

As one woman has commented, the papal letter can be viewed:

*"as an indicator that the Vatican is threatened by women's leadership in the church. Intransigence on this issue is part of the institutional church's pattern of intransigence on all major sexual issues. It is an indication that at the highest level of international church leadership the full humanity of women is still not taken seriously."*9.


Again, it is clear that the real issue is not ordination but the recognition of women's full humanity.



In the one hundred years since *The Woman's Bible*, a vast number of Jewish, Catholic and Protestant women have completed doctoral studies in Theology and Scripture, and are contributing significantly to raising the consciousness of women (and men) on the issue of the marginalization and subordination of women in the churches and in society. The long history in the church of the devaluation of women on the basis of their gender will not be easily overcome¹⁰, but there is hope in the growing awareness of Christian

(and Jewish)11 women (and men) around the globe who will not abandon the struggle until women take their rightful place in church (synagogue) and society.

Endnotes

1. Elizabeth Cady Stanton in the 'Introduction' to *The Woman's Bible* (Ed. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, New York, European Publishing Company, 1895, 12,13.
2. Sarah Moore Grimke, *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Women, Addressed to Mary Parker, President of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society*, Boston, Isaac Knapp, 1838, 10, as cited by Lerner, *ibid*, 162.
3. 'Editor's Preface' to *The Woman's Bible*, vi.
4. *ibid*, 9.
5. *ibid*.
6. See Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness*, New York/Oxford, Oxford University press, 1993, 164.
7. See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith declaration *Inter Insigniores* on the question of the admission of women to the ministerial priesthood, Oct. 15, 1976: AAS 69, 1977, 98-116.
8. *Catholic New Times*, 26 June 1994, 8. The complete text is also available in *The National Catholic Reporter*, June 17, 1994, 7. The letter was issued on May 22, 1994.
9. Carolyn Osiek, RSCJ in the *National Catholic Reporter*, June 17, 1994, 5.
10. The devaluation of women on the basis of gender finds its biblical support in such passages as 1 Cor 11:3-10, 14:33b-36; Eph 5:22-6:9; and 1 Tim 2:8-15 among others.
11. While the concern of this brief article is with women in the Christian churches, it is interesting to observe that there is a parallel movement among Jewish women, and that there are even stirrings among Muslim women as well. See for example, Jewish feminist Judith Plaskow's *Standing Again At Sinai: Judaism From a Feminist Perspective*, San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1990; *Sisters in Islam, Are Women & Men Equal Before Allah? and Are Muslim Men Allowed to Beat Their Wives?* Malaysia: United Selangor Press Sdn Bhd, 1991; and, Riffat Hassan, 'Muslim Women and Post-Patriarchal Islam', in *After Patriarchy: Feminist Transformations of the World Religions*, ed. Paula M. Cooley, William R. Eakin and Jay B. McDaniel, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991, 39-64. 



Arguments Used Against The Ordination of Women

by *Dulcie Abraham*

This is an excerpt from an article by *Dulcie Abraham* on women and priesthood in the Anglican church in Malaysia.

Traditional arguments against women becoming priests

Basically there are three main identifiable levels or planes of argument against the ordination of women which continue to be given prominence.

At the **first level** are what are regarded as theological and scriptural arguments against including women in the priesthood. One such perspective is that of Christ as the 'icon' of God as essentially a male 'imageo dei'. Only a male therefore, according to this argument, can truly represent Christ as a priest. It is for this reason it is argued, Christ chose only male apostles. This, by and large, is the Roman Catholic and Anglo Catholic stance. The more fundamentalistic viewpoint is that the case against women priests is scriptural. And those passages in the Epistles which apparently pronounce against women teaching in Church or teaching men etc. are quoted to support this view.

There has been opposition from a strong minority on grounds that the ordination of women will divide the Anglican Communion. There are in fact bishops and clergy actively campaigning for such division because of their belief, conscience or principles.



From *Against All Odds* p.117

A related argument is that the ordination of women will set up yet another barrier between the Anglican and Roman Catholic Church. Many clergy and laity are sincerely concerned about what they see as a 'setback' in ecumenical relations with Rome.

Apart from these theological or scriptural reasons there are several others that may be termed **second-level** questions that are raised by those who would consider themselves as reasonable and fair-minded persons: can women actually take on all the tasks and responsibilities of priests? Can they serve alone in remote and isolated areas? Or in large urban parishes? Can they counsel men? Why when there is so much else that can be done by women who wish to serve in the Church, must women wish to be priests as well? Why do women want to have the same roles as men when God has made them

different and intended them for different roles?

The **third level** or plane of argument is frequently put forward by men and women who would again consider themselves reasonable and well informed persons: if women are allowed into the priesthood, will it happen that men will no longer find this calling attractive, and fewer and fewer men will want to become priests? Why are women trying to enter a male preserve? Is it power that women are after? When women become powerful

and claim equality with men, will this lead to the breakdown of family life? and so on.

The struggle against injustice

In Malaysia, women in all walks of life enter into the struggle for the upliftment of their sisters - in factories, on rubber and palm oil estates, in the forests of East Malaysia as well as in the cities; the struggle against the abuse, violence and oppression of women has begun and goes bravely forward. The struggle of women to be given their rightful place in the Church in Malaysia

is only part of this wider struggle. Young women who have given their entire lives for the service of the Church are being humiliated, neglected, discriminated against and denied their rights within the structures of the Church. Arbitrary decisions by male clergy and church organisations govern the fate of women in the Church.

A new model

It needs to be stated that for many women today the role of priest, as some male leaders have shaped it is not in itself attractive.... there is so much assumption of authority and power that bears no semblance whatsoever to the Christ image of humility and servanthood, and it is this priestly role that women must capture. The entry of women to the priesthood will indeed bring it to a 'lower' level. Only then can it be renewed and refined and begin to be again what it was meant to be. Perhaps this is what women can and will, with God's grace, do for the ordained ministry.

Source: **Suara WanitaKristian, Malaysian Women in Ministry and Theology**, August 1994, MWMT, c/- 26 Jalan University, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia. ♀

