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BISHOP TODD HUNTER

The Ordination of Women

A special edition featuring the Rev. Dr. Emily McGowin and the Rev. Dr. Scot McKnight

This edition is born from my desire, in the present context, to affirm and celebrate the ordination of women and their various forms of leadership in the Church.

I have been studying the ordination of women for more than 20 years. As President of Vineyard Churches USA, I did a deep, wide and long study of the matter, helping Vineyard USA come to its current practice of ordaining women. That era of study stays with me, affirmed by other voices over the years.

How I Have Come to Practice the Ordination of Women

It is impossible to attain an absolutely clear position that everyone agrees on, so my studies on the matter were, and sometimes remain, frustrating. I wish some scholar would unearth the magic interpretive key that would allow the whole Church to agree on the matter. Instead, the grounds for arguments on both sides seem well worn. It is uncommon to see new ideas, but I know our Canon Theologian Scot McKnight has confidence that William Witt's *Icons of Christ* articulates angles that make a fresh, compelling case (more on that below).

In my view, the exegetical, lexical/etymological and hermeneutical arguments are a toss-up. Certainly, people better and brighter than I am have differing opinions. Even the [five-year study](#) done by a committee of bishops from all sides of the argument found sound theological rationale for both positions. What tips the scale for me toward joyfully ordaining women are the narrative and kingdom paradigms suggested by Dr. Ray Anderson (see *Theology for Emerging Churches* and *The Soul of Ministry*), William Webb, Bishop Tom Wright and noted New Testament scholar Gordon Fee. I seek to recognize what the Spirit is doing and then cooperate with Him. Often that means recognizing His calling on women to serve in leadership positions in the Church.

Anderson emphasizes strong mutuality in the creation accounts, which call both Adam and Eve to work with God and rule and reign with Him. In addition, we see scriptural antecedents for women in ministry/leadership and historical precedents for women's effective leadership in the Church. Finally, there is a clear eschatological preference for mutual male and female ministry in the renewed cosmos. Since this (God's renewed creation) is where we are going, since the Kingdom is inaugurated in Jesus, and since we are called to act now—in every arena of human life—in concert with what we will be then, I believe it is appropriate, good and right to ordain women. You will hear our Canon Theologian Emily McGowin's great take on this below.

Fee's main help to me (Wright would roughly fit here, too) is to allow me to understand the situated, contextually driven, ad-hoc manner in which Paul wrote his letters. Moreover, Fee states what to me is determinative: Spirit-gifting precedes all issues of structure and gender. Dallas Willard believed this too. My two chief operating principles are: 1) Follow the Spirit as John 14-16 suggests, and 2) Conduct ministry that is derived from and lived within the Kingdom of God. Thus, the Spirit and the Kingdom lead me to an egalitarian reading of Scripture.

Here are a few of my favorite quotes from Wright:

"Remember the synagogue prayer in which the man who prays thanks God that he has not made him a Gentile, a slave or a woman – at which point the women in the congregation thank God 'that you have made me according to your will'. I think Paul is deliberately marking out the family of Abraham reformed in the Messiah as a people who cannot pray that prayer, since within this family these distinctions are now irrelevant."

"I believe we have seriously misread the relevant passages in the New Testament, no doubt not least through a long process of assumption, tradition, and all kinds of post-biblical and sub-biblical attitudes that have crept in to



Christianity. Just as I think we need radically to change our traditional pictures of the afterlife, away from the mediaeval models and back to the biblical ones, so we need radically to change our traditional pictures both of what men and women are and how they relate to one another within the church and indeed of what the Bible says on this subject.”

“In Christ, in the kingdom of God, male and female roles had to be rethought from top to bottom, with one feature of that being that the women were to be encouraged to study and learn and take a leadership role...thus women must have the space and leisure to study and learn in their own way, not in order that they may muscle in and take over the leadership as in the Artemis-cult, but so that men and women alike can develop whatever gifts of learning, teaching and leadership God is giving them.”

To me, holding an egalitarian view is not in any way a slippery slope or an abandonment of scriptural authority. Rather, I derive my view precisely from scripture—the trajectory of the story from creation to renewed cosmos, not mere proof texts. My view also avoids the slippery slope with regard to human sexuality. The Anderson paradigm I cited above could not be used in the same way to argue for homosexuality or other forms of sex outside the plan of God for human sexuality (see *Slaves, Women and Homosexuality* by William Webb for more on this).

In C4SO, we want to neither belittle others whose conscience leads them to a complementarian position, nor position ourselves in an elitist, “we have arrived and know the truth” way to anyone else. To the contrary, we hold our views with confidence, but also with humility and respect for everyone. It is within that value system that I am creating space in C4SO for women to thrive according to their gifts and calling—which is tricky in our “dual integrity” province (more on this below). But when I see the godliness, giftedness and fruit-of-ministry demonstrated by women, I am inspired! To hear more of my missiological argument on women’s ordination, [listen to the talk](#) I gave at Missio Alliance’s SheLeads conference a few years ago.

With all these thoughts in mind, I have invited two friends, our Canon Theologians the Rev. Dr. Emily McGowin and

the Rev. Dr. Scot McKnight, into this space to share their thoughts on women’s ordination.

Bishop Todd: Why do you believe C4SO must support women’s ordination?

Scot McKnight: Women’s ordination recognizes the demonstrated giftedness of women for such ministries of prophecy, teaching and pastoring. William Witt’s book, *Icons of Christ*, provides an excellent argument for the ordination of women. On my blog at *Christianity Today*, I wrote:

Witt’s book is the most complete study on the topic of women’s ordination since Phil Payne’s big book and Cynthia Westfall’s study of Paul and women, but this book is far more a systematic and history-of-the-Church kind of study. It’s relentlessly careful. It will be the go-to book for years to come. It’s a game-changer. It should be in every theological library and on the intelligent pastor’s shelf. Witt is Anglican and facing the winds of the complementarians. Here is his intention for the book:

In this book, I intend to make a theological argument for the ordination of women to the ecclesial ministerial office of presbyter ... The office of presbyter would be distinguished from such lay ministries by its permanent rather than occasional character, a certain sort of authority that pertains to office as opposed to other forms of service, presiding over the gathered worship of the community, and a designated setting aside by the greater church usually denoted by such sacramental gestures as the laying on of hands. This distinction between church office and lay ministries is important to make clear that the argument concerns not whether women can exercise some sort of ministries within the church, but specifically whether women can be set aside and ordained to the office of Word and Sacrament.

Emily McGowin: We believe in women’s ordination because it is the culmination of the trajectory of redemption revealed in Jesus Christ and holy scripture. Whereas the fall of humankind resulted in disordered relations between the sexes, demonstrated principally in the reign of patriarchy, salvation in Christ results in reconciled relations between



the sexes in the reign of God. In Christ, we have entered a new creation where male and female serve side by side, co-laborers in the work of tending and keeping creation in which God's presence dwells (Gen. 2:15). The Holy Spirit calls and gifts some to do this work in the Church through Holy Orders—a charism not limited by gender.

To spell it out in more detail, C4SO contends that God's intention from the beginning was for women and men to be co-laborers in his creation. But the fall of humankind into sin resulted in patriarchy. Male rule is a consequence of the fall and not God's original design for the world. The history of Israel shows God's willingness to work within the limitations of human culture, particularly with regard to patriarchy. But even with these limitations, numerous examples shine through of God's desire for women to serve and lead in freedom (Deborah, Huldah, etc.). Jesus Christ, the culmination of Israel's hopes and fulfillment of God's promises, invited women to be His disciples, treated them as co-laborers in the Kingdom, and sent them as the first witnesses of His resurrection. The Holy Spirit empowered women in the early church to teach, preach, prophesy and lead in many various ways.

This early leadership of women is demonstrated in the historical and archeological record. The New Testament passages that seem to limit women are best understood within the entire scope of scripture as context-specific limitations, not meant to be universal prohibitions. Moreover, everywhere the Kingdom of God has taken root in the world, the liberation of women follows. They are released by the Holy Spirit to serve in freedom. Thus, along with Bishop Todd and C4SO's other Canon Theologians, I affirm that God continues to call and gift women for ordained ministry in the Church.

For more of my thoughts on this, [read an article](#) and a [follow-up article](#) I wrote previously for Anglican Compass.

Bishop Todd: To what degree is “ordination” as presently practiced in the Church a biblical idea? How should the concept of ordination be held together with spiritual gifts, which are

clearly distributed to both men and women? To put it a bit provocatively, does the Holy Spirit, as He distributes gifts to women, contradict Paul's apparent restriction on their roles?

SM: Ordination as an act of recognition that transfers a person from one state to another is only taught indirectly through such “offices” as kingship. What the Bible teaches can be seen in the embodied ministries of Deborah, Huldah, Mary, Priscilla, Phoebe, Junia and women prophets: (1) Giftedness by the Spirit and (2) Recognition of that giftedness. I see ordination as an official form of recognition. No, the Spirit does not contradict Paul because the Pastorals aren't best explained, as they often are, in a way that contradicts ordaining women. One can't have Paul permitting women to pray and prophesy and teach, and then read the Pastorals as prohibiting such. The inclusion of “women” in 1 Tim. 3 indicates some kind of women-deacons already in the New Testament period.

Bishop Todd: In the ACNA, some churches strongly favor the ordination of women to the priesthood, while others strongly resist it as a “first-order” issue. How can we walk together in biblical charity, holding to our convictions, while respecting persons on the other side?

SM: Each side must respect the legitimacy of the other side in a spirit of civility, which does not mean the disagreements aren't deep and held with passion. We must practice respectful public conversation with the other, each side explaining their views without evaluation or judgment, to the satisfaction of the other side.

EM: I think it's worth addressing the matter of whether women's ordination is a first-order issue. I think grappling with this question helps us get at how to walk together in charity and mutual respect.

The faith handed on by the Apostles, summarized briefly in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 and then, later, in the Apostles' Creed and Nicene Creed, does not include women's ordination. These creedal statements include the tenets one would be



expected to profess upon one's baptism—the truths that one asserts as one identifies with the death, burial and resurrection of Christ and is then accepted into the Christian community.

If we're talking about the minimum standard for orthodox Christianity, women's ordination need not be included. In this way, I agree that the view of women's place in the Church is non-essential when we are standing by the baptismal font. As it pertains to one's entrance into the Kingdom of God and the Church, one's view of women's ordination is non-essential.

Yet, if we define "essential" as referring to the immediate outworking of the Gospel by the Church, then the way the Church lives as the people of God on earth is no small matter. And the way women are instructed to live as the people of God and exercise their gifts within the Body of Christ is not non-essential. Where women stand in the home, Church and world is a major part of this outworking in Christian discipleship. Thus, women's ordination is essential or "first order" when we leave the baptismal font and proceed into the work of being the Church.

All this to say, we have real differences with our colleagues who don't affirm women's ordination, and we shouldn't pretend otherwise. Do these disagreements affect our friendship or fellowship as Christians? They do not need to. We are one in Christ even as we differ on these matters. But do these disagreements have major consequences for our corresponding theology and practice? Yes, of course they do. At the most basic level, our views on women's ordination will lead to divergent approaches to the story of scripture, its interpretation and application. And our views on women's ordination will lead to divergent approaches to church tradition.

So, is one's view of women's ordination a primary issue or "first-order" issue? Yes and no. When we are standing at the baptismal font, one's view of women's ordination is, in fact, secondary. But when we proceed from there into the Church and back out into the world, one's view of women's ordination is most certainly not secondary, but essential

to the outworking of the Kingdom of God. Moreover, the position one takes on the matter of women's ordination will have a significant impact. As a diocese seeking the freedom and flourishing of women, we ought neither to maximize or minimize the real difference our perspective makes on the way we do the work of ministry.

How does this help us discern how to live with fellow Anglicans who disagree with us about women's ordination? I think we emphasize our unity in the essentials of the faith I referenced earlier. I think we assume the best of those who disagree with us, trusting that they do so out of deep conviction and not arbitrary whim. This means presenting their arguments in intellectually honest ways and acknowledging the strengths and weaknesses of their position. And then, I think, we expect and request the same of others.

Bishop Todd: We have colleagues here in C4SO who are unconvinced about the issue or who lean away from the ordination of women. How do we simultaneously make room for their consciences and celebrate women leaders?

SM: When ACNA was formed, the bishops made a decision to recognize dual integrity. Priests should not be endorsed who do not support dual integrity. At work here, from either side of the controversy, is a rejection of ACNA's ecclesiology and a disrespect for the bishops' decision. To question dual integrity is to undercut ACNA's formative decisions. If some now want to undo dual integrity, they will need to explain why they affirmed it originally and what now has led them to change their affirmations.

EM: I hope C4SO can make room for clergy who do not affirm women's ordination (or lean away from it) by not requiring them to teach or participate in things that violate their conscience. This seems the very least we can do. In return, though, they have to choose to submit to the leadership of a bishop and diocesan leaders who enthusiastically affirm women's ordination and want to encourage and celebrate women leaders. And they ought not discourage women who are seeking to discern a calling



to Holy Orders, even if they personally would not ordain them. Regardless of our convictions on women's ordination, however, we can be united in the desire to uphold women's full dignity in Christ and see women (and men) flourish in the Church and the world.

Bishop Todd: I agree with you both. We have always had clergy in C4SO who are not convinced about the appropriateness of women's ordination. Yet, we have always been bound by respect for one another and a focus on Kingdom ministry as the glue that sticks us together.

I'm aware that the argument over women's ordination is particularly intense at this moment. Each side is frustrated with "dual integrity." The non-women's ordination side wants the practice to stop. Some ordained women feel like there has been a bait-and-switch in which the tension we all agreed to live in is now tilting toward no longer ordaining women or practically accepting women currently ordained.

In this crucial moment, I continue to emphasize that in C4SO, we engage with each other through the Golden Rule; we "let our gentleness be evident to all"; and we "think of one another as better than ourselves." In this way, I hope women will enjoy collegial, loving relationships with their peers along with welcome and respect from all ACNA leadership—from everyone who has committed to live in dual integrity.

Bishop Todd: How best do male clergy affirm and empower women clergy to live out their calling, especially when our sisters often bear the burden of being seen as illegitimate?

SM: It is incumbent on all priests in ACNA to support ACNA's decision for dual integrity, because dual integrity is part of ACNA's formative affirmations and agreements.

EM: There are many things male clergy can do to encourage and support women clergy in the ACNA. Some things are relatively small, interpersonal matters, and some are larger, structural matters.

Among the small things male clergy can do, I'd include the following:

- Acknowledge in private, in public, and before God in prayer the challenges women clergy face in our province. Name the reality and assure women clergy they are loved, valued and needed.
- Speak up for women clergy online and in person, particularly when you see them being maligned, undermined or dismissed.
- Highlight and foreground the work of women clergy in writing, speaking, teaching, etc.
- Preach and teach with women in mind; use gender-inclusive language in preaching and teaching; use examples of women and women clergy in preaching and teaching.
- Look for Spirit-gifted women in your circles, acknowledge verbally what you see, and encourage them to pursue growth in their gifts.
- Don't interrupt women, practice active listening with women, and invite women to contribute their ideas in meetings.

Among the larger, structural ways for male clergy to support women clergy, I'd include the following:

- Offer a week-long or month-long focus on women in ministry during a certain time of the year (perhaps the season of Pentecost or Women's History Month).
- Start or contribute to a local or regional fund to support women church planters.
- Start or contribute to a local or regional fund to help smaller churches hire women clergy.
- Offer funds through your churches to support women pursuing an MDiv or other theological higher education.

Bishop Todd: Regarding young women who feel called to church leadership, given the realities of ACNA, should we encourage them to pursue ordination?



SM: Yes, with the teaching that there will be opposition by some who are convinced ordination of women is unfaithful to the New Testament and tradition. Women so called will need to be aware of opposition, understand that opposition well and respect disagreement, but rely on the dual integrity process and the support of our bishop. I would advise them not to fight for “justice,” which tends toward “rights” instead of theological foundations, but to appeal to the examples of women in ministry in the Bible, to read carefully the study of William Witt, and to find places of safety where they can discuss, weep and find encouragement.

Bishop Todd: I agree. And I will continue to speak out on women’s behalf on the biblical basis you encourage, stand up for my female colleagues, and make a place for women in Holy Orders.

EM: This is a difficult question to answer. I can’t give an unequivocal yes or no. I think my answer depends on the woman in question: her context, temperament, support system, interests and more. When I talk to women in the ACNA interested in discerning a call to Holy Orders, I am always as honest as I can be about the challenges of being a clergywoman in the ACNA—and there are many. But I am also careful to say there is no ecclesial “promised land” for women clergy either. My clergywomen friends in mainline Protestant circles and charismatic evangelical circles, for example, also experience sexism, misogyny and opposition to their ministry in large and small ways. The painful reality is, being a clergywoman is challenging in every context. But for a woman to intentionally pursue Holy Orders in the ACNA, she will need to know, as much as possible, all of the particular challenges to which she’s submitting herself—with eyes wide open.

I am pleased that women have served in the most substantive roles in C4SO: Canon to the Ordinary, Canon Theologian, Assistant Dean, Rectors, Church Planters and many more. I cherish the contributions women clergy have made to my life and to the lives of C4SO congregations. Women are often smarter, more intuitive and more resilient than I am. Oftentimes, they are great leaders in liminal moments, effective at team building, and notable for leadership that is transformative to those they lead. I hope I strengthen women—but I *know* they have strengthened me and C4SO.

Clergywomen of C4SO, I cheer you on: Make godly and creative contributions to God’s people and God’s world. Go confidently; lead joyfully—you are authorized and empowered by the Spirit. As that Spirit works His fruit in you, lead with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control—these are the jewels in the leadership crown of *both* women and men.

Emily and Scot are valued friends and colleagues who often refine my thinking. I am grateful for their expertise on the ordination of women. I hope they have sharpened your thinking, too.

