless most significantly recognized for taking a passive role. Limiting women to a passive role in the Church echoes Aristotle’s philosophy that women are passive in generation, and therefore the inferior sex. To respond to the anticipated negativity concerning the passive role of women, the letter states:

To look at Mary and imitate her does not mean, however, that the Church should adopt a passivity inspired by an outdated conception of femininity. Nor does it condemn the Church to a dangerous vulnerability in a world where what counts above all are domination and power. In reality, the way of Christ is neither one of domination nor of power as understood by the world. From the Son of God one learns that this “passivity” is in reality the way of love; it is a royal power which vanquishes all violence; it is “passion” which saves the world from sin and death and recreates humanity.” (16)

I suspect that most feminists would agree that the ability to imitate Christ is a significant component of who we are as Christians and would not take issue with the encouragement to seek “power through service.” Power through service is what Christ modeled when he humbly washed the feet of the apostles.

## Concluding Thoughts on the Letter

I believe that this letter shows a true desire by the magisterium to continue the search for the truth concerning the role of women in the Church. We are at a critical point in the Church in which we are in great need of guidance from the Holy Spirit to lead us toward greater collaboration between men and women. Our anthropology tells us that men and women are equal in value and that we were created to be relational. Differences, however, exist and must be considered. These differences do not render one gender incapable of actively ministering in the life of the Church. Our sacramental theology reminds us that men and women have equally active and significant roles to play in the Church and world. In order to continue our conversation and seek ways in which men and women can collaboratively make Christ present in the world, we must define Christian collaboration.

## Defining Christian Collaboration

Christian collaboration requires “action” by men and women. John Paul II states in his book, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, “Christianity is not only a religion of knowledge, of contemplation, it is a religion of God’s action and of man’s action.”<sup>31</sup> In addition, we are reminded in *Veritatis Splendor*:

It is urgent to rediscover and to set forth once more the authentic reality of the Christian faith, which is not simply a set of propositions to be accepted with intellectual assent. Rather, faith is a lived knowledge of Christ, a living remembrance of his commandments, and a *truth to be lived out*. A word, in any event, is not truly received until it passes into action, until it is put into practice.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, men and women must be recognized as having an active role in the Church.

In the document *Sons and Daughters of the Light* we are reminded that “The

31. John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Alfred Knopf Publishing, 1995).

32. John Paul II *Veritatis Splendor*, (6 of August, 1993)88.

mission of the Church is not directed solely at itself, but at nurturing and forming people who are called by God, so that through the Spirit they might contribute to the sanctification of the world.”<sup>33</sup> This sanctification of the world is the mission of the Church. It is for this purpose that collaboration is necessary. *In Collaboration: Uniting Our Gifts in Ministry* Loughlan Sofield and Carroll Juliano define collaboration as “the identification, release, and union of all the gifts in ministry for the sake of mission.” In addition this mission needs to be embraced by all of the baptized faithful, men and women.<sup>34</sup>

Roger Cardinal Mahony of Los Angeles writes, “Our common baptismal vocation, our mutual need of each other’s charisms and our co-responsibility for the Church’s ministry, impel us to a life of collaboration.”<sup>35</sup> As we seek to work toward greater collaboration between men and women we must recognize that men and women share a common mission, to sanctify the world. In addition, we need to recognize that God calls both men and women, and the Spirit leads men and women so that they can use their gifts to serve the Church. It is necessary for the bishops and pastors to nurture and guide members of the Church in the identification, release and union of these gifts and charisms for the sake of the mission.

### **The Evolution of Collaboration**

Sofield and Juliano suggest that true collaboration evolves over time. The first stage is that of co-existence. In this stage people identify with one another in a general way. In the Church, the common identification with one another would be that we are baptized members of the Church who share a common history and mission. The next step

33. USCCB, *Sons and Daughters of the Light: Ministry with Young Adults: A National Pastoral Plan*, (United States Catholic Conference, Inc. Washington DC, 1996)22.

34. Loughlan Sofield and Carroll Juliano, *Collaboration: Uniting Our Gifts in Ministry* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2000) 17.

35. Roger Mahoney, Pastoral Letter on the Role of the Laity in the Life of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles (3 of December, 1986)8.

is to engage in communication which allows members of the group to recognize that while each person is unique there is a common purpose and mission. This recognition should lead to cooperation which breeds an awareness that individuals and programs do not exist in isolation, but have an impact on one another and this dynamic is a movement toward interdependence. Once interdependence becomes a reality there is a readiness and desire to work toward true collaboration. Collaboration is characterized by the group acknowledging, articulating and experiencing a common mission. In addition, there is a desire to work together for a common goal and thus “turf” and competition are replaced with a spirit of mutuality and partnership. Finally, individuals and groups acknowledge the gifts that they bring to a common mission and are able to affirm the gifts that others bring. Collaboration is revealed when all of the different gifts are freely joined together in ministry for furthering the mission of Jesus Christ.<sup>36</sup>

For men and women to engage in true collaboration in the Church we must emphasize the concept of gift. I would suggest that all gifts proper to nature would be included. Sofield and Juliano suggest that the criteria for the effectiveness of any collaborative effort are the extent that it furthers the reign of God. Once individual, or group gifts are recognized, a frank and candid exploration must be undertaken to determine what, in the individuals or system, is preventing the gifts from being placed at the service of the gospel. Finally, there is a need to determine how the gifts can be joined together to accomplish the mission.<sup>37</sup>

Archbishop John Bathersby of Brisbane Australia suggests that for true collaboration to occur there must be an emphasis on empowerment, the Church as the People of God,

36. Loughlan Sofield and Carroll Juliano, *Collaboration: Uniting Our Gifts in Ministry* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2000) 19.  
37 *ibid* 21

and a shared servant leadership.<sup>38</sup> Servant leadership is a crucial component to collaborative ministry. Men and women must be recognized as having the ability to make Christ present through service in order to work toward the mission of the Church.

Sofield and Juliano state that all ministry, thus action in the Church, must be a response to the numerous societal needs present in the world.<sup>39</sup> We must, therefore, as a Church, find a way to match differing gifts with the needs of the world. Thus, ministry is never about power. Ministry is about service and “unleashing” the power of gifts.<sup>40</sup>

Ultimately, in collaborative ministry we recognize that all people are called to express Christ’s compassion and service in the wider world. God has graced men and women with different gifts, and this must be recognized and embraced. If we do not celebrate the gifts we are rejecting a part of Christ’s plan for the Church. This concept is clearly reflected in the letters of St. Paul.

There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit.—1 Cor 12:4-7

Our tradition assures us that all people, male or female, have a right to use their gifts for the well being of the Church. An appreciation of gifts is crucial. The Second Vatican Council teaches that the Spirit gives different gifts for the well-being of the Church. All believers have the right and duty to use them in the Church for the good of humanity and the flourishing of the Church.<sup>41</sup>

38. John Bathersby, *Becoming More Collaborative* referenced in Loughlan Sofield and Carroll Juliano, 22.

39. Loughlan Sofield and Carroll Juliano, *Collaboration: Uniting Our Gifts in Ministry*(Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2000) 34

40. Collaboration will require leadership. Indeed leaderless groups do not function to their maximum capacity and leadership is also a gift from God.

41. Committee on Women in Society and in the Church, National Conference of Catholic Bishops. *From Words to Deeds: Continuing Reflections on the Role of Women in the Church.* (Washington DC:U.S. Catholic Conference, 1998) 18.

## A Great Need for Collaboration in the Church and World

John Paul II and Benedict XVI have recently given reminders to the members of the Church of some of the significant work that needs to be done. To form collaborative relationships we must seek to identify ways in which women can actively participate in the life of the Church as a sign of Christ's presence in the world. The ability to make Christ present in the world is a theological necessity for all members of the Church. John Paul II claims in *Redemptoris Missio* that the Church must make the *person* of Christ present in order to do authentic evangelization.<sup>42</sup> Evangelization is to be done by reaching out to the marginalized and treating them with Christ's tender care.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, through baptism we are required, and through the gift of the Holy Spirit we are given the ability to engage in evangelization and "bear witness to Jesus with boldness!"<sup>44</sup> Indeed the ways in which men and women reflect Christ to the world may be different, however, if women are to be fully active and collaborative members in the Church this ability must be identified and recognized.

In addition to the work of evangelization, Pope Benedict XVI reminds men and women of the need to engage in the "concrete" ecclesial exercise of the commandment of love of neighbor, thus the praxis of *caritas*. We are told "For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being."<sup>45</sup> The encyclical suggests that we approach this *caritas* through *diakonia* or service. *Diakonia* has been a significant part of the Church since her inception. The *Acts of the Apostles* discusses what has been

42. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, (7, December, 1990)18.

43. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, (7, December, 1990) 14.

44. *ibid.*, 24.

45. Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, (25, December, 2005)25.

traditionally identified as the establishment of a structured, orderly practice of *caritas* which resulted in the establishment of the diaconate.<sup>46</sup>

We are reminded in the encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est* that this praxis of *caritas*, or *diakonia*, is to be approached as if we were tending to members of our family who are in need.

The Church is God's family in the world. In this family no one ought to go without the necessities of life. Yet at the same time *caritas-agape* extends beyond the frontiers of the Church. The parable of the Good Samaritan remains as a standard which imposes universal love towards the needy whom we encounter “by chance” (cf. *Lk* 10:31), whoever they may be. . . The Christian's program—the program of the Good Samaritan, the program of Jesus—is “a heart which sees.” This heart sees where love is needed and acts accordingly.<sup>47</sup>

Women have been gifted with a “heart which sees.” It seems “fitting” that they are also recognized as having an ordinary function in diaconal ministry.

In this chapter, I have offered some background for the anger that women feel toward the Vatican because of the continued restriction of roles for women in the Church. I have also presented reasons for the need to consider embodiment in theology. Clearly this must be done with extreme caution. However, men and women are different and this should be considered when we look at collaborative relationships. Yet, the differences should not prohibit a man or a woman from using their gifts in collaborative ministry. Collaborative ministry will allow for the complete unleashing of a person's gifts for the benefit of the Church. Within our sacramental theology, men and women take active roles in the mission of the Church. We must make sure that our practice provides that opportunity for both men and women. In the next chapter, we will look at some of the unique gifts of women that they can bring to the mission of the Church.

46. Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, (25, December, 2005) 21. We will explore this in detail in chapter two.

47. *ibid*, 25b, 31b

## CHAPTER II

### **Science Speaks: Differences as Strengths in Collaborative Ministry**

Our sacramental theology reminds us that men *and* women are called to actively participate in the life of the Church. Through baptism men and women “put on Christ”. Through the Eucharist men and women become equal members of Christ’s body. The full and active collaboration of men and women is the only way in which we can truly work to build up the Church on earth. Men and women have been uniquely created with distinctive gifts and the Church must insure that these distinctive gifts are utilized for the mission of the Church. This chapter, therefore, will explore some of what science is saying concerning differences between men and women. As indicated in the introduction, I do not consider differences between men and women to indicate the inferiority of one gender or another. In addition, I also recognize that not all women will fully exhibit these differences. It is possible that some life experiences may influence how a woman chooses to respond to the brain differences that will be discussed. For example, most women have the natural ability to bear children, but some chose not to do so. Conversely, some men may exhibit some of the characteristics more naturally associated with the female brain because of experiences in which they have learned empathetic behavior. If, however, women have been created with a physiological disposition that would promote a naturally effective ministry in *diakonia* it seems reasonable, and even necessary, for the Church to provide women with the greatest



possible access to the grace needed to use these gifts in the most effective manner possible.

In addition to a scientific exploration of gender differences, we will consider the great number of women and the long history of women engaged in the ministry of *diakonia*. This exploration will include the historical role of deaconess in the Church.

### **The Female Brain**

As indicated in chapter one, historically when differences have been emphasized women have suffered. However, I believe that by ignoring differences we are also causing harm, not only to women, but to the mission of the Church. We need to identify distinctive gifts in order to celebrate the gifts and use them in a way that the Church and world will flourish. Louanne Brizendine voices the pressure that currently exists to suppress the evidence of differences between men and women.

There are those who wish there were no differences between men and women. In the 1970's at the University of California, Berkeley, the buzzword among young women was "mandatory unisex," which meant that it was politically incorrect even to mention sex difference. There are still those who believe that for women to become equal, unisex must be the norm. The biological reality, however, is that there is no unisex brain. The fear of discrimination based on difference runs deep, and for many years assumptions about sex differences went scientifically unexamined for fear that women wouldn't be able to claim equality with men. But pretending that women and men are the same, while doing a disservice to both men and women, ultimately hurts women. Perpetuating the myth of the male norm means ignoring women's real, biological differences in severity, susceptibility, and treatment of disease. It also ignores the different ways that they process thoughts and therefore perceive what is important. Assuming the male norm also means undervaluing the powerful, sex-specific strengths and talents of the female brain.<sup>1</sup>

Researchers recently released findings that show an evolutionarily preserved signature in the primate brain. The study determined that there are hundreds of biological differences between the sexes when it comes to gene expression in the cerebral cortex of humans and other primates. The findings indicate that these differences arose long ago and have been

1. Louann Brizendine, *The Female Brain*. (New York, Broadway Publishers, 2006)160 Louann Brizendine, M.D. is a neuropsychiatrist at the University of California, San Francisco. She was previously on faculty at the Harvard Medical School and is a graduate of the Yale University School of Medicine and the University of California Berkeley, in neurobiology.

preserved through evolution. This particular study focuses on gene expression within the cerebral cortex. The cerebral cortex includes functions associated with memory, attentiveness, thought processes and language.<sup>2</sup> Many feminists argue that men and women are more alike than different and science is showing that to be partially true. However, we are in search of the whole truth and therefore we must consider all of the information. While more than ninety-nine percent of male and female genetic coding is exactly the same the less than one percent variation between the sexes influences every single cell in our bodies. This variation is seen from nerves that register pleasure and pain to the neurons that transmit perception, thoughts, feeling and emotions.<sup>3</sup>

As scientists study the male and female brain they have noted that the differences are in place early on in gestation. The brain of a female fetus during gestation does not receive high levels of testosterone like the male brain. In addition, the female fetal brain cells are XX which means more genes for faster brain development and female-specific circuits. Moreover, female brain circuits for communication, “gut feelings,” emotional memory, and anger suppression grow unabated as there is not the high testosterone of the male to kill those cells. Finally, the female fetal brain has more brain circuits for communication, reading emotions, social nuance, and nurturing skills.<sup>4</sup> Studies show that these differences are maintained into adulthood. Brizendine explains:

Under a microscope or an fMRI (functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging) scan, the differences between male and female brains are revealed to be complex and widespread. In the brain centers for language and hearing, for example, women have eleven more neurons than men. The principal hub of both emotion and memory formation- the hippocampus- is also larger in the female brain, as is the brain circuitry for language and observing emotions in others. This means that women are, on average, better at expressing emotions and remembering the details of emotional events. Men, by contrast, have two and a half times the brain space devoted to sexual drive as well as larger brain centers for action and aggression. Men also have larger processors in the core of the most primitive area of the brain, which registers fear and

2. Uppsala University (2008, June 24). Evolutionary Preserved Signature Found In The Primate Brain. Science Daily. Retrieved October 7, 2008, from <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/06/080619203301.htm>

3. Louann Brizendine, *The Female Brain*. (New York, Broadway Publishers, 2006)1.

4. *ibid*, xviii In addition, to substantiate these studies and view suggestion on how gender differences should be addressed in the classroom, see Leonard Sax, M.D., PhD, *Why Gender Matters*, (New York: Broadway Books, 2005).

triggers aggression-the amygdala. This is why some men can go from zero to a fistfight in a matter of seconds, while many women will try anything to defuse conflict. But the psychological stress of conflict registers more deeply in areas of the female brain.<sup>5</sup>

One of the areas in which women are uniquely wired compared to men is reflected in woman's ability to read emotional expression. Brizendine explains:

Girls, not boys, come out wired for mutual gazing. Girls do not experience the testosterone surge in utero that shrinks the centers for communication, observation, and processing of emotion, so their potential to develop skills in these areas are better at birth than boys'. Over the first three months of life, a baby girl's skills in eye contact and mutual facial gazing will increase by over 400 percent, whereas facial gazing skills in a boy during this time will not increase at all. Baby girls are born interested in emotional expression.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, in collaborative ministry it is important to recognize that women have sharp observation skills, especially observation involving the emotional state of a human person. In addition, women can also hear emotional tones in the human voice better than men.

This female ability to read and hear emotion also translates into a greater sense of empathy. A study done at the Harvard Medical School found that female newborns, less than twenty-four hours old, respond more to the distressed cries of other babies and to distress in the human face than do male babies. Therefore, women are wired to be more responsive to the distress of others, specifically those who look or sound sad or hurt.<sup>7</sup> In addition, women tend to be more naturally empathetic than men. A study at the Institute of Neurology at University College, London placed women in an MRI machine while they delivered brief electric shocks to their hand; some shocks were weak and some

5. Louann Brizendine, *The Female Brain*, (New York, Broadway Publishers, 2006) 5.

6. *ibid*, 15 Also see Simon Baron-Cohen, *The Essential Difference*, (New York: Basic Books, 2003) 54-56. Simon Baron-Cohen is a professor of psychology and psychiatry at Cambridge University and director of its Autism Research Center

7. *ibid*, 18 Brizendine suggests that this innate ability of women to read distress signs in others is probably part of an evolutionary hardwiring for survival. Women are able to predict what others are going to do, potentially dangerous others, and thus avert attacks. (21) Most males, according to scientists, are not as adept at reading facial expressions and emotional nuance, especially signs of despair and distress. Thus, it's only when men actually see tears that they realize viscerally that something is wrong. Some scientists suggest this is why women cry four times more easily than men, displaying an unmistakable sign of sadness and suffering that men can't ignore. Also see Simon Baron-Cohen, 31.

were strong. Next, the hands of the women's romantic partners were hooked up for the same treatment. The women were signaled as to whether their romantic partner's shocks were weak or strong. The female subjects couldn't see the faces of their partners, but the same pain areas of their brains that had activated when they were shocked lit up when they learned their partners were being strongly shocked.<sup>8</sup> Researchers have not been able to elicit the same brain responses from men. Simon Baron-Cohen argues that because women are so empathetic they tend to naturally be more sensitive to newcomers as they are empathetic to their plight of being in a foreign environment and not knowing anyone.<sup>9</sup> Empathy is necessary to move one to work toward the love and care of others. The fact that women seem to have this innate gift makes it easier for women to make Christ present in the life of those who suffer.

In addition to being more observant and empathetic, women tend to be more intuitive. Women have a larger insula which is the part of the brain responsible for "gut feelings." Thus, women know things about the people around them. Women do truly tend to be more intuitive than men.<sup>10</sup>

Women tend to be more natural peace makers. Studies show that men and women tend to respond to anger differently. Men are more likely to immediately act on anger. Women tend to refrain from acting immediately. The male brain is flooded with testosterone thus, we see the tendency for active aggression. The female brain is wired to avert conflict. In addition, women tend to speak using more collaborative language than men, as a means of building a peaceful environment. This ability to calm and seek peaceful solutions to conflict is also a crucial skill to have in most pastoral situations.

8. Louann Brizendine, *The Female Brain*, (New York, Broadway Publishers, 2006)123.

9. Simon Baron-Cohen *The Essential Difference*, (New York: Basic Books, 2003) 43.

10. Louann Brizendine, 120-123.

women gain self esteem from the ability to maintain relationships, thus the desire for peaceful resolutions. If, however, a relationship is threatened then a woman will exhibit anger and act.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, a woman's stress response is massively triggered by social rejection.

The feeling of safety is built into the brain's wiring. Women's brains activate, more than men's, in anticipation of fear or pain. When stress or fear triggers go off, and this happens more frequently in women, one is prone to anxiety and ultimately depression. Anxiety is a state that occurs when stress or fear triggers the amygdala causing the brain to rally all its conscious attention to the threat at hand. This susceptibility makes teenage girls and adult women more prone to depression especially during reproductive years.<sup>12</sup> In collaborative ministry, it is crucial to recognize that men and women tend to react to different types of stress. Men tend to experience stress over challenges in authority and women experience stress over relationship issues.<sup>13</sup>

As indicated earlier one of the reasons that some people want to deny differences is due to a fear that somehow women will be shown to be inferior to men. Indeed, studies show that males and females have the same average intelligence. Interestingly, however, studies show that women medical students, despite performing equally to their male peers in the classroom and the clinic, consistently report decreased self-confidence and

11 Louann Brizendine, *The Female Brain*, (New York, Broadway Publishers, 2006) Females, in a bonded social group, are more likely to come to another's aid in a threatening or stressful situation. This behavior is referred to as "tend and befriend". In addition, regarding speech, while boys know how to employ an affiliative speech pattern they typically prefer to give commands to get things done. The testosterone-formed boy brain doesn't look for social connections the same way that the girl brain does. In fact, disorders that inhibit social nuance, i.e. autism and Asperger's syndrome are eight times more common in boys. Girls do tend to talk more than boys, however, and this has led to some negative ramifications for women in the past. In Colonial America, women were put in the town stocks with wooden clips on their tongues or tortured by the "dunking stool," held underwater and almost drowned for talking too much. This punishments were never imposed on men. Brizendine 36. The reaction of the colonial men seems similar to that of St. Paul when he frustratingly tells women not to speak in Church.

12. *ibid* 132.

13. *ibid* 34 Also see Elsevier (2007, September 18). Women More Depressed And Men More Impulsive With Reduced Serotonin Functioning. *ScienceDaily*. Retrieved October 7, 2008, from <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/09/17112504.htm> and University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine (2007, November 20). Brain Imaging Shows How Men And Women Cope Differently Under Stress. *Science Daily*. Retrieved October 7, 2008, from <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/11/19170133.htm>

increased anxiety. In addition, female medical students tend to underestimate their abilities while males tend to overestimate their ability. Perhaps this is due to a general undervaluing of the role of women in the world.

Clearly the scientific evidence tends to support the letter's claim that "women have a greater "capacity for the other" and a deep intuition toward actions which elicit life and contribute to the growth and protection of the other." (13) In addition, women seem to naturally be motivated to take these gifts actively into the world and serve others. These gifts and this willingness to serve others are synonymous with diaconal ministry in the Church.

### **The Phenomenon of Women, *Diakonia* and *Caritas***

Imagine that it is Sunday morning. The sun is shining, birds are chirping, the coffee is brewing, and you have an hour to relax and read the Sunday paper. You crack open the paper and are confronted with the following headline "Study Finds Women to be Leaders in the Practice of Charity." It is indeed quite possible that this headline would make the paper. This fact has been substantiated in numerous reports. A report done by RTI International found that, "Women, particularly mothers and those who work, are more likely than men to serve as volunteers for programs to assist the elderly, tutor youth and provide support following disasters." The report also found that in every state females volunteered at significantly higher rates than did males.<sup>14</sup> I think that this phenomenon raises some interesting questions concerning the role of women and the ministry of *diakonia* in the Church. Indeed the virtue of *caritas*, "the mother of all virtues," according to Aquinas, and *diakonia*, the ministry of charity, are at the heart of Christian

14. Nathan West, "RTI International News Release- 6-19-2006: Women More Likely to Volunteer than Men," <http://www.rti.org/newsroom/news.cfm?nav=268&objectid=429C1F1D-0B08-428E-A69F74EEB74EA1DB> [accessed June 3, 2008].

discipleship. They are so crucial to Christian identity that Benedict XVI in his first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est* states:

The exercise of charity became established as one of her [Church] essential activities, along with the administration of the sacraments and the proclamation of the word: love for widows and orphans, prisoners, and the sick and needy of every kind, is as essential to her as the ministry of the sacraments and preaching of the Gospel. The Church cannot neglect the service of charity any more than she can neglect the Sacraments and the Word.<sup>15</sup>

When the early Church community began to engage in evangelization there developed a need for various forms of *diakonia* in the Church. Men and women collaborated in the ministry of service in early Church history. In Scripture we do not have a clearly identified diaconal ministry limited solely to men. The male only diaconate developed later.

### **Diakonia in the New Testament**

*Diakonia* is a word that translates into various forms of service in the New Testament. In actuality there exists a sort of *diakonos* “family” in the Greek language. The word deacon, in Greek *diakonos*, comes from *diakonia* and therefore the role of the deacon in the Church is most often associated with service. Throughout the New Testament we see various references to people engaged in *diakonia* and this ministry is not gender specific. We frequently see reference to *diakonia* in Paul’s letters. In Paul’s letter to the Romans, we see him make specific reference to a woman, named Phoebe, who is called the *diakonos* of Cenchreae.<sup>16</sup>

In his book, *Deaconess: An Historical Study*, Amié Georges Martimort goes to great lengths to prove that there is no such thing as a “deaconess” in the New Testament, and

15. Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (25 December, 2005), 2.

16. For a thorough discussion of the different terms used to refer to people, specifically women, who practiced *diakonia* in the Church see Kevin Madigan and Carolyn Osiek, *Ordained Women in the Early Church: A Documentary History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005).

when the ministry of the deaconess did develop the role of the deaconess was considered to be inferior to that of the men who served as deacons.<sup>17</sup> While indeed it seems evident that the term “deaconess” was not used in the New Testament, it is likely because the same form of the word deacon was used to refer to both genders. Therefore while we can recognize that “deaconess” did not exist in the New Testament we must also acknowledge that it is equally difficult to argue that when *diakonos* was used in the New Testament it was only “truly” meant to refer to men. For example, as indicated earlier, St. Paul refers to Phoebe as *diakonos* in the masculine form. This is one of only two times that the noun *diakonos* is used in the New Testament. Phoebe’s specific *diakonia* is considered to be that of a protectress. A protectress offered assistance, especially hospitality, to foreigners. This would make sense as Paul was traveling at the time and Cenchreae was a sea port town.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, we must recognize that whenever Paul refers to someone exercising *diakonia*, he does not appear to be indicating that the word or ministry is gender specific. *Diakonia*, when used by Paul, refers to someone who has served in a particular area of the Church’s evangelization mission. Paul clearly finds the diaconal ministry of women beneficial to the mission of the Church.

The only other passage in the New Testament that uses the noun, *diakonos*, is in 1 Timothy 3:11, and once again it appears to make reference to both genders, although this is disputed by some scholars. Martimort suggests that most scholars believe that this passage is an interpolation, and every attempt at definitive interpretation identifying

17. Amiè Georges Martimort, *Deaconess: An Historical Study*, translated by K.D. Whitehead (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986). I have chosen to primarily address Martimort’s claims concerning women deacons due to the fact that Phyllis Zagano, author of *Holy Saturday: An Argument for the Restoration of the Female Diaconate in the Catholic Church*, claims that the International Theological Commission’s investigation of female deacons relied most heavily on Martimort rather than other consulted scholars such as Roger Gryson and Cipriano Vagaggini See Phyllis Zagano, *Catholic Women Deacons: Present Tense, Worship* vol. 77[September 2003] 397.

18. *ibid*, 20 Also consider Simon Baron-Cohen’s theory that women are naturally more sensitive to the plight of the stranger, Clearly St. Paul considers this sensitivity to be a significant gift to have in diaconal ministry.



women as “actual” deacons results in inconclusiveness. Therefore, Martimort argues that it is simply not possible to use this passage to show that female deacons, as equivalent to the eventually established office of male deacons, existed in New Testament times.<sup>19</sup> Yet, most scholars recognize *diakonia* in the New Testament is a general term used to specify some sort of service to the Church. Women regularly engaged in acts of service for the Church. Consequently, there is no need to attempt to downplay the fact that women were given the title of deacon. It is understood in the New Testament, that women and men were called deacons simply because they actively gave a part of their lives, in service to the Church. Moreover, while some scholars, like Martimort, are extremely uncomfortable allowing women to be recognized as having the title of deacon several exegetes in the history of the Church had no qualms about acknowledging women as being capable, both physically and theologically as serving the Church in the office of deacon.

Theodoret, a bishop of Cyrrhus, wrote:

Cenchreae is a great agglomeration adjoining Corinth. The effectiveness of the preaching is to be admired: in a very short period of time, not only were the cities filled with piety but the countryside around them as well. The Church assembly at Cenchreae was already so considerable as to have a woman deacon, prominent and noble. She was so rich in good works performed as to have merited the praise of Paul.<sup>20</sup>

We hear from Theodore of Mopsuestia, bishop of Mopsuestia in Cilicia, the province that bordered Upper Syria, concerning 1 Timothy 3:11:

Since Paul was speaking immediately before about deacons, and since this name applies also to women *given to similar tasks*, he quite logically added that the women also should be chaste. This does not mean that the wives of deacons were established in this service, but that any women who were established in it to exercise the same *office* as the deacons had to be as distinguished in their zeal for virtue as those same deacons. . . After

19. Amié Georges Martimort, *Deaconess: An Historical Study*, translated by K.D. Whitehead (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986),21 I fail to see why it would be so difficult for some people to acknowledge that women actively and officially served the Church in this manner. If we profess to recognize that women are full and equal persons in Christ’s body, the Church, why would the service of women not be considered part of Christ’s plan for the Church? Indeed did not Christ call all people to serve as He served?

20.Theodoret, *Interp. Romans. 16:1*, translated in Amié Georges Martimort, *Deaconess: An Historical Study*, translated by K.D. Whitehead (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986),117.

having mentioned cases of women given the responsibility of the diaconate, a mention which is explicable because of the similarity of the names, [Paul] went on to pick up the thread again of what he had been saying above deacons.<sup>21</sup>

Note that Theodore points out that male and female deacons performed similar tasks, and women exercised the same office. In addition, Theodore goes on to say that we shouldn't be surprised that Paul mentioned neither sub-deacons nor lectors since these degrees must have been created later in response to the needs of the ministry, but they were not degrees that were conferred before the altar because their conferral involved no service before the altar. Does this imply that it is possible that in some areas deaconesses did have a function before the altar?

St. John Chrysostom said on the issue:

“The women likewise” He [Paul] meant the [women] deacons. There are those who say he [Paul] was talking about women in general. No, that is not the case. It would have made no sense to have inserted here something about women in general in this particular place. He [Paul] was referring to those having the dignity of diaconess. “Let deacons be the husband of one wife.” This too is appropriately said also of woman deacons, for this is necessary, useful and proper in the highest degree in the Church.”<sup>22</sup>

Theodoret wrote:

“The women likewise,” that is to say, the [women] deacons “must be serious, no slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things.” What he [Paul] prescribed for men, [he prescribed] in similar terms equally for women. For just as he [Paul] required deacons to be “serious,” so he [Paul] required women to be serious. Just as he [Paul] required deacons not to be “double tongued,” so he [Paul] required the women to be “no slanderers.” Just as he [Paul] required deacons not to be “addicted to much wine,” so he [Paul] required to women to be temperate.<sup>23</sup>

I find it intriguing that some significant “orthodox” men in the Church take no issue with women serving the Church, and being identified, as *diakonos*.

21. Theodore of Mopsuestia, Commentaries on the Pauline Epistles, ed. H.B. Swete, vol. 2 (Cambridge University Press, 1882), pp128-29.

22. St. John Chrysostom, Homily 11, 1 Timothy:3-8, Christian Classics, Ethereal Library Calvin College <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf113.v.iii.xii.html>. [Accessed March 4, 2009].

23. Theodoret, interp Epist I ad Tim 3:11 translated in Amiè Georges Martimort, *Deaconess: An Historical Study*, translated by K.D. Whitehead (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986),118.

We don't know exactly what function these exegetes were referring to when they recognized these women as being deacons or deaconesses, however, it appears to be the same or similar function as male deacons. Given the time frame, we would have had established the "office" of deacon. In addition, Chrysostom refers to the "dignity of deaconess."<sup>24</sup> It seems to me that this implies a respected function in the Church. Indeed this would have to be unique to the role of the laity. Moreover, he clearly uses the word *diakonos* which is the same word used for the modern ordained office of deacon.

In our search for ways in which men and women can work collaboratively in Church ministry, we must not ignore that fact that women significantly served the Church in the office of *diakonia* and were recognized as having the *dignity* and *authority* to do so.

We can, therefore, determine conclusively from the New Testament that women worked alongside men in building up the Church through service in Christ's name. Moreover, women were respected and recognized as having the authority to serve as deacons by apostles, and Church Fathers.

### **The Establishment of the Diaconate**

Because the *exercise of charity* is so significant to the mission of the Church a diaconal office was established. The office, however, is currently only open to men. Interestingly, however, it is women who have excelled in the praxis of this diaconal ministry. Women, despite the lack of official recognition in the ministry, have assumed an authentic praxis of concrete charity as associated with the role of the deacon in the

24. St. John Chrysostom, comment. on Romans 16:2 translated in Amié Georges Martimort, *Deaconess: An Historical Study*, translated by K.D. Whitehead (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986),117.

.. Paul makes several references to women being coworkers i.e. Philippians 4. In addition, while we can not definitively conclude from the passages in the New Testament, or the early exegetical passages explored above, that women were ordained into diaconal ministry; neither can we deny that women could have been deemed worthy and capable of this function in the Church, some historical evidence suggests that women actually were ordained in this ministry. There are many truths revealed in the scriptures that are not literally written in the text. *Dei verbum* 9 states "the Church does not draw its certainty about all revealed truths from the holy scriptures alone."

early Church. Women lead the Church as *practitioners* of service. In his encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, Benedict XVI discusses the establishment of *diaconia*.

In the early Church, in fact, with regard to the daily distribution to widows, a disparity had arisen between Hebrew speakers and Greek speakers. The Apostles, who had been entrusted primarily with “prayer” (the Eucharist and the liturgy) and the “ministry of the word”, felt over-burdened by “serving tables”, so they decided to reserve to themselves the principal duty and to designate for the other task, also necessary in the Church, a group of seven persons. Nor was this group to carry out a purely mechanical work of distribution: they were to be men “full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (cf. Acts 6:1-6). In other words, the social service which they were meant to provide was absolutely concrete, yet at the same time, it was also a spiritual service; theirs was a truly spiritual office which carried out an essential responsibility of the Church, namely a well-ordered love of neighbor. With the formation of this group of seven, “diaconia”- the ministry of charity exercised in a communitarian, orderly way- became part of the fundamental structure of the Church.<sup>25</sup>

Notice some of the key phrases that Pope Benedict uses to define the role of the diaconal minister, “caring for the widows by serving tables... a social service that is *concrete* in nature, yet also embodying spiritual service... to carry out an essential responsibility, namely a well-ordered love of neighbor.” There is an emphasis on *concrete, measurable service*. In the Acts of the Apostles, following what many believe to be the inauguration of the diaconal ministry, it is noted that two of the newly ordained “deacons” add more to their responsibilities than simply caring for the poor in the community. We note that Stephen goes on to teach (Acts 6:8-11) and Philip does evangelization and performs a baptism (Acts 8:12-13). Soon after this revelation in Acts 9:36 we are introduced to a woman named Tabitha. We are told that “she was devoted to good works and acts of charity.” In addition we meet widows who are also recognized for their good works. It appears that we have the beginning of a trend in which women seem

25. Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (25 December, 2005), 2. John Collins suggests that it was not literally a need for people to serve tables that prompted the early Church to establish the diaconate, rather a need for evangelization to the Hellenists. In which case, we have evidence of women being acknowledged as deacons by Paul in this ministry. See John N. Collins, *Deacons and the Church: Making connections between old and new*, (Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing, 2002).

to be “making their own space” in a type of servant leadership in the Church through *diakonia*. It cannot be denied that women, with the blessing of the apostles, engaged in significant service in the Church and world to insure that the needs of the Church community were met.

It should be pointed out here that while traditionally Acts 6:1-6 is considered to be the inauguration of the diaconate many of the Church Fathers did not consider these men to be deacons. Furthermore at the Council of Quinisextum, or Trullanom, held in 692 AD, it was sanctioned that due to the teaching of the Church Fathers these seven men were not deacons and therefore the Church no longer had to maintain the practice of only seven deacons per bishop. This raises some interesting questions concerning the need to also maintain the practice of only choosing men for inclusion into the diaconal office.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Deaconess**

While it appears that the office of deacon was in place by the beginning of the second century, closely behind we have the institution of the deaconess.<sup>27</sup> The early Church community recognized that women uniquely filled a need in the Church. One of the documents that most scholars look to for evidence supporting the existence and responsibilities of the deaconess is the *Didascalia*. Yet many other sources referencing

26. The quote from Council of Trullanom reads “Whereas the Book of Acts relates that seven deacons were appointed by the apostles and the council of Neocaesarea in its canons determines that “The number of deacons in each city. . .” We having applied the same senses of the Fathers to the apostolic text find that the said history relates not to the deacons who minister in the mysteries, but to the service of tables. The doctor of the Church John Chrysostom, expounding the same, thus speaks: “It is a subject for wonder. . . neither deacons nor presbyters is their designation.” Hereupon therefore do we also publish that the aforesaid seven deacons be not taken to mean those which minister in the mysteries, as in the doctrine above rehearsed, but that these are they which were charged with the service of the common need of the people then gathered together albeit herein these be unto us a pattern of humane and diligent attendance on them that be an necessity.” We can no longer hold this passage as definitive Scriptural evidence that only men are to be ordained deacons in the Church. As found in J. Parker, *The Homilies of S. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople. On the Acts of the Apostles* (Oxford: Harvard University, 1851)199.

27. We have evidence that women held diaconal office in the East and the West, however this was more common in the East. In addition, the title deaconess did not displace that of female deacon. The two titles co-existed until the sixth century. We also have evidence that not all female diaconal officeholders were celibate, either virgins or widows. Indeed some married women were deacons. In addition it is a false assumption that by the fifth and sixth century all deaconesses were abbesses of female monasteries. Indeed, the two also coexisted. Moreover depending on geographic location and time period deaconesses were given various leadership designations. Some deaconesses received sacramental ordination, and some were simply granted membership into the clergy or special group status. See Kevin Madigan and Carolyn Osiek, *Ordained Women in the Early Church: A Documentary History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005).

the deaconess are also available. The *Didascalia* states:

Wherefore, O bishop, appoint thee workers of righteousness as helpers who may cooperate with thee unto salvation. Those that please thee out of all the people thou shalt choose and appoint as deacons: a man for the performance of the most things that are required, but a woman for the ministry of women. For there are houses whither thou canst not send a deacon to the women, on account of the heathen, but mayest send a deaconess. Also, because in many other matters the office of a woman deacon is required.<sup>28</sup>

Notice that, like the deacon, the deaconess is to serve the bishop. In addition, the

*Didascalia* also states that the role of the deaconess was to:

visit the homes of those Christian women who lived in pagan households and those who were immobilized by illness or could not otherwise go out. The deaconess is to serve them in whatever their needs might be, in spiritual works of mercy in addition to corporal works of mercy such as to bathe those who had begun to recover from illness.<sup>29</sup>

Yet again, as seen throughout history, women actively respond and excel in the practice of *concrete, measurable charity*. I think that we should seriously consider the possibility that female deacons could have been part of Christ's plan for the Church. Women seem to be naturally gifted for this ministry, and they are moved toward this ministry.

Martimort attempts to downplay the significance of the deaconess by suggesting that the office of deaconess was only created due to a social need.

The *Didascalia* indicates that it was the pressure of social conditions that brought about the creation of the deaconess in the Church; social conditions made their creation necessary at least in a relative sense. This necessity came to be perceived as more absolute in the course of the development of the Syriac text. There were households to which the bishop could never have sent a deacon to minister to the Christian women living therein, because the households were headed by pagans. A female deacon could gain admittance without difficulty.<sup>30</sup>

28. Peter Kirby. "Didascalia." *Early Christian Writings*, 2 Feb. 2006  
<<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/didascalia.html>> [accessed March 4, 2009]

29. *ibid*

30. Amié Georges Martimort, *Deaconess: An Historical Study*, translated by K.D. Whitehead (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986)43.

While it is clearly Martimort's desire to show that deaconesses were insignificant and inferior to male deacons I don't believe that to be the case. We do see instances in which deaconesses took on liturgical functions, besides that of assisting at baptisms. We know that when deaconesses were affiliated with convents they were permitted to take on liturgical functions if necessary.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, Martimort states, "the creation of the deaconess developed because of social conditions in the Church," implying it was not on the same level as the office of deacon. I am reminded of the explanation given by Pope Benedict XVI in *Deus Caritas Est* concerning the inauguration of the diaconate in the Church.

As the Church grew, this radical form of material communion could not in fact be preserved. But its essential core remained: within the community of believers there can never be room for a poverty that denies anyone what is needed for a dignified life. A decisive step in the difficult search for ways of putting this fundamental ecclesial principle into practice is illustrated in the choice of the seven, which marked the origin of the diaconal office (cf. Acts 6:5-6). In the early Church, in fact, with regard to the daily distribution to widows, a disparity had arisen between Hebrew speakers and Greek speakers. The Apostles, who had been entrusted primarily with "prayer" (the Eucharist and the liturgy) and the "ministry of the word", felt over-burdened by "serving tables", so they decided to reserve to themselves the principal duty and to designate for the other task, also necessary in the Church, a group of seven persons.

It appears that it was due to the *social issue* of the rapid growth of the Church and the need to meet a fundamental ecclesial practice of caring for the poor that the apostles/bishops needed assistance. Therefore, reflected in the institution of the deaconess, we see a response to a need in the community which was likewise reflected in the inauguration of the office of the male diaconate. Indeed it would seem that in order to insure the proper dignity of women and the sacrament of baptism, because of the

31. As pointed out by Martimort in 538 A.D. John bar Qursos, bishop of Tella Mauzelat, when questioned about the acceptable functions of the deaconess, replied that deaconesses were permitted to give out communion to children under five, in addition, if no deacon was available the deaconess could assist the priest by censing with the thurible, it is also stated that she could not distribute communion when on her menses, but the implication is that she can when she is not on her menses, she may also wash the sacred vessels and she is permitted to pour the wine and water into the chalice with the permission of the bishop. It is also permitted to her the right to read the Gospels and the holy books in an assembly meeting of women. See Martimort 141-142.

common practice of adult baptisms in that period of Church history, the bishops of certain communities saw the need for deaconesses. In addition, deaconesses played a significant role in the evangelization of women, a need that could not otherwise have been met by male deacons. It appears that we had the need to institute deaconesses in order to meet a “fundamental ecclesial practice.” We must consider if female deacons could meet a need in the Church today.

In addition, we have evidence that some deaconesses were ordained.<sup>32</sup> We are told that the ordination of the deaconess, like that of the deacon, took place during the Eucharistic liturgy, or the Mass of the Catechumens. Moreover, the ordination took place in the sanctuary. The sanctuary was also the location for the ordination of the male deacon. The ordination of the sub-deacon was not permitted in the sanctuary because their ministry did not require service at the altar. This seems to lend support to Theodore of Mopsuestia, discussed earlier in the chapter, who made reference to deaconesses serving before the altar. The bishop also presented the deaconess with the chalice, yet the deaconess simply drank from the chalice and placed it on the altar where as the deacon took the chalice into the congregation to distribute communion. In addition, the deaconess received an *orarion*, yet she was to wear it differently than the male deacon and this liturgical garb was also granted to the sub-deacon.<sup>33</sup>

32. While we have significant evidence that women were ordained in some churches for ministry, some challenge the validity of these ordinations since this practice was not universal. Most Western scholars agree that Canon 15 of the Council of Chalcedon (451) seems to confirm that deaconesses were ordained by the imposition of hands. In the fifth and sixth centuries at least three councils, Orange (441), Epacon (517) and Orleans (533) mandated that the ordination of deaconesses be stopped entirely.

It is the Western Church that seems to struggle with the idea of female ordination more than the Eastern Church. David Ford suggests that this is due to an earlier and healthier understanding of human sexuality in the Eastern Church that granted women a higher dignity. For a full conversation see David Ford, *Women and Men in the Early Church: The Full views of John Chrysostom* (South Canaan: St. Tikhons Seminary Press, 1996) In 2004 the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church in Greece voted to restore the female diaconate. While the document does not use the term ordination, it allows bishops to consecrate senior nuns. If bishops choose to promote women to the diaconate they only have the ancient Byzantine liturgy that performs the same *cheirotomia*, laying on of hands, for deaconesses as bishops, priests and deacons.

33. Amie Georges Martimort, *Deaconess: An Historical Study*, translated by K.D. Whitehead (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986)244.



Aimé Georges Martimort is adamant in pointing out that deaconesses were consistently considered to be inferior to the male deacon in the Church. Martimort suggests this could be due to sociological prejudice.

Even when the role of the deaconesses in baptisms has been verified, it has also been shown to have a limited role. . . Moreover, it must be even more strongly emphasized that deaconesses were never allowed to teach or preach in public. Of course, it is always possible to attribute these kinds of restrictions to some kind of sociological prejudice, but that changes nothing with respect to the facts and especially with respect to the very general nature of the facts: namely, that during all the time when the institution of deaconesses was a living institution, both the discipline and the liturgy of the churches insisted upon a very clear distinction between deacons and deaconesses.<sup>34</sup>

Any suggestion of sociological prejudice limiting women's role in Church ministry should not be taken lightly. If indeed we are seeking to understand Christ's role for women in the Church the litmus test for truth must be the consideration of what Christ modeled. Jesus always treated women with respect and he allowed them to take diaconal roles in his ministry.<sup>35</sup>

Scholars have been able to deduce four significant factors that led to the cessation of the deaconess. One factor was a crisis that the Church faced during the latter part of the second century regarding the heresies of Gnosticism and Montanism. It is suggested that, because many women were affiliated with these heretical sects the Church balked at allowing women leadership positions for fear of association with the heresies. Another reason for the cessation of deaconesses is thought to be an emphasis that the Church was placing on asceticism coupled with a deficient view of human sexuality. Women were seen as temptresses who led men away from celibacy and thus women were poorly

34. Aimé Georges Martimort, *Deaconess: An Historical Study*, translated by K.D. Whitehead (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986)247.

35. Most scholars will admit that women did face a restriction of activity in the Church, due to cultural influence on Church practices.

regarded, specifically in the west. A third reason suspected for the end of the deaconess was the incorrect interpretation of some Scriptural passages which prevented women from carrying out certain functions in the Church. Finally, when the Church began doing infant baptisms the deaconess was no longer needed for modesty purposes. Interestingly, male deacons also faced extinction for a period of time. In the west permanent male deacons all but disappeared from Church life until the Second Vatican Council.

While we have seen that some Church Fathers, such as John Chrysostom, considered the deaconesses to have a certain “dignity” we do have evidence that in some geographic locations, primarily in the West, the role of women in Church ministry was not as highly regarded. One is left to ponder how is it that some of our most respected Church Fathers supported the ministry and “dignity” of the deaconess while others would have vehemently rejected it. Witherington speculates:

The order had probably begun as a means of practical service, but eventually had involved sacral functions at baptism. Thereafter, it involved the teaching of new female converts, again as a matter of decorum. In due course, principles drawn from the (mis)interpretation of such texts as 1 Cor 14.33b-36, 1 Tim 2.1ff., appear to have won the day over other considerations, thus impoverishing the Church of vital female workers.<sup>36</sup>

Eventually the ministry of the deaconess was limited to the convent. The position of deaconess in the convent allowed women to receive a special blessing and serve only the women in the convent. In addition if a woman wanted to dedicate her life to Church ministry the only option was to enter the convent. Thus, many faith-filled active women chose to withdraw to the convent and the Church lost much of her “feminine genius” in active ministry. Witherington reflects:

36. Ben Witherington III, *Women in the Earliest Churches*(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 200

In fact they [women] removed themselves from being a viable influence on the Church in any ongoing way (apart from their example and their prayer life). This meant that many of the most committed Christian women went into a form of Christian living that precluded them from outreach, evangelism, and other functions of the body of Christ. . . It is a matter the whole Church still has not rectified fully.<sup>37</sup>

With the need for outreach through *caritas* and evangelism it is certainly not ideal to have some of the most fervent women out of active ministry. We must make sure that women are in a position to have a viable influence in the world by evangelizing through *caritas*.

### **Gender Differences in the Practice of Charity**

While we have seen that the reason for the establishment of deaconesses was comparable to that of the original diaconal office, throughout history we have seen some differences in the way in which men and women practice *caritas*. Women consistently outdo men in the practice of *concrete* acts of charity while men seem to be practitioners of more abstract forms of charity. In her article, discussing women in Russian charity, Adele Lindenmeyr notices the fact that women during 1762-1914 in Russia, as in the West, were leaders in acts of charity. She states:

Individual women of all classes participated in traditional forms of personal giving, such as distributing alms and caring for the sick poor that endured into the twentieth century. At the same time, private charitable organizations which numbered several thousand by 1900, relied heavily on money, time, and effort donated by women. . . . Their selfless love of their neighbor was measured not by the amounts they gave away, but, rather, by the physical care and comfort they dispensed in personal visits to the poor.<sup>38</sup>

It is this type of charity that Benedict praises in *Deus Caritas Est*. Notice the immediate identification that women practiced “selfless love of their neighbor,” the same words used by Benedict in describing the desired praxis of the persons chosen as the first deacons in the Church. Women clearly have the ability to serve as deacons in the Church.

37. Ben Witherington III, *Women in the Earliest Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 210

38. Adele Lindenmeyr, “Public Life, Private Virtues: Women in Russian Charity, 1762-1914,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* [Spring 1993]: 563.

Further in the article, Adele Lindenmeyr cites an example of the acknowledgment of men and women for practicing charity. In the year 1910, at the first national congress on charity in Russia, four people were given awards for their practice of charity, one woman, Princess Maria Dondukova-Korskova, and three men. The presenter made the following comments at the ceremony:

The princess' outstanding qualities were *spiritual*, she was dedicated from her earliest years to *selfless love for her neighbor*, the princess fulfilled the commandments of the Gospel for her entire life and trod along the pathway of Christ's disciples, applying in real life the words of the Divine Teacher: 'give all that you have away and distribute it to the poor, and you will have a treasure in heaven, and then come-follow Me'! [Emphasis mine]<sup>39</sup>

By contrast, Lindenmeyr states, "the three men were acknowledged as being charity reformers rather than practitioners; they were given gratitude, for their service to one main idea, to introduce into the realm of public charity the light of science and proper organization." Lindenmeyr notes that female charity was expected to embody love and sacrifice, while male charity served the cause of reason and reform.

I believe that two things need to be noted here; woman practice charity in a more "concrete" manner, thus, the type of charity sought by the early Church with the establishment of the diaconal ministry. The other factor is that society only acknowledged one woman for the practice of charity (service in the concrete) and yet three men were acknowledged for "contributions toward reason and reform in charity."<sup>40</sup>

Some in the early church recognized that women had a natural gift in the praxis of *caritas* and allowed them to practice this ministry with the official title of deaconess. In

39. Lindenmeyr, Adele. "Public Life, Private Virtues: Women in Russian Charity, 1762-1914," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* [Spring 1993]: 564 \* It's interesting that women are recognized by both genders as reflecting a concrete love of neighbor, so much that they conjure up images of Christ.

40. As we have discussed, the Church claims great value in the praxis of Charity, yet the seven men chosen to serve the widows quickly went on to "bigger and better things" such as preaching, and baptizing while the women picked up the "menial" task of true *diakonia*. Thus, the diaconal office went on to embrace more than just the praxis of charity. The Church is clearly not a separate entity from society, rather, many times she assimilates society's values into practice, therefore, I don't think that it is unreasonable to ask ourselves, as a Church do we value *diakonia* as much as we profess or have we followed the trend of society and lost some respect for the actual praxis of charity? Were male deacons given higher status because we value men more or are women given an inferior status for their consistent praxis of charity because we don't truly value the praxis of *caritas*?

addition some deaconesses were ordained, I would suggest, in order to receive sacramental grace for their ministry like their male collaborators in the praxis of *diakonia*. Yet, as we would expect, given the differences between the genders, we notice a distinctive way in which the genders served the Church through *diakonia*. The male deacons, as articulated in early Church documents, were to work under the authority of the bishop and “minister to the Church at worship by reading, praying, assisting with Eucharist and, in some geographical areas even preaching. The male deacons were to handle church finances, **oversee** charity to the poor, give personal counsel, and have judicial responsibilities. By contrast, the role of the deaconess was to work under the authority of the bishop and the deacon and **handle** charity, aid and assist women, assist in baptizing women and instruct new Christian women in the faith.”<sup>41</sup> Keep in mind that the seven men from Acts were commissioned to care for the widows yet it is indeed the deaconesses who have taken on the role of ministering to the women in need. Also, note the fact that the male deacon *oversees* the charity while the deaconess handles the charity.

This trend of gender variation in the practice of charity is seen throughout church history. Even St. Vincent de Paul, referred to as the Apostle of Charity, practiced charity by “raising awareness” of the problems through preaching and overseeing charitable organizations more so than actually engaging in the praxis of charity as supported in an excerpt of de Paul’s biography.

In August 1617, as he was preparing for Sunday Mass, a parishioner brought news of the illness and destitution of an entire family in the parish. He preached on their need, and that afternoon the people responded in overwhelming numbers by carrying them food and supplies. Vincent then called a meeting of interested women, and urged them to put order into their generosity by taking turns. With rules drawn up by Vincent, they established a group which became the first Confraternity of Charity.<sup>42</sup>

41. The Teaching of the Apostles, quoted in Jean LaPorte, *The Role of Women in Early Christianity* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1982), pp. 112-114; and in Tony Cowley, “Women Deacons” (*Cornerstones*, September/October 1989, p. 6).

42. St. Vincent de Paul Parish Richboro, PA “*St. Vincent de Paul Online Magazine, The Life of St. Vincent de Paul, Apostle of Charity*” <http://www.svdprichboro.org/vincent.htm>. [accessed June 4, 2008].

We note, again, that it is the women who do “concrete” service.

It seems clear that as we look to find a place for women in active Church ministry we should not ignore the natural giftedness and inclination that women have for “concrete” *caritas*. At this time we currently do not recognize *diakonia* as an ordinary function of women in the Church.

### **A Place for Women in the Church**

When asked about the place of women in Church ministry Pope Benedict XVI stated:

In our own time women, and we with them, must look for their right place, so to speak. Today they are very present in the departments of the Holy See. But there's a juridical problem: according to Canon Law the power to make legally binding decisions is limited to Sacred Orders. So there are limitations from this point of view but I believe that women themselves, with their energy and strength, with their superiority, with what I'd call their "spiritual power," will know how to make their own space. And we will have to try and listen to God so as not to stand in their way but, on the contrary, to rejoice when the female element achieves the fully effective place in the Church best suited to her, starting with the Mother of God and with Mary Magdalene.<sup>43</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI has stated that women need to find their own place in the Church and it appears that women have shown that *diakonia* is one Church ministry that they do naturally and do well. Scripture does not prevent women from being ordained in this ministry. Moreover, tradition records women as being ordained in this ministry. In addition, science supports that women's brains are created with the ability to be moved to the plight of the suffering and marginalized. Interestingly, while traditionally female deacons have tended to the needs of women they would be just as capable of ministering effectively to men. A study out of the University of Alberta shows that male athletes prefer female team physicians. Indeed the study states:

43. Schenk, Christine. National Catholic Reporter 11/3/2006: "Vatican Shows New Openness to Women." <http://www.futurechurch.org/watwl/vaticanwomen.htm>. [accessed November 14, 2008].

What we found is that male athletes tend to feel that female team physicians are more caring and sympathetic towards their medical issues and are easier to talk to. . . Other personal attributes of importance to athletes included the team physicians concern for them as people and athletes, as well as being understanding and respectful. Good listening and communication skills from the team physician were also paramount as was having compassion towards the athlete. Trust, sensitivity and understanding were important, as was having a positive, encouraging and open-minded attitude towards the athlete with a professional approach and a willingness to help.<sup>44</sup>

Clearly the female capacity to be empathetic is a gift that can serve both genders and ultimately the mission of the Church well.

Ultimately women, from the inauguration of the Church, have modeled a well structured praxis of *caritas*. The feminine *caritas* is concrete and spiritual. This is the same service that Christ modeled when he bent down to wash the feet of his disciples. The fact that women have never balked at this fundamental ecclesial practice, rather embraced it naturally as part of their feminine “capacity for the other” also must be recognized as very well being within Christ’s plan for His Church.

The DMLPD states:

Pastoral formation constantly encourages the deacon to perfect the effectiveness of his ministry of making the love and service of Christ present in the Church and in society without distinction, especially to the poor and to those most in need. Indeed it is from the pastoral love of Christ that the ministry of the deacons draws its model and inspiration.

Thus, it seems that women have gifts proper to their nature to excel in this ministry.<sup>45</sup>

As we consider all that has been discussed thus far, our conversation requires the identification of a model couple, if you will, who concretely reflect fruitful collaboration between men and women in the Church. It is my intention to show that John Chrysostom and Deaconess Olympias is that couple.

44. University of Alberta, *Male Athletes Prefer Female Team Physicians*. Science Daily April 27, 2007, <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/04/070426150300.htm>. [accessed October 7, 2008].

45. Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons*. (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1998).

### CHAPTER III

#### **Tradition Speaks: John Chrysostom and Deaconess Olympias, A Model of Collaboration**

In our work toward increasing the collaboration of men and women in the Church and world, I believe that it would be helpful to identify a couple that models Christian collaboration. In consideration of all that has been discussed thus far, there are several characteristics that should be exemplified in a collaborative relationship. A collaborative relationship should be based on mutual respect. Moreover, Christian collaboration in ministry should recognize the differences between men and women and accentuate the gifts that each person brings to the relationship for the sake of the mission of the Church. Collaborative ministry should recognize women as having an active role to play in the Church and world. A good collaborative relationship in ministry should reflect the ability to make great strides in the areas of evangelization and *caritas*, thus reflecting Christ's love and compassion on the world. Therefore, a collaborative relationship in the Church should reflect a shared servant leadership. It is my intention to show that John Chrysostom and Deaconess Olympias serve as a model of Christian collaboration in ministry.

In this chapter I will begin by exploring the long history and traditional basis for men and women working collaboratively in the Church. I will also explore the biographies of Chrysostom and Olympias. In this exploration it will be necessary to consider the theology of John Chrysostom and address some accusations of misogyny. I



will present evidence of their close friendship which also reflects an awareness and respect of gender differences. I will rely on a series of extant letters that Chrysostom wrote to Olympias to show Olympias displaying some of the behavior discussed in chapter two. Ultimately, within Church history women were ordained deacons and this ministry proved to be fruitful for the Church. Chrysostom and Olympias model this fruitfulness.

### **The Significance of Male and Female Collaboration in the Christian Tradition**

The Christian tradition is full of examples of men and women working collaboratively to make Christ present in the world and build the kingdom on earth. The fact that the incarnation reflects the divine plan that a man and a woman play a role in bringing the Word into the world, thus salvation history, clearly reflects the Creator's desire for active collaboration between men and women in the Church and the world.

An emphasis of male-female pairs is clearly noticeable in the New Testament. Francis Martin points out just how deliberate these male-female pairs appear to be emphasized in Scripture.

It is interesting to observe how often in the gospel tradition these [references to women] are presented as part of a male-female pair of stories. Some examples are the oppressed widow and the despised tax collector as models of prayer (Lk 18:1-14); the farmer sowing mustard seed and the woman using leaven (Mt 13:31-33; Lk 13:18-21); the lost sheep and the lost coin (Lk 15:3-10).

The tendency to form male-female pairs is evident also in stories of healing. The only two healings at a distance recorded in the Gospels involve accounts of Jesus' care for a pagan officer of the occupation forces and a pagan woman in Matthew 8:5-13 (par Lk 7:1-10) and Matthew 15:21-28 (par. Mk 7:24-30). Besides illustrating Jesus' care for those outside the pale of usual Jewish concern, Matthew's pairing is meant to teach us something about his abiding and equal concern for both women and men. Luke's regular practice of pairing stories about men and women finds expression in the stories of the centurion's boy and the raising of the son of the widow of Nain (Lk 7:1-17); the Sabbath healings of the woman bowed over and the man with dropsy (Lk 13:10-17; 14:1-5).<sup>1</sup>

Also within the New Testament, we see numerous examples of men and women working collaboratively in ministry. For example, we see Lydia providing hospitality to Paul and

1. Francis Martin, *The Feminist Question: Feminist Theology In The Light of Christian Tradition*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdsman, 1994). 102.

his companions (Acts 16:14-15, 40). We also see the husband and wife team of Priscilla and Aquila teaching and providing hospitality in their home. In Romans 16, Paul refers to this couple as his coworkers. Paul uses this term several times in his letters and it is frequently used in reference to women. Francis Martin points out “It [coworker] seems to be a title he [Paul] reserves for those who have generously extended themselves for the sake of the gospel.”<sup>2</sup> Paul refers to Timothy as a coworker (Romans 16:21) as well as numerous women.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, in Romans 16, Paul spends time identifying people that have helped him in his ministry and men and women are clearly identified as playing significant roles.<sup>4</sup>

Within the Christian tradition, we also see examples of men and women reflecting Christ to the world through martyrdom. The Church grew due to the strong witness of Christ presented to the world by men and women. For example, Deacon Laurence was slowly roasted over hot coals. Perpetua and Felicity were fed to wild animals as part of the emperor’s birthday celebration and eventually pierced by gladiator’s swords. Peter was hung upside down on a cross and died. Yet, through the persecutions their faith stood strong, and these martyrs presented to the world *imago Christi*. A text by Eusebius in *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5.1.41 tells of Blandina, a woman, who was dangled from a stake before wild beasts and appeared, in the eyes of the Christians present, as the crucified Christ.<sup>5</sup> These martyrs felt the presence of Christ with them in their suffering, and through the strength granted to them by the grace of God they emulated for others the

2. Francis Martin, *The Feminist Question: Feminist Theology In The Light of Christian Tradition*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdsman, 1994). 106.

3. See Philippians 4:3

4. Interestingly in this passage, Phoebe is referred to as a deacon in the masculine form and Timothy is simply referred to as a coworker, a term that Paul applies to men and women in his letters. . . . in 1 Timothy 5:22, Paul warns Timothy to not ordain anyone hastily, yet there are no limitations concerning gender specified. Ultimately the only criteria given is that “they should be tested first; then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. Clearly, women’s ability to serve the Church through diakonia has been tested and shown to be very fruitful.

5. Elizabeth Goodine and Matthew Mitchell, “The Persuasiveness of a Woman: The Mistranslation and Misinterpretation of Eusebius’ *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5.1.41,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 13:1 [2005]: 1-19.

image of the suffering Christ. These martyrs presented an image that would compel others to take up their cross and follow Jesus as well. Out of the suffering came fruit. The growth of the Church is often attributed to the suffering of the martyrs. While logic may lead one to believe that the killing of the early Christians would have hurt the community, it had an opposite effect. Amidst the suffering, the ability of the martyrs to present the image of Christ actually perpetuated the Church community.

In addition, we see examples of collaboration in Scripture exegesis through Jerome and Marcella, Paula, and Eustochium. Upon the death of Marcella, Jerome wrote a memoir in which he discussed her significance and ability in Scriptural exegesis.

And, as in those days my name was held in some renown as that of a student of the scriptures, she never came to see me that she did not ask me some question concerning them, nor would she at once acquiesce in my explanations but on the contrary would dispute them; not, however, for argument's sake but to learn the answers to those objections which might, as she saw, be made to my statements. How much virtue and ability, how much holiness and purity I found in her I am afraid to say; both lest I may exceed the bounds of men's belief and lest I may increase your sorrow by reminding you of the blessings that you have lost. This much only will I say, that whatever in me was the fruit of long study and as such made by constant meditation a part of my nature, this she tasted, this she learned and made her own. Consequently after my departure from Rome, in case of a dispute arising as to the testimony of scripture on any subject, recourse was had to her to settle it. And so wise was she and so well did she understand...<sup>6</sup>

In addition to using their bodies to represent Christ as martyrs, women can also use their intellect to teach the inspired word of God to men and women in the Church. In this area, men and women can and should collaborate.

Moreover, the Church in America grew due to collaborative efforts in Catholic education. Elizabeth Ann Seton and the Sisters of Charity and Fr. William Du Bourg and American Bishop John Carroll are recognized for their collaborative efforts. Fr. Du Bourg, who was the president of Saint Mary's Seminary in Baltimore, was looking for someone to assist with the formation of a Catholic school in Baltimore, and

6. Jerome, *Letter CXXVII To Principia*, Christian Classics Ethereal Library retrieved March 17, 2009 from (<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf206.v.CXXVII.html>)

he asked Seton to take on the project.<sup>7</sup>

Seton and the Sisters of Charity in America followed a very similar rule to the Sisters of Charity in France founded by St. Vincent de Paul. Therefore, their mission was rooted in acts of charity in support of the poor.

John Paul II identified acts of charity and social work to be a significant aspect of evangelization of the Church in America.

Another important area in which the Church is present in every part of America is social and charitable work. The many initiatives on behalf of the elderly, the sick and the needy, through nursing homes, hospitals, dispensaries, canteens providing free meals, and other social centers are a concrete testimony of the preferential love for the poor which the Church in America nurtures. She does so because of her love for the Lord and because she is aware that “Jesus identified himself with the poor (cf. Mt 25:31-46).” In this task which has no limits, the Church in America has been able to create a sense of practical solidarity among the various communities of the continent and of the world, showing in this way the fraternal spirit which must characterize Christians in every time and place.

For this service of the poor to be both evangelical and evangelizing, it must faithfully reflect the attitude of Jesus, who came “to proclaim Good News to the poor” (Lk 4:18). When offered in this spirit, the service of the poor shows forth God’s infinite love for all people and becomes an effective way of communicating the hope of salvation which Christ has brought to the world, a hope which glows in a special way when it is shared with those abandoned or rejected by society.”<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, the Sisters of Charity did great work and very definitely made Christ present in America. Their work also had a significant evangelization component which resulted in the growth of the Church, although their focus was not primarily to proselytize, rather to simply spread the love of Christ. Seton recorded in a letter to a friend, “I will speak of the joy of my soul at the prospect of being able to assist the poor, visit the sick, comfort the sorrowful, clothe little innocents and teach them to love God!”<sup>9</sup>

Clearly, women are capable of, and many are drawn to, doing fruitful ministry typically associated with the office of deacon. It seems reasonable that the Church would offer them added grace for their ministry.

7. For more information on male/female collaboration in education in America see, Catherine M. Kealey and Robert J. Kealey, *On Their Shoulders: A Short Biographical History of American Catholic Schools*. Washington: National Catholic Educational Association, 2003, 31.

8. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America*. (January 22, 1999) 18.

9. Elizabeth Seton, *Elizabeth Bayley Seton collected writings Vol.2*. New York: New City Press, 2002.

I would like to focus on John Chrysostom and Deaconess Olympias as a model for collaborative ministry. Olympias was ordained for her ministry of service in the Church. Ordination is seen as a natural step once the need for the ministry is recognized by the Church and a call from the Lord is received by the minister.

### **St. John Chrysostom**

John Chrysostom was the son of a military officer. His father died when he was still an infant. His mother adamantly refused to remarry.<sup>10</sup> John was raised with a classical education and thrived in rhetoric. He was also raised with Christian piety. When he was eighteen he rejected his philosopher tutors and opted to study under a monk. John lived a semi-monastic life until the death of his mother because she did not want him to leave her. Once she died he was given permission by the archbishop to live as a hermit. Due to a poor diet and living in cold temperatures his health was compromised, and he acquired a kidney and digestive ailment that plagued him all his life.

Chrysostom moved to the city due to his health conditions, and he was ordained a priest in 386. At this time he was given major preaching responsibilities in Antioch. His preaching gained him great attention, and eventually he was summoned to Constantinople and was made Archbishop. During his time in Constantinople, Chrysostom developed a close relationship with Deaconess Olympias, and they worked extensively to aid the poor in their midst while building up the Church.

While Chrysostom was initially warmly received, his consistent preaching against excessive luxury and ostentation of the wealthy eventually resulted in the disdain of the

10. The following biographical information primarily comes from David C. Ford, *Women and Men in the Early Church: The Full Views of St. John Chrysostom* (South Canaan: St. Tikhons Seminary Press, 1996) 1-10.

powerful Empress Eudoxia.<sup>11</sup> Eventually Chrysostom was banished to exile, yet he left behind several supporters including the Deaconess Olympias. Chrysostom died September 14, 407 while being forced to march to a further place in exile.

Chrysostom had a beautiful and respectful relationship with several women, Deaconess Olympias in particular. Yet, Chrysostom has been labeled by many feminists as being misogynist. It is necessary to explore these claims before proceeding in our conversation.

### **Chrysostom and Women**

David Ford, in his book *Women and Men in the Early Church: The Full Views of St. John Chrysostom*, argues that Chrysostom has been unjustly labeled misogynist. In order to support his claim, Ford relies on several factors. These factors include, (1) the more positive view of the Eastern Fathers than that of the Western Fathers on sexual issues;(2) a marked change in his writings after his ordination to the priesthood in his descriptions of marriage;(3) Chrysostom's general theological/spiritual ethos; (4) his characteristic use of rhetorical exaggeration; (5) his profound admiration for the noteworthy spiritual women of the Old and New Testament; (6) his close association with and high esteem for spiritual women of his day, especially the deaconess St. Olympias.<sup>12</sup> I will briefly explore these points to defend my position that Chrysostom was not misogynist.

Some feminists claim that Chrysostom is misogynist because some of his writings indicate a preference for celibacy and thus they argue that he spoke negatively about

11 It has been pointed out that a newly discovered manuscript that proves to be the life of St. John Chrysostom cites three new charges brought about at the Synod of Oak. It states that one of the charges was that he built a leprosarium within the confines of the residential district. Another ridiculous charge, is that he obtained power over people by magical powers and thirdly that he had gone beyond his canonical jurisdiction in making some ecclesiastical appointments, conducting ordinations and censuring the clergy. See Robert Meyer, *Ancient Christian Writers: Palladius: Dialogue on the Life of St. John Chrysostom* (New York: Newman Press, 1985)6.

12. To see the complete argument see David Ford *Women and Men in the Early Church: The Full Views of St. John Chrysostom* (South Canaan: St. Tikhons Seminary Press, 1996).

women. An example can be seen in Chrysostom's exhortation to Theodore in which Chrysostom speaks very harshly about woman's beauty.

I know that thou art now admiring the grace of Hermione, and thou judgest that there is nothing in the world to be compared to her comeliness; but if you choose, O friend, you shall yourself exceed her in comeliness and gracefulness, as much as golden statues surpass those which are made of clay. For if beauty, when it occurs in the body, so fascinates and excites the minds of most men, when the soul is refulgent with it what can match beauty and grace of this kind? For the groundwork of this corporeal beauty is nothing else but phlegm, and blood, and humor, and bile, and the fluid of masticated food. For by these things both eyes and cheeks, and all the other features, are supplied with moisture; and if they do not receive that moisture, daily skin becoming unduly withered, and the eyes sunken, the whole grace of the countenance forthwith vanishes; so that if you consider what is stored up inside those beautiful eyes, and that straight nose, and the mouth and the cheeks, you will affirm the well-shaped body to be nothing else than a white sepulchre; the parts within are full of so much uncleanness.<sup>13</sup>

Yet, it is crucial to keep things in proper context. Early in Chrysostom's career he wrote against marriage because he was writing in defense of a monastic/ascetic life. His objective was to encourage monks to be faithful to the celibate life, as observed in this letter to his friend Theodore. Therefore any just reading of Chrysostom's writings during his early monastic years must keep this point in mind. When Chrysostom was ordained a priest and wrote homilies on marriage he developed a very beautiful theology of marriage, because his pastoral objective at this time was to address and minister to the married couples in the Church.

Ford suggests that overall the Eastern Church Fathers had a more positive view of sex than the Western Fathers. This was based on a more positive view of marriage in the east. This claim can be supported by the fact that the Eastern Church allows priests to marry. In the Western Church, however, marriage of priests was frowned upon, and eventually rejected. Thus Ford proposes that Tertullian, Ambrose and Augustine were more negative toward women primarily because of an unhealthy view of sex. In the East, Irenaeus, Methodius, Clement and Gregory of Nyssa, for example, had a high view of

13. John Chrysostom, *Letter One An Exhortation to Theodore After his Fall* 14 Christian Classics Ethereal Library <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf109.v.iii.html> [accessed March 10, 2009].

marriage and sex and therefore women were not simply viewed as being seductive and ultimately bad by their nature.<sup>14</sup> This is supported, for example, by Augustine's teaching that sexual relations were evil, but tolerated in marriage due to procreation.

Marriages have this good also, that carnal or youthful incontinence, although it be faulty, is brought unto an honest use in the begetting of children, in order that out of the evil of lust the marriage union may bring to pass some good.<sup>15</sup>

Chrysostom believed that sex was good, but could be misused.

The fornicator, then, is not the only one that is unclean, but others more than he, such as especially the adulterer. But both are unclean, not due to the intercourse, for according to that reasoning a man cohabiting with his own wife would be unclean, but due to the injustice and rapacity of the act, and the injury done to his neighbor. . .<sup>16</sup>

Notice, how Chrysostom does not simply hold the woman accountable for the adultery, but, rather, “both” are unclean. Moreover, Chrysostom believed that sex between a husband and wife was still good even if no child resulted. Indeed sexual desire is part of our human nature and since it is God-given, it is to be enjoyed.<sup>17</sup>

This love (eros) is deeply planted within our nature. Unnoticed by us, it attracts the bodies of men and women to each other, because in the beginning woman came forth from man, and now from man and woman both men and women proceed.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, Chrysostom did not believe that sex was only “tolerated” because of procreation. He argued, “But suppose there is no child; do they then remain two and not one? No, since their intercourse effects the joining of their bodies, and they are made one, just as when perfume is mixed with ointment.”<sup>19</sup>

Chrysostom saw marriage as a beautiful reflection of Christian love between the

14. David Ford *Women and Men in the Early Church: The Full Views of St. John Chrysostom* (South Canaan: St. Tikhons Seminary Press, 1996)12-37.

15. Augustine, *On the Good of Marriage* Christian Classics Ethereal Library <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnfl03.v.ii.iv.html> [accessed April 1, 2009].

16. John Chrysostom, *Homily III on Titus*, Christian Classics Ethereal Library <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnfl13.v.v.iii.html> [accessed April 1, 2009].

17. John Chrysostom, *Homily xii on Colossians*, Christian Classics Ethereal Library <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnfl13.iv.iv.xii.html> [accessed April 1, 2009].

18. John Chrysostom, *Homily XX on Ephesians*, Christian Classics Ethereal Library <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnfl13.iii.iv.xxi.html> [accessed April 1, 2009].

19. John Chrysostom *Homily XII on Colossians*, Christian Classics Ethereal Library <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnfl13.iv.iv.xii.html> [accessed April 1, 2009].



spouses. He speaks of a wife being man's "helpmate," "partner of his living," his "member and body" and a "warm and genuine friendship" between them. A wife provides great comfort to a husband. "Like a skilled pilot she will transform for him the storm of his spirit into calm by means of her particular wisdom, and by the understanding she shows she will provide him with deep comfort."<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, Chrysostom believed that when a couple marry their bodies are no longer their own, but they also belong, if you will, to their spouse. This allowed for full equality between the husband and the wife. "As for you husband, if a prostitute tries to seduce you, tell her "My body is not my own, but my wife's." And let the wife say the same to any man attempting to undermine her fidelity: "My body is not my own, but my husband's."<sup>21</sup>

While it should be evident that Chrysostom saw a husband and wife as being fully equal in the marriage his understanding of roles in a marriage does reflect the cultural understanding of what was prevalent at the time. For Chrysostom, designated roles were also necessary to maintain peace and harmony. Thus, while the husband is the head of the family he is to love his wife at all times with the same love that Christ has for the Church. Therefore Chrysostom frequently tackled the tough subject of domestic abuse in his homilies.<sup>22</sup>

Chrysostom did not believe that the ordering, of a husband as the head and the wife as the body, lessened the significance or dignity of a woman in any way. As evidence of

20. John Chrysostom Homily xxxviii on Genesis translated in David Ford *Women and Men in the Early Church: The Full Views of St. John Chrysostom* (South Canaan: St. Tikhons Seminary Press, 1996) 66.

21. John Chrysostom *Homily 19 on 1 Corinthians 7*, see Catherine Roth *St John Chrysostom: On Marriage and Family Life* (Crestwood: St. Vladimirs Seminary Press, 2003) 27.

22. Joy A Schroeder. *John Chrysostom's Critique of Spousal Violence*. *Journal of Early Christian Studies* - Volume 12, Number 4, Winter 2004, pp. 413-442.

this claim one only needs to look at Chrysostom's understanding of the Godhead. He believed that headship was part of God's plan, and he saw this reflected in natural creation, the human person, human society and even in God's very being as Trinity. Chrysostom believed that order was needed for harmony, but that one's rank, position or role did not indicate that one person was of greater dignity than the others.

For the same thing which the eye is, this also is the foot, in the respect of each one being a member of, and both equally helping to comprise, a body. In this respect there is no difference. And you also cannot say that one of the members comprises a body by itself, while another does not. For in this they are all equal (*isazei*), for the very reason that they all comprise one body.<sup>23</sup>

When Chrysostom refers to the male headship, of which females are the "body," he uses the Greek word *elasson* in the neutral sense, without any derogatory connotations concerning women. He also emphasizes women's full ontological equality with men and the crucial importance of their role. It is crucial to recognize that in Chrysostom's application of this theology to men and women he made the man the head of woman but he also said that God is the head and Jesus is the body. He would not have meant to imply that Jesus is inferior to God. Indeed that would have been heretical. It was, rather, his way of showing that there must be order. In Chrysostom's mind the only reason for the needed ranking in the world between men and women is because of the first sin. He does not believe that this ranking will exist in heaven.<sup>25</sup> The fact that Chrysostom said that woman is the head of the home was not meant to be offensive to women, nor was it his intention to be oppressive. Chrysostom felt this was liberating to women. He truly believed that this was a great thing for women to only work in the

23. John Chrysostom, *Homily XXX on 1 Corinthians* Christian Classics Ethereal Library <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnfl12.iv.xxxi.html> [accessed April 2, 2009].

24 David Ford *Women and Men in the Early Church: The Full Views of St. John Chrysostom* (South Canaan: St. Tikhons Seminary Press, 1996)142.

25 See David Ford *Women and Men in the Early Church: The Full Views of St. John Chrysostom* (South Canaan: St. Tikhons Seminary Press, 1996)144.

home as they could escape all of the evil in the marketplace, and they would be superior in spirituality because they could avoid all of the pressures of work and focus on God. For Chrysostom a superior spirituality was to be sought and was the ideal. Moreover, it is necessary to recognize that in the time period Chrysostom was writing Christianity was facing prejudice. Chrysostom was eager to stress the ways in which Christianity actually did uphold the established order of things and was not in contention with the social structure of the empire. If he did challenge this structure it would have made things even more difficult for Christian women who were married to non-Christian husbands.<sup>26</sup>

It cannot be denied that in homilies Chrysostom did make some comments that can seem quite harsh concerning women. He has been quoted as saying that women are especially prone to becoming angry, busybodies, drinking too much wine, lusting after fame, vain-glorious, following after schismatics and being talkative. We must consider, however, the fact that Chrysostom is known for his rhetoric and specifically his rhetorical exaggeration. He was preaching to an audience of men and women, and he was likely addressing behavior that he observed as being a problem in his culture and time. This does not mean that he hated women. In addition, he frequently scolded men for behavior that was inappropriate and even said, often, that women were more virtuous than men, as seen in the following quote. “Women have their share of vainglory, but this they have in common with men. They are also in some measure inclined to anger, but this too is common to both sexes. But the things in which women excel they do not have in common with men- their solemn dignity, and their fervency, their devotion and their love for Christ.”<sup>27</sup> At one time, Chrysostom even acknowledges that at times he exaggerated

26. Catherine Roth, *St. John Chrysostom on Marriage and Family Life* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003) 10.

27. John Chrysostom *Homily XII on Ephesians* Christian Classics Ethereal Library <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf113.iii.iv.xiii.html> [accessed April 2, 2009].

concerning the sins of women.

Perhaps we seemed to you the other day unnecessarily hard and burdensome upon you, using language which was too sharp, and extending too far our reproaches against the sluggishness of the many. Now if we had done this merely from a desire to vex you, each of you would be justifiably angry. But if in trying to help you we did neglect to also give you words of comfort if you will not give us credit for our forethought, you should at least pardon us on account of our tender love for you.<sup>28</sup>

Chrysostom recognizes the significance of women in Scripture and praises them for their good qualities. When Chrysostom speaks of Rebecca in the Old Testament he says “Who would not have loved such a woman, so virtuous, so beautiful, so hospitable, generous, and kind, so brave in her soul and vigorous in her body?”<sup>29</sup> In addition he says of the faithful women who stood by Christ at the crucifixion,

These things the women see happen, they who were most compassionate toward Him, they who were most of all bewailing Him. And observe how great was their assiduity. They had followed Him ministering to Him and were present even through the time of the dangers. . . and these first see Jesus [at His resurrection]; . . . Do you see the women’s courage? Do you see their affection? Do you see their magnanimity in sharing their goods, even unto death? Let us men imitate the women; let us not forsake Jesus in temptation.<sup>30</sup>

Yet, Chrysostom not only admired women in the Scriptures, he also had close relationships with women of his day. Olympias is known as being one of his closest friends. Elizabeth Clark, a well-versed scholar on Chrysostom, asserts “Olympias was without doubt his true soul-mate.” Baur, another scholar, speaks of the noble, religious fellowship of soul which united these two personalities. Anne-Marie Malingrey, in the introduction to her French translation of the Letters to Olympias, talks of the beautiful quality of their friendship and how they felt each other’s sufferings.”<sup>31</sup>

28. St. John Chrysostom Homily XII of St. John translated in David Ford *Women and Men in the Early Church: The Full Views of St. John Chrysostom* (South Canaan: St. Tikhons Seminary Press, 1996)94.

29. St. John Chrysostom *How to Choose a Wife* translated by Catherine Roth, *St. John Chrysostom on Marriage and Family Life* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003) 113.

30. St. John Chrysostom *Homily LXXXVIII on St. Matthew*, translated in David Ford *Women and Men in the Early Church: The Full Views of St. John Chrysostom* (South Canaan: St. Tikhons Seminary Press, 1996)107.

31. Quotes taken from David Ford *Women and Men in the Early Church: The Full Views of St. John Chrysostom* (South Canaan: St. Tikhons Seminary Press, 1996)111.

For the reasons explored above, I do not believe that Chrysostom was misogynist. I believe that he respected women and believed that they play a significant role in the life and ministry of the Church and world. This respect and appreciation for the significance of women in the Church is especially exemplified in his relationship with Deaconess Olympias.

### **St. Olympias, Deaconess**

Olympias was born into a wealthy and well respected family.<sup>32</sup> She was orphaned at a young age. A fine education was recognized by those who knew her, and some suspect that Gregory of Nazianzus was her teacher. Olympias was a beautiful young woman and she had many men pursue her in marriage. She did marry, but her husband died early in their marriage. Olympias, it is said, did not enjoy married life and considered the early death of her husband to be a divine sign that she should not become entangled in another marriage. She decided to adopt an ascetic life and to use her wealth to serve the mission of the Church. She was ordained a deaconess, by the bishop of Constantinople, Nectarius.<sup>33</sup> Olympias was extremely generous to the bishop, and she provided for all of his needs. He is said to have taken her advice even in ecclesiastical affairs.<sup>34</sup> Olympias built a monastery near the Cathedral and took over as abbess of the monastery. It was a center of prayer and charity. An orphanage and a hospital were subsequently added.<sup>35</sup>

32. Biographical information taken from Elizabeth Clark, *Jerome Chrysostom and Friends Essays and Translations* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1979) 107-119.

33. Several documents indicate that age sixty is the age to ordain deaconesses. i.e. Tertullian *On the Veiling of Virgins* and the *Canonical epistle of Basil* and the *Codex Theodosianus*. Yet in the Council of Chalcedon canon 15 it states that age forty would be a suitable age for the ordination of deaconesses. Clark suggests that Olympias was ordained at an early age due to the fact that she was wealthy. See Elizabeth Clark, *Jerome Chrysostom and Friends Essays and Translations* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1979) 107-119.

34. *ibid*, 112.

35. Elizabeth Clark charges that she doubts Olympias actually worked *with* the poor, by suggesting “because Chrysostom praised her for remaining in her chamber and conducting battles rather than venturing to the agora we should not picture her roaming the slums in search of the indigent.” We must recall, however, the fact that her convent supported a hospital and an orphanage leads one to suspect that she did do some concrete service caring for the sick and children. While she probably did prefer living in seclusion it appears that she worked to insure the care of the marginalized. See *Jerome Chrysostom and Friends: Essays and Translations* 113.

Deaconess Olympias became admired and praised throughout the Near East for her charities: "a wonderful woman ... like a precious vase filled with the Holy Spirit."<sup>36</sup> Nectarius died in 397, and John Chrysostom took over as the episcopal chair of Constantinople. Olympias and Chrysostom quickly developed a friendship that was rooted in mutual respect. Olympias provided for the needs of the Church and charitable functions from her personal wealth. She also took care of all of Chrysostom's basic personal needs such as food. Because of his weak stomach, she took care to make sure that his diet was simple. Olympias received spiritual direction from Chrysostom and in return she requited the Archbishop for his spiritual care by many little "feminine attentions to his bodily wants, especially by seeing that he was supplied with wholesome food."<sup>37</sup> Olympias, though she was a strong, educated, wealthy leader of a monastery tended to the needs of many people. She was also moved to care for Chrysostom in a humble manner. This care was rooted in friendship and respect rather than mandatory service. Chrysostom was the spiritual director of her monastery, and he was the only man permitted in her monastery. Because of their close friendship he would visit her on a daily basis. He offered spiritual instruction to Olympias and the women under her care. *The Life of Olympias* states, "Thus fortified each day by his divinely-inspired instruction, they kindled in themselves the divine love so that their great and holy love streamed forth to him." Clearly Chrysostom and Olympias were companions supporting one another on the path to holiness. Chrysostom would preach on the need to practice *caritas*, and "She followed to the letter with intelligence the divinely-inspired teachings of the most holy

36. Robert F. McNamara, *St. Olympias* Irondequoit Catholic Communities <http://www.irondequoitcatholic.org/index.php/St/Olympias> [accessed April 3, 2009].

37. W.R.W. Stephens, Introduction to *Letters of St. Chrysostom to Olympias*, Christian Classics Ethereal Library <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf109.xvii.i.html>. [accessed April 3, 2009].

archbishop of this sacred Church.”<sup>38</sup> In other words, she did the concrete praxis of *caritas*. In addition to her charitable contributions, we are given the impression that she assisted at baptisms. Assisting at baptisms would be consistent with the role of the deaconess.<sup>39</sup>

*The Life of Olympias* provides us with a glimpse of the significance of her charity and the pious manner in which she lived.

She furnished the churches with liturgical offerings and helped the monasteries and convents, the beggars, the prisoners, and those in exile; quite simply she distributed her alms over the entire inhabited world. And the blessed Olympias herself burst the supreme limit in her almsgiving and her humility, so that nothing can be found greater than what she did. She had a life without vanity, an appearance without pretence, character without affectation, a face without adornment; she kept watch without sleeping, she had an immaterial body, a mind without vainglory, intelligence without conceit, an untroubled heart, an artless spirit, charity without limits, unbounded generosity, contemptible clothing, immeasurable self-control, rectitude of thought, undying hope in God, ineffable almsgiving; she was the ornament of all the humble and was an addition worthily honored by the most holy patriarch John.<sup>40</sup>

We are also told that she had a very close and respectful relationship with many priests, bishops, and monks always providing hospitality and even sitting with them at death.

We are told at the death of Optimus she “shut the eyes of the great man with her own hands.”<sup>41</sup> Yet, this respectful treatment of the clergy was no different from the way in which she treated all people. *The Life of Olympias* recalls:

She lived faultlessly in unmeasured tears night and day, “submitting to every human being for the sake of the Lord,” full of every reverence bowing before the saints, venerating the bishops, honoring the presbyters, respecting the priests, welcoming the ascetics, being anxious for the virgins, supplying the widows, raising the orphans, shielding the elderly, looking after the weak, having compassion on sinners, guiding the lost, having pity on all, pity without stinting anything on the poor. Engaging in much catechizing of unbelieving women and making provision for all the necessary things of life, she left a reputation for goodness throughout her whole life which is ever to be remembered.<sup>42</sup>

38. Elizabeth Clark, *Jerome Chrysostom and Friends: Essays and Translations* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1979) 131.

39. *ibid.*, 134. *The Life of Olympias* discusses a woman named Marina, who was “among the blessed, who was her [Olympias’] relative and spiritual daughter, whom she [Olympias] had received from the undefiled and salvatory baptism. . . .” Some sources read this as she was her godmother, and others read it as she assisted in the baptism.

40. Elizabeth Clark, *The Life of Olympias* in *Jerome Chrysostom and Friends Essays and Translations* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1979) 137.

41. *ibid.*, 138.

42. *ibid.*

Deaconesses played various roles in different locations throughout the history of the Church. Chrysostom had a great love for St. Paul, and it seems reasonable to suggest that Chrysostom equated Olympias with Phoebe, the deacon, in Paul's letters.<sup>43</sup> Thus, her primary role as deaconess under Chrysostom was to provide hospitality for the poor, and foreigners. *The Life of Olympias*, discusses that "travelers from everywhere have enjoyed her hospitality."<sup>44</sup> In addition to being a deaconess, she also served as the abbess of a monastery and she and her fellow nuns ran a hospital and orphanage. Because she served as an abbess she played a liturgical role in the monastery as well, a benefit of her ordination.<sup>45</sup>

It appears that Olympias had that "spiritual power" that Pope Benedict referred to when he discussed the need for women to make their own place in the Church. Olympias made sure that the needs of others were met, and she used her blessing of wealth to assure that the Church was able to care for the less fortunate. In addition, she took care to concretely serve people in need as well.

As previously indicated, Chrysostom and Olympias were very close friends. Record of their close relationship as well as a look at the female brain at work can be observed in the extant letters that Chrysostom wrote to Olympias. It is evident in the letters that Olympias is intuitive and feels the pain of those in need. In this particular instance it is John Chrysostom who is suffering. Olympias chooses to act on her intuition and we see that through her action Chrysostom believes she is modeling the service and care of

43. Alluded to in Kevin Madigan and Carolyn Osiek, *Ordained Women in the Early Church: A Documentary History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005)15.

44. Elizabeth Clark, *The Life of Olympias* in Jerome Chrysostom and Friends Essays and Translations (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1979)138.

45. Kevin Madigan and Carolyn Osiek suggest that Olympias likely lead the monastic choir or led the Divine Office or some form of liturgical singing. It is also pointed out that in both Eastern and Western monastic traditions, The Divine Office is every bit as much liturgy as the celebration of the Eucharist. See *Ordained Women in the Early Church: A Documentary History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005) 34.



Christ. It seems reasonable that we should see this coming from a deacon in the Church, but the female brain seems to be geared to naturally propel her toward this service. This aspect of the female brain can be both a blessing and a curse. The sensitivity to the suffering of others can encourage women to reach out to the suffering, thus making her more Christ like. However, it can also cause depression if the outreach is not successful. There are other reasons that women may experience depression and we will observe some of those reasons as well in the letters.

### **The Letters to Olympias: Collaboration and Differences Revealed**

Chrysostom was expelled from Constantinople in 404. Many reasons have been considered for his expulsion, but most scholars recognize that his preaching on almsgiving and care for the poor against maintaining an extravagant lifestyle offended some important people, particularly Eudoxia. Ultimately, due to plotting by those he offended he was banished into exile. In addition to Eudoxia, his simple lifestyle offended fellow leaders in the Church.

We are told that Chrysostom stripped his house of almost all of its furniture, and entertainment pieces such as fancy dishware, sold it and used the money to care for the poor.

He accordingly disfurnished the Episcopal residence, sold the costly plates and rich carpets, and with the proceeds erected hospitals for the sick and strangers and provided for the support of virgins and widows. He even disposed of some of the marble and other ornaments of the churches. Instead of inter-changing grand dinners with the wealthy, he ate the simplest fare in his solitary chamber. He avoided the court and the company of the great, and even seems to have regarded social intercourse with his fellow-men as waste of time. The bishops who visited Constantinople no longer found the episcopal palace open to them, Chrysostom alleging that there were houses of the faithful in abundance where they would meet with a welcome.<sup>44</sup>

44. Witnesses for Christ and memorials for the Church Life from the fourth to the thirteenth century. ([http://www.archive.org/stream/witnessesforchri01backuoft/witnessesforchri01backuoft\\_djvu.txt](http://www.archive.org/stream/witnessesforchri01backuoft/witnessesforchri01backuoft_djvu.txt)) 192 [accessed April 3, 2009].

This behavior seemed “anti-social” to many clerics, and Chrysostom made some enemies among his fellow clerics.

While in exile, Chrysostom wrote several letters to friends and supporters. Seventeen of the extant letters were addressed to Olympias, who is recognized as being the most eminent of his female friends. Unfortunately, none of the letters that Olympias wrote to Chrysostom were kept, but we can conclude some of what she said by the letters from Chrysostom. Stephens tells us in *The Introduction to the Letters to Olympias*, that Olympias suffered much persecution because she was a supporter of Chrysostom. She was accused of having been involved in a fire that broke out shortly after his expulsion in which the Cathedral and the senate house were damaged.

After the expulsion of Chrysostom from Constantinople 404, through the intrigues of his enemies, Olympias suffered much from the persecution to which all his followers were subjected. She was accused of having been concerned in causing the fire which broke out immediately after his departure, and destroyed the Cathedral Church and the Senate House. Her intrepid demeanor before the prefect who tried in vain to frighten her into a confession of guilt, or induce her to acknowledge Arsacius who had been intruded into the See by an arbitrary exercise of imperial power, excited general admiration; and the tidings of her fortitude were a great consolation to the exiled archbishop in the midst of much bodily suffering, and mental distress. It is not quite certain whether she was driven from Constantinople or voluntarily retired from it.<sup>49</sup>

We are told that Olympias, under interrogation by the prefect, replied that her manner of life should show that she would not have destroyed the Church and senate. When the prefect yelled at her, she maintained strength and confidence and refused to cower in fear in the face of the accusations.

Being asked why she had set fire to the great church, "My manner of life," she answered, "is a sufficient refutation of such a charge. One who has expended large sums of money to restore and embellish the churches of God is not likely to burn them." "I know thy past course of life well," cried the prefect. "If thou knowest aught against it," was the intrepid reply, "descend from thy place as judge, and come forward as my accuser." Unable to fix any charge upon her, the prefect changed his tone, and advised her and the other accused ladies to save themselves further trouble by "communicating" with Arsacius. Her companions yielded, but Olympias boldly replied:

49.W.R.W. Stephens, Introduction to *Letters of St. Chrysostom to Olympias*. Christian Classics Ethereal Library <http://www.ecel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf109.xvii.i.htm>. [accessed April 3, 2009]

It is an injustice, that, after being publicly calumniated, I should be called upon to clear myself of charges utterly foreign to the issue. Not even on compulsion will I hold communion with those from whom it is my duty to secede.<sup>50</sup>

At this point, we do not know if she left of her own accord or she was banished.

However, her life was not good and she suffered great persecution. In the letters from Chrysostom she is constantly being told that her suffering will result in good things because it will bring her closer to Christ and her perseverance will serve as a model for others. The persecution, and the anxiety that she experiences due to John's exile causes her to experience some depression. We also know that this situation resulted in the shutting down of her convent and the hospital and orphanage. We must recall that women's brains activate in anticipation of fear or pain when stress triggers go off. This leads to anxiety and depression. In addition, women's stress response is set off by social rejection. In consideration of the fact that more women are prone to depression than men, it is not surprising that Olympias experienced depression while in this situation. Moreover, the fact that women are sensitive to the pain of their loved ones, would also support the extreme suffering that Olympias experienced knowing that Chrysostom was facing physical perils. It seems apparent that because of the closeness of their relationship, Chrysostom knew that she would be anxious. Therefore, many of the letters reflect Chrysostom's attempt to cheer her up and bring her out of her desolation.

In letter one dated June, 404 he writes:

..My Lady, so beloved by God, let yourself above these agitations, above these tumultuous tides and deign to let us know news of your health. As for us, we are in good health and joy. Actually our body is strengthened, and we breathe a pure air, and those accompanying us in our exile are treating us so well that we are not left with need of any servants, because they fulfill this role. . . there remains only one thing that causes us pain,

50. Witnesses for Christ and memorials for the Church Life from the fourth to the thirteenth century. ([http://www.archive.org/stream/witnessesforchri01backuoft/witnessesforchri01backuoft\\_djvu.txt](http://www.archive.org/stream/witnessesforchri01backuoft/witnessesforchri01backuoft_djvu.txt))226. [accessed April 3, 2009].

and that is not having the assurance that you, you also, are in good health. Make us know, so that we can be reassured with joy, and so that we will render one thousand thanks . . .<sup>51</sup>

In letter two dated July, 404 it appears that Chrysostom has heard that Olympias is still experiencing concern and depression over his exile.

Come on, free yourself from fear regarding our journey. . . our bodies have made much progress in health and strength. The air has been helpful for us, and those who guide us have been very zealous to help. . . write to us often about the subject of your health. . . Do not tell me only about your health, but tell me if you have yet dissipated the cloud of your sadness. . . since I've not received a message from Your Excellence, I have suffered much.<sup>52</sup>

In letter three, dated end of July, 404 Chrysostom encourages Olympias to continue with courage and reason. He knows that she has a great capacity for both.

When I see those crowds of men and women pouring out onto the streets into businesses, in the towns, who see us and who cry, I imagine the feelings you have now. . . But the greater the violence of the storm, greater still is the recompense, if you tolerate it by giving thanks and with appropriate courage, as in fact you do. . . Knowing this, my lady so beloved of God, do not abandon yourself to the tyranny of sadness, but conquer the storm by reason. You are able to do it actually; the rolling of the sea is not greater than your capacity. Send us letters that allow us to learn you have done this, so that all the while living in a strange land - - we taste the great joy of learning that you have tolerated this sadness with understanding and wisdom which is appropriate. I am writing Your Excellence just at the point of arriving in Cesarea.<sup>52</sup>

It appears that sometime in August or early September Chrysostom was moved to a different location. He writes Olympias again in September of 404 and shares the difficulty of the journey. He seems to be very well aware of the fact that she will be troubled to know of his suffering.

We have just caught our breath after having arrived at Cucuse, from where we write to you. Only with effort can we see clearly to find our way out of the smoke into the thick night of evils that fell upon us during the voyage. Now, in effect, given that the sufferings

51. John Chrysostom, *Lettres `a Olympias* trans Anne-Marie Malingrey. (Paris, Editions du Cerf, 1947). Pg. 95 English translation provided by Rev. Joseph T. Poggemeyer, S.T.D.

52. John Chrysostom, *Lettres `a Olympias* trans Anne-Marie Malingrey. (Paris, Editions du Cerf, 1947). Pg. 96 English translation provided by Rev. Joseph T. Poggemeyer, S.T.D. "Your Excellence" is referred to as one of those abstract words that are sometimes difficult to understand in John Chrysostom. The English translator, Joseph Poggemeyer, believes that in this instance "Your Excellence" refers to Olympias.

52. *ibid*, 97.

have passed, we tell them to Your Piety. While I was still in the middle of these troubles, I did not want to tell them to you, for fear of causing you too much pain. During almost thirty days and even more, I did not cease to fight against very painful fevers, in making this long and tiresome journey, assailed also by sicknesses of the stomach very painful. Figure yourself what resulted, without doctor, without bath, without necessary things, without any rest, assailed on all sides by fear of the Isaurians, also by the other evils that are ordinarily the part of a difficult voyage, anxiety, concern, sadness, the absence of people who can console us. But now all of that is passed.<sup>53</sup>

Chrysostom was aware of the fact that Olympias would be empathetic and feel anxious concerning his suffering. He admits that he refrained from telling her of his suffering “for fear of causing you too much pain.” Yet, due to her great capacity for “gut feelings” that the female brain exhibits, even though he wrote to her saying that everything was fine, she was able to discern that it was not and she had fallen into depression.

Chrysostom begins letter seven with the following salutation, “The most reverend and divinely favored deaconess Olympias, I John, Bishop, send greeting in the Lord.”<sup>54</sup> Indeed it appears that he had great respect for her as a religious leader in the Church. The letter goes on to offer encouragement in helping to pull her out of her depression.

In letter eight, which was sent at the end of 404 we see much encouragement in order to bring her out of her depression. In the context of this encouragement Chrysostom recognizes her strength, her wisdom, her charity, and numerous other virtues. In addition, he references her “deep intuition” and the fact that each of these things has a list of “actions” which is the fruit of the virtues. Yet again, it seems to me that her “deep intuition” is what has made her depression so great. While Chrysostom has attempted to keep from her the great perils that he is facing, it seems as though she is aware that he is suffering and it is bringing her great pain. Clearly her anxiety has been heightened and

53. John Chrysostom, *Lettres `a Olympias* trans Anne-Marie Malingrey, (Paris, Editions du Cerf, 1947). Pg. 102 English translation provided by Rev. Joseph T. Poggemeyer, S.T.D.

54. John Chrysostom, *Letters of St. John Chrysostom to Olympias* trans. W.R.W. Stephens, Christian Classics Ethereal Library <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf109.xvii.iii.html>. [accessed April 3, 2009]

is taking its toll. It is this same anxiety that, if channeled properly, can lead to empathy. It is empathy which tends to move people to care for and meet the needs of the marginalized. Indeed men and women can experience anxiety and empathy, yet women seem to be hard wired to experience this at a greater capacity. Ultimately the inability to “act” and help others would cause one experiencing empathy great distress, and we see this with Olympias.

A letter that recently went out to Your Grace will serve to calm the storm of your chagrin, but since the tyranny of discouragement has completely beaten you, I thought I should add a second letter to the preceding one, so that you would experience with abundance the consolation in that your health might be more strengthened. Well, I want by another means to dissipate the dust of your sadness, because I think that this dust has appeared following upon inflammatory pains. What is sure is that one must not neglect taking care of oneself, . . . Let’s go, get up! Stretch out your hand. . . . For I know well the nobility of your thoughts, I know the strength of your soul full of piety and of the greatness of your knowledge, the high degree of your wisdom, and how it suffices that at your command the wild sea of your sadness would dissipate. . . If you say to me again “I will it, but I do not have the strength”, I will repeat to you, “excuse and pretext that is!” For I know the stamina of your soul, friend of wisdom.<sup>55</sup>

Additionally, in letter eight Chrysostom discusses her virtues, which he says have resulted in “action” since her youth. He specifically cites her patience, temperance, prayer, charity and hospitality, which he says “have not ceased to nourish Christ.” He praises her for concretely practicing all that was taught in Matthew 25: 31-46. Indeed, he reminds her that she has given Christ food and drink, welcomed and clothed Him, cared for Him in time of sickness and imprisonment.<sup>56</sup> He explains that her multiple forms of charity have “surpassed one thousand furnaces” with regard to the burning intensity of her love and goodness. In addition, he claims that she has a great wisdom, and “intelligence” rooted in understanding and perceptiveness, which he says has borne great fruit.<sup>57</sup> Olympias was called to diaconal ministry. It appears that, according to the

55. John Chrysostom, *Lettres `a Olympias* trans Anne-Marie Malingrey. (Paris, Editions du Cerf, 1947). Pg.116 English translation provided by Rev. Joseph T. Poggemeyer, S.T.D.

56. *ibid*, 133

57. *ibid*, 135

testimony of Chrysostom, she successfully carried out that ministry. While we are all called to care for one another, the office of deacon exists for those people who have received a vocational call to diaconal ministry. It appears that women, too, are capable of receiving the call and fulfilling the responsibilities associated with the office of deacon in the Church. Olympias, clearly exhibited all of the gifts necessary for a fruitful diaconal ministry.

In letter nine Chrysostom addresses the fact that Olympias is lamenting due to the fact that she has not been able to rescue him from his exile. It appears from some communication that she has been working toward easing his suffering, but that has not worked out.

Why do you lament? Why do you belabor yourself, and demand of yourself a punishment which your enemies were not able to demand from you, having thus abandoned your soul to the tyranny of dejection? For the letters which you sent to me by the hands of the Patricius have discovered to me the wounds which have been inflicted on your mind. Wherefore also I am very sorrowful and much distressed that when you ought to be using every exertion and making it your business to expel dejection from your soul, you go about collecting distressing thoughts, even inventing things (so you say) which do not exist and tearing yourself to pieces for no purpose, and to your very great injury. For why are you grieved because you could not remove me from Cucusus? Yet indeed, as far as you were concerned you did remove me, having made every exertion and endeavor for this purpose. And even if it has not been actually accomplished you ought not to be vexed on that account. For perhaps it seemed good to God that I should be set to run the longer double course, in order that the garland of victory might be rendered more glorious.<sup>58</sup>

It appears that Olympias was moved to action in order to reach out and help Chrysostom during his peril. Male deacons do this, and Olympias shows that women can not only see suffering, but also actively seek to alleviate the pain of those in need.

Additionally in letter eight, we observe one of the consequences of women having

58. John Chrysostom, *Lettres à Olympias* trans Anne-Marie Malingrey. (Paris, Editions du Cerf, 1947). Pg.135 English translation provided by Rev. Joseph T. Poggemeyer, S.T.D.

a larger communication center in the brain than men. We gather from the letter that Olympias has complained that Chrysostom has not kept in good contact. He chastises her for this as he feels that he has done a good job of communicating with her.

And what do you mean by saying that you have not the benefit of letters from me? I have already sent you three long letters. . . Two of them were salutary medicine capable of reviving anyone who was desponding or stumbling and conducting him into a healthy state of serenity. . .<sup>59</sup>

Indeed, we must recall that women have a greater need for, and appreciation of communication. Women find great solace in communication and intimacy with friends. While Chrysostom feels that he has maintained good communication, Olympias is experiencing a sort of “disconnect” in their relationship because of the distance and the inability to engage in regular conversation. It should be recalled that prior to his exile, they talked daily.

In letter eleven Chrysostom continues to offer exhortations on remaining joyful and positive. He ends the letter with a very playful “You behave!”<sup>60</sup> Yet, despite the playful nature, Olympias senses that her dear friend is in danger and indeed she acts to offer assistance. In letter twelve it is clear that Chrysostom has been experiencing some significant issues and he is grateful for the help that Olympias has provided him.

Having risen from the very gates of death I address this letter to the discreet lady; and I am very glad that thy servants have met me just as I am anchoring at last in harbor. For had they met me when I was still tossing on the open sea, and experiencing the cruel waves of bodily sickness, it would not have been easy for me to deceive your cautious spirit, by sending good tidings instead of sorrowful.<sup>61</sup>

59. John Chrysostom, *Letters of St. John Chrysostom to Olympias* trans. W.R.W. Stephens, Christian Classics Ethereal Library <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf109.xvii.vi.html> [accessed April 3, 2009]

60. John Chrysostom, *Lettres à Olympias* trans Anne-Marie Malingrey. (Paris, Editions du Cerf, 1947). Pg.184 English translation provided by Rev. Joseph T. Poggemeyer, S.T.D.

61. John Chrysostom, *Letters of St. John Chrysostom to Olympias* trans. W.R.W. Stephens, Christian Classics Ethereal Library <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf109.xvii.v.html> [accessed April 3, 2009]



We also see in letter eleven, that Chrysostom is very impressed with her virtue. He recognizes that she is a model for men and women in virtuous and charitable living. Yet, he is influenced by the culture and therefore seems to be exhibiting some shock at her strength. We must remember, however, that Chrysostom is known for his rhetorical ability.

Therefore I rejoice, and leap for joy; I am in a flutter of delight, I am insensible to my present loneliness, and the other troubles which surround me, being cheered and brightened, and not a little proud on account of your greatness of soul, and the repeated victories which you have won, and this is not only for your own sake, but also for the sake of that large and populous city, where you are like a tower, a haven, a wall of defense, speaking in the eloquent voice of example, and through your sufferings instructing either sex to strip readily for these contests and descend into the lists with all courage, and cheerfully bear the toils which such contests involve. . . . But you on the contrary, woman as you are, clothed with a fragile body, and subject to these severe attacks, have not only avoided falling into such a condition yourself, but have prevented many others from so doing. They, indeed before they had advanced far in the contest even at the very outset and starting point, have been overthrown; whereas you, after having gone countless times round and farther turning post, have won the prize in every course, after playing your part in manifold kinds of wrestling and combats. And very naturally so; for the wrestling of virtue do not depend upon age, or bodily strength, but only on the spirit and the disposition. Thus women have been crowned victors, while men have been upset; so also boys have been proclaimed conquerors, while aged men have been put to shame. It is indeed always fitting to admire those who pursue virtue, but especially when some are found to cling to it at a time when many are deserting it. . . . Therefore, I rejoice, and leap for joy; for I will not cease repeating this, and taking about with me everywhere the material of my joy; so that although my separation from you distresses you, yet you have this very great consolation arising from your successful exploits; for I also who am banished to so great a distance gain no small cheerfulness from this cause, I mean your courage.<sup>62</sup>

Clearly Chrysostom respects Olympias for her strength of virtue. It is possible that some feminists may be offended at the comments concerning her fragile nature. However, kept in context, it simply suggests that Chrysostom is acknowledging that women are indeed able to take an “active” role in the Church. In addition, he states that women are capable of modeling virtuous living for either sex. I believe that this supports women being ordained in the office of deacon. Women can be successful spiritual leaders in the Church. They can take an active role in the practice of charity and virtuous living. In

62. John Chrysostom, *Letters of St. John Chrysostom to Olympias* trans. W.R.W. Stephens., Christian Classics Ethereal Library <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf109.xvii.v.html> [accessed April 3, 2009]

addition, the office of deacon seems to be fitting for women given some of the natural bodily gifts that women have been granted by the creator.

In letter sixteen Chrysostom continues to praise her for her strength and fortitude in dealing with the suffering and persecutions. Once again, we hear his *surprise* that a woman can display such strength.

For the contests which you have anticipated in your training you now undertake with much ease, although it be in a woman's body, feebler than a cobweb, treading under foot with derisive scorn the fury of lusty men gnashing their teeth upon you; being ready to suffer even worse things than they prepare for you. . . The pleasure which you are now enjoying, the cheerfulness, the courage, the endurance, the patience, the power which is proof against capture and conquest and rises superior to all things; the perfect training which renders you insensible to any terror at the hands of anyone. . . Since you also wish to be informed concerning my bodily health, let me tell you that I have been relieved for the present from the infirmity which was lately oppressing me, and now am in a more comfortable condition: the only fear is lest the winter on its return should again make havoc of my feeble digestion; and as far as the Isaurians are concerned we now enjoy great security.<sup>63</sup>

Chrysostom died while in exile. It seems that Olympias' concern was warranted as the winter did wreck havoc on his system. Olympias died shortly after Chrysostom. She was approximately forty years of age at the time of her death.

The letters, show a relationship that reflects mutual respect as well as care and concern. We see some of the characteristics of the female brain exhibited in the letters. This was evident in Olympias' intuition concerning the danger Chrysostom was facing despite his attempt to deceive her. We saw her high level of anxiety at the pain that he was experiencing. We also saw her desire for greater communication from him as communication helps women feel connected. Finally we saw her natural inclination to nurture. She sent help to him when she sensed that he needed assistance. In addition, we see that Chrysostom found women to be very capable to taking on roles of spiritual leadership in the Church.

63. John Chrysostom, *Letters of St. John Chrysostom to Olympias* trans. W.R.W. Stephens., Christian Classics Ethereal Library <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf109.xvii.vii.html> [accessed April 3, 2009]

Chrysostom stated bluntly that she served as a model disciple for men and women. He was impressed at the way she lived the virtues, and she acted by means of practicing charity and loving others. This is an example of a fruitful female diaconate.

### **Productive Collaboration**

Indeed this relationship demonstrates that collaboration between men and women can bear much fruit in the Church and world. Olympias, because of her “great capacity for the other,” intuition and empathy was moved to see that Chrysostom and the marginalized were cared for. Chrysostom recognized her intelligence and wisdom as well as her leadership ability. This was recognized through her ability to model piety for men and women and her role as the abbess of a monastery. In addition, he recognized her ability to serve in a diaconal office due to her natural praxis of charity and virtuous lifestyle. Chrysostom, as a bishop, encouraged Olympias, and other women, to serve as Christ served and armed them spiritually for the task at hand. In addition to spiritual direction, he ordained women for diaconal ministry. Thus he gifted them in a unique way with the Spirit for the great work that they needed to undertake. As Chrysostom pointed out, when he preached on Acts 6, ordination gives the officer greater access to the Spirit.

See how even among the seven one was preeminent and won the prize. Though ordination was common to him and them, he drew upon himself greater grace. And observe how he wrought no signs and wonders before this time, but only when he became publically known; to show that grace alone is not sufficient but there must be ordination also; so that there was a further access of the Spirit.<sup>64</sup>

Indeed, as previously indicated, it was said that Olympias was “a wonderful woman... like a precious vase filled with the Holy Spirit.” Clearly her “further access of the Spirit” served the Church well.

<sup>64</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homily on Acts vi* Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf111.vi.xv.html> [accessed April 4, 2009].

Chrysostom and Olympias model collaborative ministry for several reasons. It is clear that they respected one another. In addition, they supported one another in their ministries. Strengths were recognized and cultivated. Olympias was empathetic and sensitive to the concrete needs of the poor. She was blessed with wealth and she concretely put that wealth to use to help others. She was hospitable and tended to orphans and the sick. This was a natural part of who she was as a woman. Thus her ministry as deaconess was enhanced due to her gender specific attributes. In addition, Chrysostom as a bishop, was in a position to preach about the need to practice charity, similar to St. Vincent de Paul. Thus, he was a great organizer and promoter of charity, something that has been recognized to be more natural to men.<sup>65</sup>

Moreover, Chrysostom recognized, and made allowance for, the “action,” thus the fruit of the virtue, springing forth from Olympias. He likewise encouraged her to put her faith into action, by supporting her activity in charitable work rather than simply encouraging her to take a passive role in the Church.

Finally, the collaboration of Chrysostom and Olympias reflected Christ’s compassion on the world. Their practice of selfless *caritas* is the type of evangelization that has served the Church so well in working to build up the Kingdom on earth. Indeed their appreciation of baptismal equality, which recognized that they were both capable of reflecting Christ in the world, resulted in empowering one another for servant leadership.

65. This is not to imply that women are not capable of organizing charitable work. This implies that men tend to be less likely to concretely practice charity, as compared to women.

## CHAPTER IV

### **Conclusion: Engaging the Speakers**

The Magisterium has called for discussion on ways to increase the collaboration of men and women in the Church and the world as a way to reach out to feminists and work for unity. Christian feminists are angered and troubled over the fact that women are not recognized as having an ordinary role in the Church.

Recent magisterial teaching has placed great emphasis on the belief that differences between men and women must be considered in discerning the roles for men and women in the Church. Ultimately women have been recognized solely for their role as mother, thus emphasis has been placed on women's reproductive ability. While this is a significant role for women to play, it tends to limit the gifts of women to the domestic sphere and does not allow for all of the gifts of women to be recognized and fully incorporated into the life of the Church.

I would like to suggest that, as we work toward greater collaboration between men and women in the Church and world, we recognize that in addition to distinctive reproductive organs, women also have distinctive brains. Indeed science is showing that the female brain has distinctive characteristics that must be considered when we look for the truth concerning the role of women in the Church. As a Church we profess to believe that men and women are ontologically equal, and equality does not require uniformity. It does, however, require that the God-given gifts of men and women are respected in such

a way that men and women are provided the opportunity to completely “unleash” their gifts for the well being of the mission of the Church. Feminists point out, that because women are not permitted ordination they are not able to be fully incorporated into all of the aspects of Church life, and women continue to be marginalized in the Church.

This marginalization makes it difficult, if not impossible, for women to unleash their feminine gifts for full incorporation into the Church.

In addition feminists argue that women must be recognized as having the ability to act in order to make Christ present in the Church and world.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, I would argue that both sexes must be recognized as having the ability to act with authority and in the name of Christ in order to insure an effective outpouring of gifts to work toward the mission of the Church.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, in order to increase the collaboration of men and women in the Church and the world the Church must recognize differences between men and women and provide a means by which women can fully contribute their God-given feminine gifts to building the kingdom. In order to identify feminine gifts and ways in which women can fully participate in the life of the Church we have reviewed, in a preliminary way, the history of the collaboration of men and women in scripture and Tradition. We have also explored some of the most recent scientific evidence that helps us to determine, more fully, the God given gifts of women.

We have discovered that women appear to have been naturally designed and blessed with a greater “capacity for the other.” Edith Stein argued, that women are created, body and soul, to reflect works of effective love. Specifically, science has shown that women

1. The Church has formally recognized women’s ability to take active roles in the Church. Canon 208 of the 1983 Code states “From their rebirth in Christ, there exists among all the Christian faithful a true equality regarding the dignity and the action by which they all contribute in the building up of the Body of Christ according to each one’s own condition and function.”

2. I am not attempting to make female ordination a justice issue, however, the Church cannot fully flourish without offering both genders full participation in the life of the Church. God created men and women with differences, not to exclude, one gender from full participation in the life of the Church rather to complement one another in active ministry.

have been gifted with a greater capacity for communication, the ability to read emotion, social nuance and nurturing skills. These gifts provide women with a greater ability to empathize with others. The ability to feel empathy is crucial to move one toward *action* in caring for the marginalized. Erik Erikson noted this when discussing the difference between men and women in the area of sensation/reaction.

It also makes sense that she is able, earlier than boys, to concentrate on details immediate in time and space, and has, throughout, a finer discrimination for things seen, touched and heard. To these she reacts more vividly, more personally, and with greater compassion. More easily touched and touchable, however, she is said also to recover faster, ready to react again and elsewhere.<sup>3</sup>

This feminine ability to notice the suffering of others is a crucial ability to possess in order to advance the mission of the Church, specifically in areas of evangelization and the practice of *caritas*. These gifts must be recognized and celebrated within the Church. Indeed, anything short of this is a rejection of the creator and his gifts. While women have been recognized for these gifts in the role of mother and religious orders, these gifts have not been fully incorporated into the Church due to the reluctance of the Vatican to ordain women, thus granting them clerical status. Therefore, it seems that women should be recognized as having an ordinary function in the Church that will provide them with the authority needed to unleash these gifts for the mission of the Church. I am, therefore, proposing that women be ordained into diaconal ministry in the Church, in order to increase the collaboration of men and women in the Church and the world.

Pope Benedict XVI has stated that women need to find their own place in the Church and women have shown that *diakonia* is one Church ministry that women have been granted divine gifts to do well. From the inauguration of the Church women have been

3 .Erick H. Erickson, *Identity: Youth and Crises* (New York: Norton, 1968), 28.

acting through the concrete praxis of *caritas*.<sup>4</sup> Jesus, St. Paul, John Chrysostom and many other orthodox men and women have recognized women for their ministry of *diakonia* in the Church. Scripture does not prevent women from being ordained in this ministry. Moreover, tradition records women as being ordained in this ministry. Furthermore, science has shown that some of the unique gifts that women innately possess reveal God-given gifts that are synonymous with diaconal ministry. Recall the purpose for the institution of the diaconate was to care for the marginalized. The female brain has been gifted with the ability to sense pain and suffering. In addition, the female brain not only senses the pain and suffering of others, but it has the ability to *feel* the pain of others. This would provide women with a natural empathy for the suffering of others. This would move them to act in providing care for the poor and suffering in the world. I recognize that this ability will run along a spectrum in women. However, women who are strongly inclined to act on these feminine gifts should be granted the greatest access to grace in the Church in order to effectively implement these gifts for the mission of the Church.

I believe that John Chrysostom and Deaconess Olympias provide a model of collaboration in the Church. They had mutual respect for one another which stemmed from his recognition that women had gifts to enhance the diaconal ministry in the Church. He was not threatened in recognizing that women need to be granted further access to the Spirit for this great work in the Church. This respect and recognition of equality resulted in a shared servant leadership. They worked collaboratively to care for the least in the Church. Thus they lived out the fundamental ecclesial practice of *caritas*.

4. The DLMPD, citing Pope Paul VI in *Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem* (June 18, 1968), no8. Says “from the experience of the restored diaconate certain behavioral patterns are noted by exemplary deacons: a “natural inclination of service to the Christian Community,” and to all in need.



In doing so they made Christ present in the world and ultimately worked to build up the Church. This work was enhanced due to the unleashing of their gifts and a great access to the Spirit granted to each of them within their respective ministries. Ordination to the diaconate was not denied to Olympias because of her gender. Therefore, the laity of the church in Constantinople and members of the clergy around the world respected her and her role as an official minister in the Church. Ultimately, her ministry thrived and the poor reaped the benefits. Even during her time of solitude or banishment, she served the Church as a model of virtuous living which served to advance evangelization. She also continued to act in order to ease the pain of the suffering, namely Chrysostom, whenever possible. The mission of the Church advanced due to the great fruit of the female diaconate.

Furthermore, Chrysostom and Olympias did not find it necessary to deny their sexual differences. Indeed both were seen as being able to reflect the love of Christ on the world because of God given gifts and abilities. Ironically, even with Chrysostom's understanding that women are the weaker sex, in body, he recognized Olympias' feminine gifts and abilities to act officially in serving the Church through the ordained ministry of *diakonia*. Chrysostom, in his wisdom, found it necessary to fully utilize her God given gifts for the mission of the Church. She had the "dignity" of deacon, according to Chrysostom. With this "dignity" Olympias appeared to those with whom she had contact to be "a precious vase filled with the Holy Spirit". Undoubtedly, this sacramental grace served her well through her work in the fundamental Church practices of evangelization and *caritas*. It also provided her with additional strength throughout the difficult challenges of her official work in the Church.

## The Necessity and Benefits of Female Ordination

Some scholars suggest that it is not necessary to ordain women for their role in this ministry as all baptized members of the Church are called to service. I suggest that clearly some are called to a specific ministry of service in the Church. This has been observed within the tradition of the Church. Martimort has argued against the ordination of female deacons by claiming that “perhaps a proposal based on an “archeological” institution might even obscure the fact that the call to serve the Church is urgently addressed today to all women, especially in the area of the transmission of faith and works of charity.”<sup>5</sup> Yet, clearly while we had deaconesses within our tradition, women continued to practice *caritas*. Indeed, not all of the women working in the convents, running hospitals, orphanages, schools, canteens, etc. were ordained female deacons.<sup>6</sup> In addition, works of effective love are a natural part of the person of woman. I sincerely doubt women would stop practicing acts of *caritas* if the Church ordained some women in this ministry. Women who seek ordination to the diaconate are simply asking for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the gifts proper to the ministry of *diakonia*. Indeed we pray for deacons to be “strengthened by sacramental grace and dedicated to the People of God, in conjunction with the bishop and his body of priests, in the service of the liturgy, of the Gospel and of works of charity.”<sup>7</sup> Seeking grace, in order to serve, hardly seems to be a malicious or detrimental act.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, there are some practical issues that come into play that add to the

5. Amié Georges Martimort, *Deaconess: An Historical Study*, translated by K.D. Whitehead (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 250.

6. Kevin Madigan and Carolyn Osiek, *Ordained Women in the Early Church: A Documentary History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005) 3.

7. Libreria Editrice Vaticana, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1994) 1588.

8. This is in response to some who believe that women seek ordination simply for power. As previously indicated, women seem to have gifts that would increase their ability to serve the Church in diaconal ministry. Ordination is a natural step when the Church identifies a person as being called to serve in the name of Christ.

necessity to ordain women to the diaconate for greater collaboration between men and women. As Benedict XVI has stated, there are some juridical problems which restrict women from being fully integrated into all aspects of the Church. According to canon law, power to make legally binding decisions is limited to members of the clergy. In addition, since women are not considered clerics they are not fully integrated into public ministry. Moreover, unfortunately, there are some members of the Church who refuse to grant women necessary respect in ministerial positions because they are not members of the clergy. Thus, often times, the female perspective and gifts are ignored and ultimately women continue to be marginalized in the Church. Regardless of what we profess to believe concerning the full dignity of women, without recognizing women as ordained clerics, women and their gifts will continue to be marginalized. Furthermore, by denying women ordination to serve in diaconal ministry, we run the risk of implying that the service of men is somehow more significant, or Christ like, than the service of women. Indeed, God seems to have created men and women with different gifts for this ministry, both of which are necessary to the mission of the Church. The organic gifts of women imply a “fittingness” or divine desire for women to serve the Church in this capacity. Participation in the sacraments requires all Christians to serve like Christ.

Furthermore, due to the differences between men and women, it would be beneficial to have women clerics to insure quality pastoral care to women. In her book, *Without Benefit of Clergy: Women and the Pastoral Relationship in Nineteenth-Century American Culture*, Karin Gedge explores some of the discomfort and frustration that male clergy face when pastorally caring for women. Gedge refutes the belief that there exists a

“feminization of religion” and suggests that women in the Church have possibly been neglected in pastoral care. Referring to journals kept by male clergy regarding their comfort in pastoral ministry, Gedge states:

Their experiences reveal a high degree of tension, anxiety, and conflict—a consequence of the social leveling described and decried by the leaders in their profession. However, these private sources reveal that the frustration of pastoral work was most acute when these men recorded their personal dialogues with the women they attempted to serve. New pastors, especially, document disturbing encounters with women that challenged their assumptions about the other sex, as well as their confidence in their ability to serve women. As a consequence, young pastors took very seriously the advice to delegate much of their pastoral work to competent wives. Yet their search for a suitable candidate proved a most unsettling undertaking too.<sup>9</sup>

Clearly within the Roman Catholic tradition, delegating pastoral care to the wives of pastors is not an option due to our tradition of a celibate priesthood. Moreover, we cannot, nor should not, assume that deacons will marry a woman who will bypass her own vocational calling for assisting her husband in all of his pastoral duties. Ministry is something that some people are called to.

Another point noted in the book is that frequently male clergy, indicated in their journals, anger that some men in their congregations made references to the fact that religion “emasculated” a person.<sup>10</sup> Thus several male clergy members responded with a “campaign” using only masculine imagery, such as military imagery, which did not appeal to, or spiritually entice, the women in the congregation. In addition there was a desire by some male clerics to distance themselves from women for fear of losing face with men in the congregation as well as fear of enticing romantic interest from a woman. Thus a dutiful pastor could not and did not ignore or avoid women, but he experienced and maintained a wary distance from them, nonetheless. With women he felt ill-at-ease, ill prepared and “insufficient” for the task of ministering to them.<sup>11</sup>

Through the review of numerous reflections by male clergy, of their pastoral interactions

9. Karin E. Gedge, *Without Benefit of Clergy: Women and the Pastoral Relationship in the Nineteenth-Century American Culture*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 142.

10. *ibid.*, 149

11. *ibid.*

with women, Gedge concludes:

These troubled pastoral encounters with women seriously undermine the assumption that clergy and women shared a mutually beneficial relationship or even an “uneasy alliance.” Though women made up the majority of Church members, church attendees, and the recipients of pastoral visits the evidence does not support historian E. Brooks Holifield’s argument that “early nineteenth century pastoral care was designed for an institution filled with women.” . . . Holifield surmised that “an adept physician of the soul would need to understand and work with women.” But pastors from across the denominational spectrum fell far short of that goal.<sup>12</sup>

As would be expected if the male pastors felt that they were falling short of pastorally caring for their female congregants, it is very likely that the women did not feel that their pastoral needs were being met. A journal entry found from a woman named Sarah Dana articulates a sentiment likely shared by many female parishioners even today; “I cannot like the man however great his talents who has so much the appearance of display and preparedness of mind with so little heart. . . he is not the preacher suited to my own feelings.”<sup>13</sup>

Men and women are different and the Church is composed of men and women. It seems reasonable that God would have created women with unique gifts for ministry in the Church. In chapter two we looked at some of these unique gifts. We must also consider, that women congregants would benefit from the existence of female ministers. Recall that there is a significant and consistent pairing of male and female couples in scripture and throughout Christ’s ministry.<sup>14</sup> We must recognize that God has created men and women differently for the benefit of ministry in the Church. In addition, men and women have different needs that must be addressed in proper pastoral ministry. As Francis Martin pointed out, the consistent mention of men and women shows God’s equal

12. Karin E. Gedge, *Without Benefit of Clergy: Women and the Pastoral Relationship in the Nineteenth-Century American Culture*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 152.

13. *ibid*, 171

14. Phyllis Zagano, *Catholic Women Deacons: Present Tense*, *Worship* vol. 77[September 2003] 399. Interestingly the Catechism states “In the Consecratory prayer for ordination the Church confesses: Almighty God. . . , You make the Church, Christ’s body, grow into its full stature as a new and greater temple. You enrich it with every kind of grace and perfect it with a diversity of members to serve the whole body in a wonderful pattern of unity. You established a threefold ministry of worship and service for the glory of your name.” 1543. Acknowledging the Church with a perfected diversity of members to serve the whole body in a wonderful pattern of unity indicates and confirms the need for a diversity of ministers to serve the whole body.

care and concern for both. In addition, God created men and women to compliment one another, so we should not accept that one gender is equipped with everything necessary to meet the pastoral needs of the diverse members in the body. We have recently recognized the need for the clergy to reflect the diversity in the Church by ordaining a greater number of bishops who represent various ethnic and racial backgrounds. We still have not recognized that women, too, reflect some of the diversity in the Church. Therefore, we have the beginning of a need to ordain women to the diaconate. The Church will benefit from the full incorporation of women's unique gifts and women congregants will benefit by having the opportunity to be ministered to by a woman. I will expound on this more fully at the conclusion of the thesis. The question that we must now address is does the Church have the authority to ordain women deacons?

### **Does the Church Have the Authority to Ordain Women Deacons?**

*Ordinatio sacerdotalis*, written in 1994 by John Paul II, denied women ordination to the priesthood not the diaconate. Many scholars and orthodox men and women throughout the Church believe that the Church does have the authority to ordain women to the permanent diaconate. Phyllis Zagano explains:

I accept that the apostolic life and ministry of the Church is organized around a hierarchical system that includes clergy as bishops, priests and deacons. I see the diaconate not as part of the priesthood, but in the longer tradition of the Church as a separate ministry.<sup>15</sup>

I will argue that denying women ordination to the diaconate is an ecclesiastical law, not a divine law. In doing so I will address concerns raised by the Vatican's Theological Commission concerning female ordination to the diaconate.

In 2002, the Vatican convened an International Theological Commission to explore

15. Phyllis Zagano, *Catholic Women Deacons: Present Tense*, *Worship* vol. 77[September 2003] 387.

the question of female ordination to the diaconate. The Vatican's Commission on the female diaconate concluded that women were most likely sacramentally ordained, yet, the commission was reluctant to recommend ordaining women to the diaconate for a couple of reasons. The report emphasized two points.

Regarding the ordination of women to the diaconate, it should be noted that two important points emerge from what has been set forth here: 1) the deaconesses mentioned in the ancient tradition of the Church- as suggested by their rite of institution and the functions they exercised- are not purely and simply the same as deacons; 2) The unity of the sacrament of order in the clear distinction between the ministries of the bishop and the priest on the one hand and the ministry of the deacon on the other, is strongly underscored by the ecclesial tradition, above all in the doctrine of Vatican Council II and the post-conciliar teaching of the Magisterium. In the light of these elements, supported by the evidence of the present historical-theological research, it will be up to the ministry of discernment, which the Lord has established in his Church, to speak authoritatively on this question.<sup>16</sup>

To support the commission's suggestion that the deacon is part of the priesthood, the commission suggested that the deacon serves in *persona Christi*. The introduction of this theological argument, which is used by the Church as an explanation for the denial of female ordination to the priesthood, indicates that the commission is leaning toward the belief that the diaconate is not simply connected to the priestly office, but is one in being with the priesthood of Christ. In order to thoroughly defend my position that the Church has the authority to ordain women to the diaconate, I must address this concern raised by the commission. I will begin, however, with point one of the Commission's statement which argues that women *possibly* should not be ordained deacons because the female deacon was different from the male deacon.

Let us consider that indeed it would make sense that, given the differences between men and women, the female version of an office would be slightly different than the male version of the office. This is especially also considerate of the strong cultural influences

16. Translation by Phyllis Zagano, *Catholic Women Deacons: Present Tense*, Worship vol. 77[September 2003] 389.

which impacted the role of women in society.<sup>17</sup> In this case, female deacons ministered primarily to women and had a significant social service aspect. Thus, as we have already noted female deacons took on more of a concrete praxis of charity, specifically hospitality for the marginalized and foreigners. Historically female deacons have taken on roles in evangelization, catechesis and spiritual direction, primarily of women. In addition, they have cared for the sick and led liturgical prayer. Clearly some of the roles overlapped between the male deacons and the female deacons.<sup>18</sup> Yet, even if differences existed, the “ordainability” of women to the diaconate cannot be denied because historically female deacons took on different forms of service in the Church. I believe that there are many women’s issues today that female deacons could address more empathetically and comfortably than male deacons. Indeed in some cultures, it would still be preferable for women to minister to women for modesty sake. Moreover, as we have considered above the differences between men and women suggest that in some cases a male cleric may not provide the best pastoral care for a woman. Most significantly however, historically the deaconess seems to have fulfilled the role associated with the original establishment of the office of deacon. The deaconess most frequently took on the responsibility of the concrete praxis of charity. Interestingly, the Church seems to be struggling to find a theology of the diaconate, specifically one that incorporates the charitable aspect of this office. It seems to me that women would bring a wealth of gifts to the charitable and pastoral component of the office.

Yet, before the Church can proceed in ordaining women to the diaconate, she must

17. The Church has acknowledged in various documents that women have experienced prejudice due to patriarchy. Indeed the code of canon law in 1983 remedied comments in the 1917 code that appeared to reflect the influence of patriarchy.

18. Recall, however that we saw in chapter two that the Church Fathers stated the roles between male and female deacons were similar. For a full discussion of the roles of the female deacon see Jean Danielou, *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church*, trans. Glen Symon (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1974).



be sure that the Church has the authority to ordain women to this ministry. Ultimately, this requires discernment that the ministry of the deacon is indeed different from that of the priesthood. While the commission suggested that the deacon has been traditionally linked to the priesthood of Christ the commission emphasized this tie so strongly that it used the *in persona Christi* argument to possibly exclude women from ordination into the diaconate.<sup>19</sup> I do not believe that this is an appropriate theological argument to use for the exclusion of women from the ministry of the deacon.

The diaconate is associated with the priesthood, but they are clearly two separate offices in the hierarchy of the Church and this is clearly observable in our tradition and the teaching of the magisterium. In addition, the *in persona Christi* argument is generally considered to be a weak theological argument, and while it has been used as a theological argument to explain a male-only priesthood it is not meant to be used as a primary argument against female ordination.

19. The theology of *in Persona Christi* is very complex and controversial. It was used in the 1976 document *Inter Insigniores* as an explanation for the denial of priestly ordination to women. *Inter Insigniores* proposed “the analogy of faith” which alleges that women do not have the ability to represent Christ, thus are incapable of acting *in persona Christi*. The analogy is an argument *ex convenientia*, articulated by Aquinas, and proposes to know that Christ intended a tradition of a male only priesthood by his choice of male apostles. In addition it refers to a “profound fittingness” of a male only priesthood in consideration of the nuptial analogy. The *in persona Christi* argument, according to Sara Butler, was introduced to help explain the teaching of the Church. In no way, according to Butler, is the *in persona Christi* theology meant to serve as the primary purpose for the denial of female ordination. Most scholars agree that when Aquinas used the argument of “fittingness” to deny female ordination he was referring to the subordinate position of women in society. John Paul II omitted the analogy of faith in *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*. See Sara Butler, *The Catholic Priesthood and Women: A Guide to the Teaching of the Church*, (Chicago: HillenbrandBooks, 2007). Also see Dennis Michael Ferrara, *Representation or Self-Effacement? The Axiom of In Persona Christi in St. Thomas and the Magisterium*, (Theological Studies 55, 1994) 195. Clearly *in persona Christi* theology has critics. In addition the fact that the Vatican’s theological Commission chose to connect this teaching to the ministry of the deacon, according to some theologians, seems to be an attempt to link the two ministries purely to exclude women from clergy, or the reception of Holy Orders. While the commission was unable to use Scripture or Tradition to deny the ordination of women in the diaconate, the introduction of the *in persona Christi* argument for the diaconate is a new development. Phyllis Zagano states that in 2002, as part of the committee’s report, it was indicated that canons were being revised, at that time, to reflect this understanding. For centuries the Church clearly distinguished the diaconate from the priesthood. The deacon was ordained to a ministry of service and was doing so in the *name* of Christ, not in the *person* of Christ. This has been an interesting new emphasis of the function of the deacon. Many scholars have argued that this “new” language used to exclude women from sacred orders is by no means doctrinal and only serves to add to the exclusion of women from full participation in the Church. In addition, *In Persona Christi* theology, for feminists, is very troubling. Phyllis Zagano states “The clear attempt to narrowly define the sacrament of orders at any level as part of the (male) priesthood of Christ, to which women need not apply, makes Church teachings about the equality of all persons less credible. Aside from the insinuation that women cannot represent Christ, even as servant (cannot act “*in persona Christi servi*”) the commission ignores the essential weaknesses of “*in persona Christi*” theology. The humanity of Christ overcomes the limitations of gender; there is no Church document that insinuates or states an ontological distinction among humans except among documents that address the question of ordination.” See Phyllis Zagano, *Catholic Women Deacons: Present Tense*. Worship vol. 77[September 2003] 403.

*In persona Christi* theology is rooted in Aquinas' theory of fittingness. Fittingness is an attempt to discern the will of God through Christ's actions. If one acknowledges the traditional institution of the diaconate in Acts 1-6, one recognizes that the diaconate was established by the early Church community, and the deacons were to be chosen by the people. In addition, the actual office of deacon that exists today was not established until the second century. I believe that using fittingness for a male-only diaconate is a difficult argument.<sup>20</sup> The commission suggests that the role of the deacon is to reflect Jesus' humble service when he washed the feet of the disciples at the last supper. Yet, traditionally, all Christians have been called to model this humble service. Service is reflected in the common priesthood of believers, and this is clearly different from the ministerial priesthood. In fact, throughout his earthly ministry Christ called and encouraged both men and women to serve one another. Jesus praised the woman from Bethany for her compassionate service (Mt 26:6, Mk 14:3, Lk 7:36, Jn 12:1-12). He was clearly impressed that she intuitively understood what was going to happen to him and she acted accordingly. Indeed, perhaps Jesus chose to model humble service for the twelve because concrete service does not come as naturally for men, and he wanted

20. This argument, proposed by the commission, requires one to accept that Jesus intended that the humble service he modeled to the twelve, by washing their feet, was to officially be limited to men in the Church. If, however, it appears that Christ would have intended for women to model humble service, and encouraged or praised this, perhaps, we can argue "fittingness" for female deacons. Indeed, furthermore, if we can link women's service to salvation history we can discern that it would not be against Christ's will that women be ordained to diaconal ministry in the Church. It is true that Mary was not ordained a priest, but one cannot deny Mary's fiat established her as the first servant of the Lord. Clearly Mary's humble service played a part in salvation history. While this was modeled through physical motherhood women who do not have children have been asked to model Mary's spiritual motherhood and ultimately care and tend to the needs of others. I cannot think of another office in the Church that exemplifies the humble service exhibited by Mary than that of the diaconate. In addition, I would like to suggest that we consider the anointing of Christ by the woman from Bethany. This is traditionally recognized as a foreshadowing of Christ's anointing after death, clearly linking it to the paschal mystery. Interestingly, having a better grasp of women's intuitive nature, one could even argue that the woman had a full understanding of what was to take place and her role in salvation history. In addition, it was indeed her empathy that prompted her to act in a manner that provided such comforting service to Jesus. While the male apostles did not "get" the emotional stress and pain that Jesus was experiencing, this woman did and Christ praised her for her willingness to act accordingly. This significant gospel story is present, in some form, in all four of the gospels, making it something to be noted. In this story a woman serves Christ and receives more recognition for doing so than any other person in the New Testament. It seems to me that, using an argument of "fittingness," women serving in diaconal ministry would not go against the divine plan for the Church, rather would be part of Christ's plan. In addition, the fact that the deacon is so strongly linked to the gospel brings to mind the familiar commission of Mary Magdalene by Christ, himself, to take the good news to the apostles. This coupled with the fact that a woman brought the Word into the world, adds to the "fittingness" that women play a role in service ministry with an emphasis on the gospel, thus diaconal ministry.

to insure that they understood exactly what was expected of them with regard to the service of others. In my humble opinion, this seems more reasonable than assuming that Jesus only intended men to serve with authority in the Church. We must continue to recall that in scripture throughout Jesus' ministry, and in the early Church men and women were coworkers.

While I do not believe that Jesus intended to omit women from official servant leadership in the Church, we must continue to address the concern raised by the commission that the diaconate shares in the priesthood of Christ. The Commission specifically cites documents from the Second Vatican Council as evidence that the two offices are linked. While we can say that traditionally the ministry of the deacon and the priest have been linked historically it appears that there has always been a clear distinction between the offices of bishop and priest and the office of deacon.

A review of the document *Lumen Gentium* shows a clear distinction between the diaconate and the priesthood.

At a lower level of the hierarchy are to be found deacons, who receive the imposition of hands "not unto the priesthood, but unto the ministry." For, strengthened by sacramental grace they are dedicated to the People of God, in conjunction with the Bishop and his body of priests in the service of the liturgy, of the Gospel and of works of charity.<sup>21</sup>

In an address given by Pope John Paul II in 1993 the distinction between the diaconate and the priesthood is even further clarified.

The formula "not unto the priesthood, but unto the ministry" is taken from a text of Hippolytus' *Traditio Apostolica*, but the Council sets it against a broader horizon. In this ancient text, the "ministry" is specified as a "service to the Bishop"; the Council stresses the service to the People of God. Actually, this basic meaning of the deacon's service was asserted at the beginning by St. Ignatius of Antioch, who called deacons the "ministers of God's Church", recommending that for this reason they should be pleasing to everyone.<sup>22</sup>

In order to emphasize even more the distinction between the priest and the deacon,

21. *Lumen Gentium*, 29

22. John Paul II, *Deacon Has Many Pastoral Functions* (October 13, 1993)

John Paul II states:

Pope Paul VI, in *Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem* (n. 22 10) laid down in addition that the deacon, "in the name of the parish priest or Bishop, could legitimately lead dispersed Christian communities". This is a missionary function to be carried out in territories, surroundings, social contexts and groups where a priest is lacking or not easily available. Especially in those places where no priest is available to celebrate the Eucharist, the deacon gathers and leads the community in a celebration of the Word with the distribution of the Sacred Species duly reserved. This is a supply function which the deacon fulfils by ecclesial mandate when it is the case of providing for the shortage of priests. But this substitution, which can never be complete, reminds communities lacking priests of the urgent need to pray for priestly vocations and to do their utmost to encourage them as something good both for the Church and for themselves. The deacon too should foster this prayer.<sup>23</sup>

While the deacon is part of the hierarchy of the Church and representative of the service that Christ performed at the Last Supper, when he bent down to wash the feet of the disciples, our tradition has always distinguished the deacon from the priestly order. Epiphanius, recognized as the first to argue that God's will regarding a male only priesthood is known by means of Christ's choice of the Twelve, believed that it was acceptable for women to serve in the office of deacon. Sara Butler reminds us of Epiphanius' views, "He acknowledges that women may engage in prophecy and serve in the ecclesiastical office of deaconess but insists that they have never been admitted to the priesthood."<sup>24</sup>

Rather than being one with the priestly ministry, the deacon has been described as a bridge between the laity and the priest and bishop. Indeed, most faculties granted by ordination to deacons are also permitted by canon law to be granted to the laity, under certain circumstances. Therefore canon law would require minimal adjustment if

23. John Paul II, *Deacon Has Many Pastoral Functions* (October 13, 1993).

24. Sara Butler, *The Catholic Priesthood and Women: A Guide to the Teaching of the Church*, (Chicago: HillenbrandBooks, 2007) 63. It is not my intention to make an argument for or against the issue of a female priesthood in this thesis. The point of this thesis is to address women and the diaconate.

women were ordained to the diaconate.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, the role of the deacon is limited to presiding at the liturgy of the word, thus the liturgy of the Eucharist is still reserved for the priest alone. The Sacrament of the Eucharist is the only Sacrament in which the priest acts in the person of Christ.<sup>26</sup> In all of the other sacraments, the priest is the minister of Christ. Thus, since 1983 the deacon has been the ordinary minister of baptism. A woman is permitted, already, to perform baptisms if necessary. It is possible, therefore, for a woman to be an ordained deacon and serve as an ordinary minister of baptism without theological recourse.

The Church has also suggested that women cannot be ordained to the priesthood because of the constant practice of a male-only priesthood. The diaconate is different from the priesthood in this situation as well. Women have been ordained into the diaconate, as explored in chapter two. In addition, Phyllis Zagano points out that valid ordination of women to the diaconate has never been prohibited.

The most significant scholarship on the topic agrees that women were sacramentally ordained to the diaconate, inside the *iconostasis* at the altar, by the bishops in the early Church. Women deacons received the diaconal stole and Communion at their ordinations, which shared the same Pentecostal quality as the ordination of a bishop, priest or male deacon. Despite the decline of the order of deaconesses in the early Middle Ages, Orthodoxy never prohibited it. In 1907 a

25. By virtue of ordination, a deacon may read the gospel and preach in Churches and oratories. Indeed we have seen that Jerome found women to be quite capable of exegesis. In addition, the restriction given to women by Paul in Corinthians 14: 33-36 has been shown by scholars to have been an isolated incident of a particular group of women in a certain church being disruptive, thus Paul chastised those women. See Ben Witherington III, *Women in the Earliest Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 91. Paul clearly allowed for women to teach as seen in the case of Priscilla. Moreover, lay ministers are also permitted by canon law to preside at services of the liturgy of the Word and hours. In addition, occasionally, with the permission of the presiding priest, lay ministers may give a brief instruction or personal testimony by way of explanation of the homily given by the priest or as part of a dialogue homily. (180) Deacons may baptize infants and this is permitted for the laity to do in emergencies and lay ministers may also be granted faculties for infant baptism under certain circumstances. (181) The deacon may distribute communion, which is also a role that the laity are permitted to fill as extra-ordinary ministers of holy communion. A deacon may preside at the liturgy of the hours and this right has been granted to abbesses of convents. A deacon is granted a faculty to preside at benediction. Deacons are permitted to give blessings and so are lay ministers. In addition, deacons may preside at penance services and funeral liturgies. Lay ministers may also preside at these services provided faculties have been granted. For a full discussion of faculties see John M. Huels, J.C.D., *Empowerment For Ministry*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2003).

26. Peter Steinfelds offers some compelling insight on the *in persona Christi* theology. See Peter Steinfelds, *A People A Drift: The Crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America*(New York: Simon Schuster,2003).

Russian Orthodox Church commission reported the presence of deaconesses in every Georgian parish; the popular 20-th century Orthodox Saint Nektarios (1846-1920) ordained two women deacons in 1911; and up to the 1950's a few Greek Orthodox nuns became monastic deaconesses. In 1986 Christodoulos, then a metropolitan of Demetrias and now archbishop of Athens and all of Greece, ordained a woman deacon according to the "ritual of St. Nektarios"- the ancient Byzantine text St. Nektarios used. . . Even the document on the diaconate issued by the Vatican's International Theological Commission in 2002 admits that "Canon 15 of the Council of Chalcedon (451) seems to confirm the fact that deaconesses really were 'ordained' by the imposition of hands (*cheirotonia*)."<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, the Greek Orthodox Church, of which the Catholic Church recognizes the validity of Sacraments, voted on October 8, 2004 to officially restore the female diaconate. The commission that made the recommendation to the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church in Greece stated:

"The apostolic order of deaconess should be revived. . . the revival of this ancient order should be envisaged on the basis of the ancient prototypes testified to in many sources and with the prayers found in the Apostolic Constitutions and the ancient Byzantine liturgical books."<sup>28</sup>

Clearly it cannot be argued that because of constant practice or tradition, women cannot be ordained to the diaconate.

Ultimately, the Church follows the Tridentine criteria to determine if something is the word of God handed on as tradition.<sup>29</sup> If indeed something is considered to be the word of God, the Church does not have the authority to change it. If, however, a practice is shown to be human tradition it is open to further development. The office of the deacon falls under the category of human tradition as it does not meet the criteria set forth by the Council of Trent to qualify as tradition, to the deposit of faith. The criteria set forth by the Council of Trent states that for something to be the word of God handed on as tradition it must have the Gospel as its source, have been received by the

27. Phyllis Zagano, *Grant Her Your Spirit*, America Magazine vol. 192 No. 4, February 7, 2005. The Commission suggest that these women were ordained to some sort of a fourth minor order, not to the major order of the diaconate, despite the belief of many scholars to the contrary.

28. Phyllis Zagano, *Grant Her Your Spirit*, America Magazine vol. 192 No. 4, February 7, 2005.

29. Sara Butler *The Catholic Priesthood and Women: A Guide to the Teaching of the Church*, (Chicago: HillenbrandBooks, 2007)108.

Apostles from the very mouth of Christ or revealed to them by the Holy Spirit and have been preserved without interruption in the Catholic Church.

We have seen that Jesus did not set the example of a male only diaconate as traditionally in Acts 6:1-6 the people, not Jesus, were charged by the apostles with choosing what has traditionally been understood as being the first deacons. We must recognize, however, that “recent” scholarship challenges the belief that the seven men chosen in Acts were actually deacons.<sup>30</sup> Nowhere is Scripture are women denied female diaconal ordination or is it said that men alone can be deacons.

Next, we cannot definitively show that the apostles maintained a pattern of a male only diaconate as it appears that the apostolic line allowed for the inclusion of women in this ministry. Indeed we have recordings of St. Paul recognizing women as serving as diaconal ministry. We also have Bishop John Chrysostom and other ordained clergy using the same word used for male deacons to refer to female deacons in addition they discuss women as having the “dignity” of deacon thus implying these women had a distinctive role from the laity. Furthermore, we have copies of ordination rites for women. Finally, the third criterion for determining if a tradition is divine requires that the practice has been preserved without interruption in the Church. The history of the office of deacon has undergone many changes in the history of the Church.<sup>31</sup> History has shown that the ministry was open to women at one time. Furthermore, at one time the permanent diaconate in the west was non existent. It would, therefore, be difficult to argue that the permanent diaconate was not of human tradition. Based on a review of the Tridentine Criteria, ordaining women to the permanent diaconate is not part of the

30. I have placed the word recent in quotes because this belief that the seven men in Acts were not deacons stems all the way back to the Church Fathers, yet scholars have recently discovered the early Church’s thoughts on this issue.

31. Interestingly some scholars do not believe the diaconate is an office. See Francis Martin, *The Feminist Question: Feminist Theology in the Light of Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994) 400 footnote 109.

word of God handed on as tradition and is therefore of human origin. The Church has the authority to ordain women to the diaconate.

Can women serve as Christ served and reflect Christ's love in the world? Yes, women can serve the Church and legitimately reflect the reality of Christ's love for the world. While tradition holds that Jesus chose twelve apostles at the institution of the Eucharist, the diaconate is clearly a separate ministry. Indeed the diaconate is a ministry not unto priesthood, but unto service, and this ministry should not be restricted to men. The recognition that women can serve in a permanent diaconal ministry does not ignore differences between the genders. In addition, it does not ignore the fact that Jesus assumed male form if we recognize that the diaconate is a separate office from the priesthood, and the deacon serves in Christ's name. This understanding seems to be more authentic to the actual diaconal ministry established by the early Church.

#### **A Need for Female Deacons**

*Gaudium et spes* states, "Women ought to be permitted to play their part fully in all spheres of life according to their nature."<sup>32</sup> It seems to me that recognizing the organic gifts of women as being valuable to the Church and granting them the authority to use those gifts is exactly what the Church needs to do in order to respect women as persons in consideration of, not denial of, their differences. This is consistent with what was articulated in article nine of the decree *Apostolicam actuositatem*, "Since in our days women are taking an increasingly active share in the entire life of society, it is very important that their participation in the various sectors of the Church's apostolate should likewise develop."<sup>33</sup>

32. *Gaudium et spes* 60

33. *Apostolicam actuositatem* (On the Apostolate of the Laity) article 9



The Church has struggled to discern a role for women according to their proper nature. Ultimately, women have not been fully incorporated into the life of the Church. This has resulted in some women developing a sense of alienation toward the Church. While this disunity hurts the mission of the Church, equally harmful to the mission is that the divinely given gifts of women have not been fully incorporated into the life and mission of the Church. Ordaining women into the diaconate would address these issues while maintaining faithfulness to a male only priesthood.

I am not arguing that women have a “right” to be ordained, rather I am arguing, that diaconal ministry is within woman’s proper nature, and it seems fitting to ordain women to this ministry. These gifts have been freely given to women to build up the body of Christ so that all may reach salvation and attain the holiness of saints. We must provide the Church with a means to fully utilize the gifts of women to advance the mission of the Church.

In addition, I do not mean to suggest that the Church has denied women ordination based on a faulty anthropology. I am suggesting, however, that we have perhaps denied ordination to women on an incomplete understanding of the organic gifts possessed by women. While the magisterium has emphasized the need to embrace and recognize the differences between men and women, perhaps we have not fully considered all of the gifts of possessed by women and how those gifts can serve the Church. Since I am not arguing that baptismal grace allows everyone to take ministerial roles, in the Church, it would be necessary for the Church to ordain women and thus grant them the Sacrament of Orders.

Moreover, Pope Benedict XVI has recognized some of the serious injustices that women face in the world and these need to be addressed. In an address to the participants in the International Convention on the Theme “Woman and Man, the Humanum in its Entirety”, Pope Benedict XVI echoed a cry for all women, some near and some far:

Opening the work of the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops’ Conferences in May of last year in Brazil, I was able to recall how a masculine mentality still persists that ignores the novelty of Christianity, which recognizes and proclaims that men and women share equal dignity and responsibility. There are places and cultures where women are discriminated against or undervalued for the sole fact of being women, where recourse is made even to religious arguments and family, social and cultural pressure in order to maintain the inequality of the sexes, where acts of violence are consummated in regard to women, making them the object of mistreatment and of exploitation in advertising and in the consumer and entertainment industry. Faced with such grave and persistent phenomena the Christian commitment appears all the more urgent so that everywhere it may promote a culture that recognizes the dignity that belongs to women in law and in concrete reality.<sup>34</sup>

I cannot imagine a more concrete reality that affirms women’s equal dignity and responsibility in the Church than ordaining women to diaconal ministry. In the words of St. John Chrysostom, recognizing that women have the “dignity” of deacon, not in spite of their sex differences but because of them, will speak volumes to the world concerning the dignity of women. The Church will surely benefit by incorporating the “feminine genius” more fully into the life of the Church.

Ordination grants women the authority necessary to be fully incorporated into all aspects of the life of the Church. In addition, the re-institution of the female deacon will

34. Benedict XVI, *Address to the Participants in the International Convention on the Theme “Woman and Man, the Humanum in its Entirety”* February 9, 2008.

serve to promote the great work needed in addressing some of the women's justice issues that plague the Church and the world. Female deacons can minister to and advocate for these women who are so undervalued.

Recognizing women's ability to function officially in the fundamental Church practice of evangelization and *caritas* seems necessary, not contrary, to Christ's plan for the Church. In addition, this recognition allows for the complete person of woman, inclusive of her active nature, to be considered regarding her function in the Church.

Scripture, Tradition and science do not deny, and in many ways could be used to support, female ordination to the diaconate. Caring for the marginalized was a significant component of the ministry of Christ and therefore is a significant component in the mission of the Church. Caring for the marginalized is within the proper nature of woman.

Ultimately, many women have modeled a well structured praxis of *caritas*. The feminine *caritas* is concrete and spiritual. This is the same service that Christ modeled when he bent down to wash the feet of his disciples. The fact that women have never balked at this fundamental ecclesial practice, rather embraced it naturally as part of their feminine "capacity for the other," also must be recognized as very well being within God's plan for the Church. The diaconate seems to be a perfect means by which men and women can work collaboratively and be fruitful in evangelization specifically through the practice of charity. Diaconal ministry is a perfect means to increase the role of women in the Church. It is within the proper nature of women.

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