

“A matter of justice and necessity”:

Women’s Participation: A Prophetic Challenge to the Contemporary Church.¹

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Abstract.

This article expands on a statement made by John Paul II on the necessity for “real equality” for women. A brief examination of key aspects of Israelite prophecy provides a point of entry for elaborating on two aspects of John Paul’s statement that with regard to women, “history has conditioned us,” and “the Gospel contains an ever relevant message.” The article examines some sayings about women in the tradition then argues that this tradition has been shaped by the false biological premises of Aristotelian philosophy.

Introduction.

On the eve of the 1995 Beijing Women’s Conference John Paul II stated:

We are heirs to a history which has *conditioned* us to a remarkable extent. Women’s dignity has often been unacknowledged and their prerogatives misrepresented; they have often been relegated to the margins of society and even reduced to servitude. This has prevented women from truly being themselves and it has resulted in a spiritual impoverishment of humanity.

If objective blame, especially in particular historical contexts, has belonged to not just a few members of the Church, for this I am truly sorry. May this

regret be transformed, on the part of the whole Church, into a renewed commitment of fidelity to the Gospel vision. When it comes to setting women free from every kind of exploitation and domination, the gospel contains an ever relevant message which goes back to the attitude of Jesus Christ himself.

As far as personal rights are concerned, there is an urgent need to achieve *real equality* in every area... **this is a matter of justice but also of necessity** (para 3 & 4).²

There have been many statements made about women and their participation in the Catholic Church, but this one of John Paul II has received very little attention and yet it has the potential to be profoundly liberating. His letter notes that historically the Church has been conditioned in its consideration of women, and that this uncritical conditioning has resulted in the marginalisation and servitude of women as well as the impoverishment of the whole global society. He then, on behalf of the Church offers an apology and continues by speaking of a desire for the transformation of the entire Church to achieve the liberating vision of the Gospel. Finally he names the urgency of this transformation, to achieve real equality in every area, “as a matter of justice and necessity.” His words, spoken fifteen years ago, continue to provide a prophetic challenge to the contemporary Church, but more than rhetoric is needed.

This article will begin with a brief discussion of Israelite Prophecy: when it emerged and two of its characteristics, to critique and offer an alternative vision. As well as criticizing the monarchic

and social institutions, the prophet also demanded integrity from Israel's religious leaders and called for religious reform and fidelity to her covenant with God. Israel's experience of prophecy provides the context for examining the challenge to the Church today of John Paul II's words, for transformation and fidelity to the Gospel.

A. The Emergence of Prophecy.

Prophecy emerged in ancient Israel with the institution of the Monarchy, when the tribes came to Samuel desiring to be 'like other nations': "Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel ... and said to him, "You are old and your sons do not follow in your ways; appoint for us a king to govern us, like other nations" (1 Sam 8:4-5). Samuel saw the danger in this request –Israel was not to be like other nations. She was to be a "Kingdom of priests, a holy people" (Exod 19:6). Her identity was to be sought in relationship with God. To be 'like other nations,' is to turn from being a holy people of God, to being a secular power alongside other nations. Under the leadership of Saul, then David and Solomon, Israel became like the nations around them, and in becoming a nation among other nations, their way of life as a people of God changed. The values of a God who sees, hears and cares for the oppressed (Exod 3:7-8) were soon compromised and forgotten in the growth of Kingship and its supportive social system.

i. Prophetic Critique

It was Israel's Prophets who dared to face the Palace and Temple leaders to remind them of the original vision of the covenant

Although heavens belong to the Lord, yet the LORD set his heart on you. Circumcise, then, your heart. For the LORD your God is mighty

and awesome, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the alien, providing them food and clothing. You also shall love the alien, for you were once aliens in the land of Egypt (Deut 10:14-18).

The Prophets unmasked the hypocrisy and smallness of vision of those meant to be leaders. They were told to circumcise their hearts. Nothing is to restrict or curtail the largeness of heart of those who lead in God's name. Notice that justice for the widow, the orphan, and the alien is intrinsically tied to the justice of God and what God has done for Israel. There can be no dichotomy between love of God and love of neighbour – both are essential aspects of Israel's religious experience.

ii. An alternative vision.

The Prophet not only critiques the loss of covenant values present in the society and its institutions, the Prophet also holds up an alternative vision. This vision can seem utterly fanciful but as Walter Brueggemann reminds us “imagination comes before implementation.”³

Our culture is competent to implement almost anything and to imagine almost nothing.... It is the vocation of the Prophet to keep alive the ministry of imagination, to keep on conjuring and proposing futures alternative to the single one the king wants to urge as the only thinkable one.⁴

During a time when the small southern kingdom of Judah was under threat from Assyria and Egypt, the Prophet Isaiah urged the King not to let royal arrogance or fear lead him down the path of war. Isaiah urged the King to rely on God rather than his armies, to trust that history is in God's hands not the King's. In the midst of military turmoil and political intrigues Isaiah imagines a time of peace and his words have been sculptured in the forecourt of the United Nations.

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. (Isa 2:3-4)

Similarly, consider the alternative vision of Jesus:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. (Matt 5:3-7)

Because Jesus knew intimately the heart of God, he had the freedom to imagine an alternative world where the poor would be blessed, and the hungry would be filled. Jesus' vision and choice of the reign of God over the Empire of Caesar or the religious tyranny of Caiaphas, led to his

inevitable arrest and death. This is the usual fate of the Prophet whose own integrity will not allow him or her to compromise, to be more accommodating or self-protective.

iii Prophecy and Religious Authority.

When we read the Prophets, it is easy to hear their critique of **social** values, “they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes; they trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and turn aside the way of the afflicted” (Amos 2:6-7). But we forget that some of the strongest critiques offered by the Prophets were against the **religious** leaders and their religious practices. Listen to Amos as he stands, perhaps near the sanctuary at Bethel:

I hate I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings I will not accept them, and the peace offerings of your fatted beasts, I will not look at them. Take away from me the noise of your hymns; I will not listen to the melodies of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream (Amos 5:21-24).

Today, could we relocate Amos to the steps of St Stephen’s, St Mary’s, or St Patrick’s?

I hate I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your Eucharist. Even though you offer me your Masses I will not accept them, and your processions, I will not look at them. Take away from me the noise of your hymns; I will not listen to the melodies of your organs. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

B. The Contemporary Challenge.

i. Prophetic Integrity

In speaking of the Prophet I used the word integrity. The power of the Prophet lay entirely with his/her own integrity. He/She had no official role or status. Prophets stood for nobody but God. This moral or religious integrity gave power to their words. No matter how disliked they were, how troublesome and uncomfortable, their words could not be ignored. Integrity carries its own authority.

The challenge to the institutional Church today is that it has lost its voice in society because that voice has been compromised. The Church, particularly through her official ministers, is no longer perceived as an institution of integrity. The recent sex abuse scandals have made all too obvious the sinfulness and corruption within the Church's own ranks. In looking to the Church's statements about social justice in the past, their titles reflect a focus on society "out there." But the Church can only dare to speak of injustice "out there" if she is scrupulously maintaining that same justice within; and the past decades have shown **that** justice to be lacking. The Church, for this generation, has lost its credibility and will not regain it without radical changes.

Bishop Kevin Dowling of Rustenburg, South Africa spoke recently of the principles that underlie the Social Teaching of the Catholic Church.⁵ In these principles he said we have the

means to “engage with complex social, economic, cultural and political realities, especially as these affect the poorest and most vulnerable members of societies everywhere.”

But having spoken of the rich treasure that the Church **can** offer to our society the Bishop went on to say,

However, if Church leadership anywhere presumes to criticize or critique socio-political-economic policies and policy makers, or governments, it must also allow itself to be critiqued in the same way in terms of its policies, its internal life, and especially its *modus operandi*.

If the Church, and its leadership, professes to follow the values of the Gospel and the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, then its internal life, its methods of governing and its use of authority will be scrutinized on the basis of what we profess.

In these words he reminds us of Jesus’ teaching about taking the plank out of one’s own eye, before offering to take the splinter out of another’s eye (Matt 7:3).

ii Preferential Option for the Poor.

One of the principles Bishop Dowling names is “the preferential option for the poor.” This phrase, had its origins in the South American Church,⁶ and was taken up by John Paul II in his 1991 letter on the centenary of *Rerum Novarum*.⁷ While not using this phrase, Benedict XVI expressed its sentiments in his first Encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, (*God is Love*). In this he wrote: “love for widows and orphans, prisoners, and the sick and needy of every kind, is as

essential as the ministry of the sacraments and preaching of the Gospel”.⁸ Here, Benedict names groups of people who have a particular claim on Christian charity, and in this he follows the consistent biblical ethic that singles out some for God’s special protection, an expression of God’s preferential option.

You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me, I will surely heed their cry. (Exod 22:21-24)⁹

In the scriptures, women, children and the resident alien are singled out again and again as people under God’s special protection. In the Psalms God is called the ‘father of orphans’ and ‘the protector of widows’ (Ps 68:5). The book of Job names the treatment of widows and orphans as an indicator of human wickedness: “You have sent widows away empty-handed, and the arms of the orphans you have crushed” (Job 22:8-9).

Given this constant biblical cry for justice for the orphans and the widows, it is particularly heinous that in our time we have become terribly aware of the systemic abuse of children within the Church; and, I believe that the consistent and long history of discrimination against women must also be called abuse.

C “History has conditioned us.”

i. Misogynistic attitudes towards women in Church history.

The opening statement by John Paul II began: We are heirs to a history which has *conditioned* us to a remarkable extent. The following excerpts provide evidence of how deeply conditioned the Christian Church has been when it comes to women.

Tertullian (160-230): Do you know that each of your women is an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age; the guilt must necessarily live too. You are the Devil's gateway; you are the unsealer of that tree; you are the first deserter of the divine law. (*The Dress of Women 1.1.2*)

St. Ambrose (375): We know that Adam did not sin before the woman was created; indeed, after woman was made, she was the first to violate the divine command. She even dragged her husband along with her into sin and showed herself to be an incentive to him. (*On Paradise*, 10, 47)

St. John Chrysostom (345-407): A wife has just one purpose: to guard the possessions we have accumulated...God maintained the order of each sex by dividing the business of human life into two parts and assigned the more necessary and beneficial aspects to the man and the less important, inferior matters to the woman. (*The kind of women who ought to be taken as wives*, 4).

St. Augustine: I cannot think of any reason for woman's being made as man's helper, if we dismiss the reason of procreation. (*Literal Commentary on Genesis 9:5*)

Martin Luther: He rules the home and the state, wages war, defends his possessions, tills the soil, plants etc. The wife on the other hand, is like a nail driven into the wall. She sits at home. (*Commentary on 1 Tim 3:16*).

Episcopal Bishop James Pike (1968) is reported as writing in a letter to his son: Women are simple souls, who like simple things. Our family Airedale will come clear across the yard for one pat on the head. The average wife is like that.

In the light of this catalogue of patronising and misogynistic statement it is a relief to read the words of John Paul I: “God is Father, but especially God is Mother”;¹⁰ and the words of John Paul II stated at the beginning of this article.

But, while the rhetoric of justice for women is gradually creeping into the tradition, this is not yet being met with action in terms of significant changes to Canon law and Church order.

ii. The source of history's conditioning.

Far too often the Scriptures are blamed for the discrimination against women, prevalent in so much of our heritage. Certainly, the Scriptures, particularly the Old Testament, reflect a patriarchal society, but the tradition's misogynistic attitude has its basis not in the bible but in pagan, Greek philosophy.

Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.)

And a woman is as it were an infertile male; the female, in fact, is female on account of inability of a sort... The male provides the “form” and the “principle of the movement,” the female provides the body, in other words, the material... (*“On the genesis of the creatures,”* bk. 1, chap. 20)

Aristotle's understanding of the human person and society continued into the Roman world in which Christianity began and developed. Such philosophical thinking about gender differences is based on a false understanding about the process of human conception. In ancient times it was believed that only the male was active in the generation of human life. The woman was a passive recipient of the male seed and the carrier of life, but she contributed nothing to life's origin.

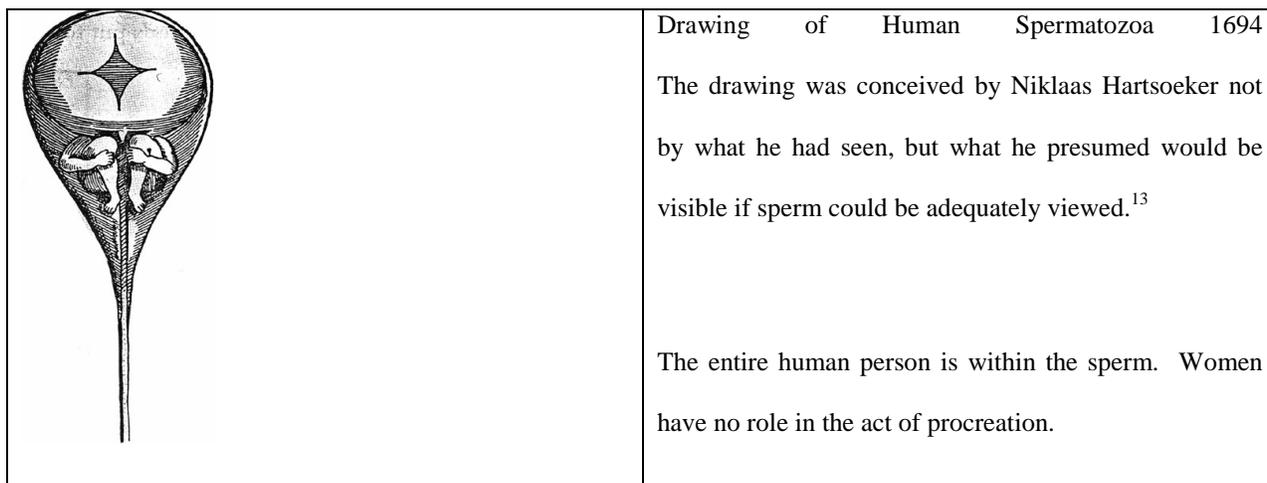
“If, then, the male stands for the effective and active, and the female, considered as female, for the passive, it follows that what the female would contribute to the semen of the male would not be semen but material for the semen to work upon.” (Aristotle. *De Generatione animalium*.)

From this wrong biology came an understanding that women were deficient and that only the male was the true and complete sex, females were a deviation. Thinking that women were biologically deficient and inferior, led to treating women as socially inferior.

I want to stress that this attitude towards women does not come from biblical teaching but from the philosophy of Aristotle which has its basis in ignorance about human biology. But as the early Church developed within this Greco-Roman world, Greek philosophy became the milieu for Christian theological thinking.¹¹ Aristotle's view about the inferiority of women is reflected in Patristic writings and the theology of Thomas Aquinas who wrote: “In the higher animals, brought into being through coitus, the active power resides in the male's semen, as Aristotle says, while the material of the foetus is provided by the female.” (*Summa Theologica* 1a. 118, 1 ad 4). These philosophic considerations work out of a dualistic perception of the human being

understood as matter and spirit, with the woman always identified with the material and the man identified with what was considered the higher faculty of rationality and spirit.¹²

This understanding of human conception, which had its origins four hundred years before Christ, continued throughout most of our Christian tradition. So certain were scientists about the male being the sole source of life, that even when microscopes began to be used male prejudice saw in semen miniature human beings, complete with arms and legs. As late as the 19th century, the view persisted that only the male contributed to the creation of a human life, with the woman providing the womb receptacle to incubate and nourish this life.



It was not until 1827 that Karl Ernst Von Baer identified and described the female ovum using a microscope.¹⁴ This discovery, that woman also was an active participant in human procreation, had profound affects on the understanding of the human person and also of human society. This was the beginning of any consideration that women could play an active part in society and led to the educational and political reforms that only began to happen late in the 19th and early 20th

century. No longer could a woman be considered an inferior biological specimen of the human race. But this is a very late discovery – 1827. In the 1800's we knew more about electricity and the solar system than we did about human life.

What I want to insist on here is that this is Greek philosophy, based on a dualistic understanding of reality and also false biology. But this is the philosophic milieu taken for granted throughout most of Christianity and therefore this necessarily is the prevailing world view that informs and shapes Christian theology, and that influences biblical translations, Church architecture, rituals and canon law.

iii "The Gospel contains an ever relevant message."

Against such misogynistic philosophy, the New Testament proposes a shockingly positive portrayal of woman and sexuality.

Women were included in the discipleship group of followers of Jesus (Mark 15:40-41; Matt 27:55-56). Women were the first to receive the Easter proclamation, and in the Gospel of John Mary Magdalene is the first to experience an appearance of the Risen Jesus and commissioned to proclaim the Easter message to "my brothers and sisters" (John 20:17). For this she has been given the title in the Church, *Apostle to the Apostles*.¹⁵ Women were not included in the list of "the Twelve" as these were the foundation group, modelled on the twelve patriarchs who were the foundation of Israel; this group did not continue beyond the foundation time. In the New Testament world, women were leaders of House Churches (Nympha (Col 4:15) Apphia (Philemon 1:2) Mary (Acts 12:12); a woman named Lydia was the first European convert, and her home provided the first welcome to Paul and his Gospel (Acts 16:14-15). Women were prophets (Acts 21:9), they prayed and prophesied in community liturgies (1Cor 11:5) and Priscilla was a travelling missionary like Paul (Acts 18:2, 19; 1Cor 16:18; 2Tim 4:19; Rom

16:3). Paul names Phoebe, “deacon” and “leader” of the Church in Cenchreae (Rom 16:1-2),¹⁶ and commends Junia, calling her “outstanding among the Apostles” (Rom 16:7). These New Testament writings give evidence of the active participation of women in the community.

In the New Testament communities the titles used to describe leadership were elders (*presbyteroi*), overseers (*episkopoi*) and stewards or administrators (*diakonoi*);¹⁷ none of these roles is linked to the Eucharist in New Testament times. In the New Testament there seems to be little distinction made between these titles and it is not until the next century that these developed a hierarchical structure. The term ‘priest’ (*hierous*) is never used to describe a Christian ministry in the New Testament, nor is there any ritual called an ‘ordination’. Here we need to be aware that the term priest (*hierous*) in both Judaism and pagan religions meant an official linked to the sacrifice of an animal in a Temple. Within the New Testament the primary description of worship was the “Lord’s Supper” and this was a meal celebrated within a house, and there is no indication who presided over this meal – it may have been the owner of the house, or a travelling missionary, or an apostle if one was present.¹⁸ The first time there is any mention of who led the Eucharist occurs in the Didache (ca. 100) and in this text the presider is called a ‘prophet.’ “But permit the prophets to offer thanksgiving as much as they desire (Did. 10:7). “Every first fruit then of the produce of the wine-vat and of the threshing-floor, of thy oxen and of thy sheep, thou shalt take and give as the first fruit to the prophets; for they are your chief-priests (Did. 13:3). Within the New Testament, named women held all of these roles: prophet, householder, travelling missionary, apostle.

An investigation into the New Testament and the possibility of women’s priesthood was conducted by the Pontifical Biblical Commission from July 1976 through January 1977. When

the Biblical Commission studied all the relevant information, some of which I have briefly noted above, their conclusion was that the New Testament alone was inconclusive on whether women could or could not be ordained priests.¹⁹ This was a unanimous decision (17-0).²⁰ The seventeen members of this Commission were all priests appointed by the Pope in view of their outstanding biblical scholarship. Their findings are very significant when we consider that the Church looks to Scripture and Tradition as the two sources of Revelation. In 1977, the verdict was that Scripture alone could not determine an answer to the question of women's ordination.

iv Women in the Tradition.

If the Scriptures are unable to provide a conclusive answer, an examination of Church Tradition may bring greater certainty. It has become commonplace to hear phrases such as 'women have never been ordained', or 'women have never been priests'. A study of historical documents and epigraphs provides evidence that such statements are wrong. As I will demonstrate, in the early centuries women were 'ordained', they were considered part of 'clerical orders', they were called '*presbytera,* *diakonos,* and *diakonissa*' and two that we know about were given the title '*episcopa*'. While noting these terms, it is also important to recognise that at present there is no certainty what roles these women had in relation to sacramental ministries. Further research may bring greater clarity.

It is only when we move beyond the New Testament that words, which today are associated with hierarchy and priesthood, have their origins. Tertullian (155-220) was the first to use the terms cleric or clergy as distinct from the people, the *laos*, and he describes the clergy as an '*ordo*'.²¹ Within Roman society there were different ranks that were known as an 'order' (*ordo*), e.g. the order of senators, or the order of *equites*. The process of being enrolled in an order was called 'ordination'.²² This pattern from the Roman political world had a strong influence on the

Church. Widows and Virgins²³ could be enrolled in an order providing they met strict conditions of good works and also age;²⁴ according to Theodore of Mopsuestia, a woman could only “be received into the order of widows” if she were over sixty.²⁵ This same author also asks, “whether it was fitting that deaconesses be ordained before this age.” Widows had a role in receiving penitents who, according to Tertullian, were required “to prostrate themselves before the widows and the presbyters” (*De Pudicitia* 17, 7). Tertullian also speaks of both women and men in “ecclesiastical orders”: “How many men and how many women in ecclesiastical orders owe their position to the practice of continence.”²⁶ In the *Apostolic Constitutions* (ca 400) there is a description and prayer for the ordination of a deaconess:

O bishop, you shall lay your hands upon her in the presence of the presbytery, and of the deacons and deaconesses, and shall say: O Eternal God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Creator of man and of woman, who replenished with the Spirit Miriam, and Deborah, and Anna, and Huldah ... do Thou now also look down upon this Your servant, who is to be ordained to the office of a deaconess, and grant her Your Holy Spirit ... that she may worthily discharge the work which is committed to her. (Book VIII, 19-20)

The Council of Chalcedon (451) determined: “A woman shall not receive the laying on of hands (*cheirotoneisthai*) as a deaconess under forty years of age, and then only after searching examination” (Canon 15).²⁷ The age of 40 for a deaconess continues in the Justinian legislation (ca 530) where deaconesses are listed among the clergy and like other clerics deaconesses receive an ordination by the “laying on of hands,” they were attached to a Church and were supported by the Church.²⁸ In addition to widows, virgins and women deacons, an Abbess was

also ‘ordained’ in a ritual laying on of hands.²⁹ As head of her community, the Abbess heard confession, absolved from sin, gave penances and reconciled members back into the community. As part of her ordination ritual a religious mitre was placed on her head and she received from the bishop a staff as a sign of office. The Cistercian Abbess of Las Huelgas, (founded in Spain in 1187) as well as wearing the mitre and carrying the crozier of a bishop, she also exercised Episcopal authority by appointing and dismissing parish priests, she issued faculties to hear confessions, to preach and celebrate Eucharist, and carried out other duties of ecclesiastical jurisdiction. Her powers of jurisdiction came to an end by Papal edict as late as 1873.³⁰

There are several books now available that provide primary sources listing inscriptions from tombs and other monuments where women are named with the title deacon, and deaconess.³¹ Madigan and Osiek list sixty-one such inscriptions in the East and four in the West covering the first six centuries. These books also include evidence for women given the title *presbytera/presbyteressa*, (a total of 10) and there are two women who have the title *episcopa*. One woman, whose name is uncertain, was buried in the Basilica of St Paul’s in Rome. Her inscription reads: “Here lies the venerable woman, bishop (*episcopa*) Q, buried in peace for five [years] +Olybrio.”³² Also in a Church in Rome, there is a mosaic showing a group portrait of four women.³³ On the far left, one is named, Theodora Episcopa.

The above sampling of the traditions regarding the ordination of women has not been widely known, because history has given little attention to women’s experience. But as more and more evidence from history comes to light there can be no doubt that for centuries within the Catholic tradition, in a variety of jurisdictions, women received ordination to different roles, women were considered as clerics, women bore titles that today we would associate with deacons, priests and

bishops, and in some of these roles women exercised ecclesiastical and sacramental authority. The witness therefore of Scripture (Phoebe) and tradition provides a precedent for at least the ordination of women to the diaconate. This move would enable women to participate in Church governance, which Canon Law at present restricts to male clerics (Canon 129 #1).

D A Matter of Justice and Necessity

I have developed this point at length as there is still much ignorance about women's roles in the Church in earlier centuries. There are other issues that could also be examined if the Church were to take seriously the words of John Paul II when writing to the gathering of women in Beijing: "there is an urgent need to achieve *real equality* in every area... this is a matter of justice but also of necessity."

As a matter of justice and necessity, English translations of our liturgical readings and prayers should include and name women, instead of maintaining the archaic use of "man" as a generic term. In many cases, the use of the term 'man' is an inaccurate translation from the original language, since Hebrew, Greek and Latin have different terms for an individual male and for a general collection of people. An accurate and literal translation should make this distinction in English.

As a matter of justice and necessity women should be well represented at all levels in diocesan, national and international committees, commissions and consultations regarding Church matters. We also have been baptized into Christ and share in his royal, priestly, and prophetic character.³⁴

As a matter of justice and necessity women should have equal access to financial support in their theological studies instead of only financing the theological education of a few male seminarians.

As a matter of justice and necessity women should have equal access to diocesan support for their discernment of vocation and pastoral formation for ministry.

The list could continue.

Conclusion.

I began this article by quoting parts from a letter addressed to Women by John Paul II. In this letter I noted his awareness of the conditioning power of history and the need today for transformation **by** “into a renewed commitment of fidelity to the Gospel vision.” These words I believe provide a prophetic challenge to the contemporary Church. It is the nature of prophecy to both criticize and offer an alternative vision, and no institution is exempt from the prophet’s critique and call to God’s originating vision. At the heart of the prophetic cry for justice is the particular care for the “widows and the orphans.” Women and children are singled out, along with the resident alien, for God’s particular concern. Recent years have forced the Church to acknowledge the neglect and abuse of children. This article has argued that the long history of women’s treatment by Church authorities and the structures that continue to marginalize women by not allowing their full participation in Church life and ministry, are also abusive. I argued that both the Scriptures and Tradition testify that women in the past were ordained at least into the ministry of deacon and in some centuries various other ministries. The refusal to allow this issue to be openly discussed is itself an oppressive abuse of authority. The Church cannot preach

justice with prophetic integrity so long as justice is compromised within its own institutional structures.

The liberating God of the Exodus, who hears the cries of the widows and the orphans, laments with us and over us, and over our institution for the centuries of neglect, brutality, ignorance and prejudice that have been part of women's experience within the Church that we too would like to call our home.

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Academic Publications.

Books

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¹ This article is an abridged revision of an address given in Brisbane (3/9/2010) to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission in the Archdiocese of Brisbane, Australia.

² John Paul II, “Letter of Pope John Paul II to Women,” Libreria Editrice Vaticana, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_29061995_women_en.html.

³ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 40.

⁴ Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 40.

⁵ Kevin Dowling, “Catholic Social Teaching Finds Church Leadership Lacking,” *National Catholic Reporter*, 8th July, 2010. Bishop Dowling named these principles as: “The Common Good, Solidarity, the Option for the Poor, Subsidiarity, the Common Destiny of Goods, the Integrity of Creation, and People-Centeredness -- all based on and flowing out of the values of the Gospel.”

⁶ As a principle of justice, this phrase emerged from the Catholic Bishops of Latin America in their conferences in Medellin and Puebla. It seems to have first been used in 1968, in a letter by Fr. Pedro Arrupe, Superior General of the Jesuits, to the Jesuits of Latin America.

⁷ “Re-reading the Encyclical [*Rerum Novarum*] in the light of contemporary realities enables us to appreciate *the Church's constant concern for and dedication to* categories of people who are especially beloved to the Lord Jesus. The content of the text is an excellent testimony to the continuity within the Church of the so-called “preferential option for the poor”, an option which I defined as a “special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity,” John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, para. 11, 1991.

⁸ Benedict XVI *Deus Caritas Est*, para. 22, 2005.

⁹ See also Deut 14:28-29; 26:12-13; Isa 10:2; Jer 49:11

¹⁰ 10th September, 1978. This text can be found in *La Documentation catholique*, vol 75. 60th year (24 September, 1978) 17:836.

¹¹ See the discussion on the development of sexual identity and sex-polarity based on Aristotelian thought in Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman: The Aristotelian Revolution, 750 B.C. - A.D. 1250* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985).

¹² The neo-platonic philosopher Plotinus (C.E. 205-270) was the first philosopher to emphasize the connection of matter with evil. He wrote, “When something is absolutely deficient – and this is matter – this is essential evil without any share of good.” Plotinus, *Enneads in Plotinus* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), Vol. III, 256. Since women were associated with materiality, under the influence of neo-platonism, women became related to evil. See Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, Plotinus citation on p. 203.

¹³ This illustration and information taken from Norman Ford, *When Did I Begin? Conception of the Human Individual in History, Philosophy and Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 49.

¹⁴ Ford, *When Did I Begin?* 48. In the 13th century anatomists at the University of Bologna had discovered the female ovaries, but this discovery did not lead to changing the Aristotelian view that only the male seed was active in the generation of life; Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, 432.

¹⁵ This title, which became quite common in the twelfth century, appears to date back to Hippolytus, bishop of Rome (c. 170-235) in his Commentary on the *Canticle of Canticles*. On the title in the twelfth century see, Jane Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene: Legends, Apocrypha, and the Christian Tradition* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 88.

¹⁶ A number of church Fathers comment on Phoebe and have no difficulty with Paul naming a woman as a ‘deacon’. See for example, John Chrysostom, Homily 30 on Rom 16:1-2. This text is cited in Kevin Madigan and Carolyn Osiek, *Ordained Women in the Early Church: A Documentary History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005), 15. John Chrysostom speaks of women “who hold the rank of deacon.” (Homily 11 on Timothy 3:11; cited *ibid.* 19. Similarly, Theodoret Bishop of Cyrrhus, (Commentary on 1 Timothy 3:11; cited *ibid.* 19). Phoebe is called diakonos and *prostasis* and these words are frequently mistranslated. The term *prostasis* when used to describe the role of an *episkopos* (1Tim 3:4) and *presbyter* (1Tim 5:17) is translated as ‘rule’, but when used of Phoebe is frequently translated as ‘helper’ or ‘patron’.

¹⁷ H. W. Beyer, “Diakónos,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 155.

¹⁸ Acts 20:11. Paul breaks the bread also (Acts 27:35).

¹⁹ Pontifical Biblical Commission, “Can Women Be Priests?” *Origins* 4, July (1976): 92-96.

²⁰ A copy of the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s Document and a discussion of this document and “The Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood,” can be found in John R. Donohue, “A Tale of Two Documents,” in *Women Priests: A Catholic Commentary on the Vatican Declaration*, ed. Leonard Swidler and Arlene Swidler (New York: Paulist, 1977); the voting numbers are on pg. 25.

²¹ Tertullian, (*De idol.*, c. viii); Kenan Osborne, *Priesthood: A History of Ordained Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist, 1988), 115.

²² The first ritual of ordination is found in *The Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus, dated around 215. See Osborne, *Priesthood*, 117.

²³ “Virgins” were sometimes called “Widows,” and this may have been because they performed the same duties and professed continence. “Greetings to the families of my brothers, along with their wives and children, and to the

virgins called widows” (Ignatius of Antioch, *Ep. to Smyrneans* 13:1. See Roger Gryson, *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church* (Collegeville: Order of St Benedict, 1976), 13-14, 21-22.

²⁴ Gryson, *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church*, 20-21.

²⁵ Theodore of Mopsuestia, Commentary on 1 Tim 5:9. See Madigan and Osiek, *Ordained Women in the Early Church*, 22.

²⁶ Tertullian, *De exhortatione castitatis* 13, 4.

²⁷ Ute E. Eisen, *Women Officeholders in Early Christianity: Epigraphical and Literary Studies* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000), 151.

²⁸ Gryson, *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church*, 71-73.

²⁹ A description of these rituals is given in Gary Macy, *The Hidden History of Women’s Ordination: Female Clergy in the Medieval West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 81. Macy provides an Ordination rite for an Abbess from the Early Middle Ages in Appendix 2 and an 10th century ordination ritual for a deaconess in Appendix 1. For a discussion of these rituals see *ibid.* pp. 70-73.

³⁰ Papal Bull *Quae Diversa*. Pope Pius IX. See, Gary Macy, “Bishops by Any Other Name,” *The Tablet*, 9th August 2008. George Tavard, *The Church, Community of Salvation: An Ecumenical Ecclesiology*, New Theology Studies 1 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992), 125.

³¹ See especially Madigan and Osiek, *Ordained Women in the Early Church* and Eisen, *Women Officeholders in Early Christianity*

³² Madigan and Osiek, *Ordained Women in the Early Church*, 193; also Eisen, *Women Officeholders in Early Christianity*, 199.

³³ Church of Praxedis

³⁴ Vatican II, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, para. 31.