



Rome, Catacombs of Priscilla

# The Ministry of Women

by Thomas F. Torrance

In one of the earliest of the Catacomb paintings in Rome in the *Capella Greca*, within a century after the death and resurrection of Christ, there is a remarkable mural depicting the breaking of bread at the celebration of the Eucharist. Seven presbyters are seated in a semi-circle behind the Holy Table, assisted by several deacons. This is known as the "Catacomb of Priscilla," for Priscilla is seated to the right of the presiding presbyter (presumably her husband Aquila), the *proestos* or bishop, and is actively engaged with him in the eucharistic rite. There are two points about this painting on which I would like to comment.

The first has to do with the number *seven*. In the great Temple Synagogue in Jerusalem there was a Sanhedrin of 71 elders (*zekenim*) or presbyters together with its president or *sagan*. What of the smaller synagogues in the communities outside Jerusalem or in the *diaspora*? According to the *Mishnah* tractate "Sanhedrin" it was laid down that a large Jewish community might have 23 elders, presumably plus its president, making 24 in all, but if a community were 120 strong it was allowed to have its "seven" elders, which would normally be presided over by an "*Archisynagogos*," such as Jairus or Crispus of whom we read in the New Testament. The "Sanhedrin" tells us that these presbyters were to be arranged "like the half of a round threshing floor so that they all might see one another." It was thus in accordance with the regulations of Jewish law that at Alexandria, where there were well over a million Jews in

the first century, the local sanhedrin numbered 23 or 24, while at Rome, the Jewish community, which was differently distributed, was served by a number of smaller synagogues each with its sanhedrin of 7 elders.

Regarded in this light, the fact that the number of disciples, who with Peter formed the original Christian community in Jerusalem, was numbered about 120 (Acts 1:15), is rather significant. It helps us to understand why shortly afterwards the twelve Apostles appointed specifically "seven" disciples (presumably as "presbyters" not "deacons" as is usually held) to serve the needs of the primitive church in Jerusalem, while they gave themselves over "to prayer and the ministry of the Word" in fulfillment of their universal apostolic ministry. We also learn, however, that in due course with the growth of its membership the Jerusalem church came to have a Christian sanhedrin of seventy presbyters, probably in line with the seventy disciples sent out by Jesus on the mission of the Kingdom mentioned by St. Luke (10:1,17), but again in accordance with Jewish regulations, presided over by James, not the Apostle but the brother of our Lord.

It is not surprising, then, that in Alexandria the church had twenty-four presbyters, twelve for the city and twelve for rural districts around the city, presided over by one of their number whom they elected and consecrated as bishop. Nor is it surprising that in Rome, on the other hand, as we learn from Optatus (*Libri VI, CSEL, XXI, pp. 187-204*), there were at least forty small churches, which evidently had their due number of presbyters after the pattern of the Jewish communities in Rome, but with bishops rather than rulers of the synagogue as their presidents. Incidentally this helps to explain why "moniscopacy"—having a single bishop—was comparatively late in developing in Rome and why Clement acted as the chosen spokesman for all the churches in Rome to those beyond. It is in the *Capella Greca* that we are given a vivid glimpse into the assembly of one of these small congregations of believers

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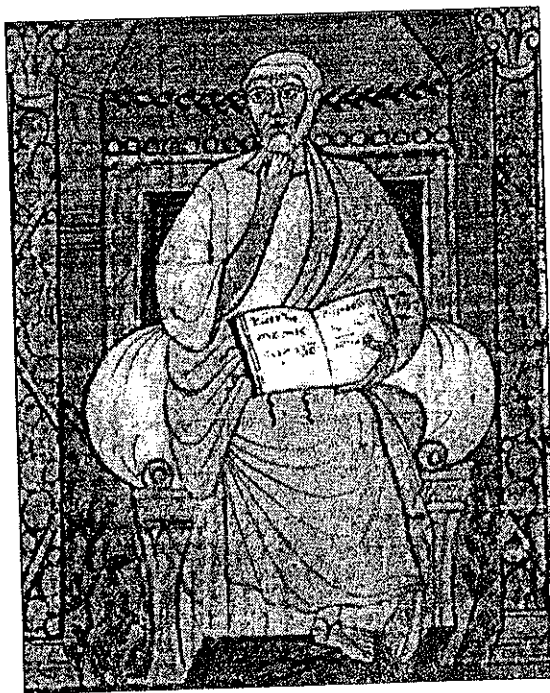
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*This article has also been published as a pamphlet by Handsel Press, Edinburgh and in A Festschrift for Penelope Jamieson, the Bishop of the Diocese of Dunedin, New Zealand, by the University of Toago, Dunedin.*

meeting in the catacombs with their seven presbyters, Aquila and Priscilla and five others, arranged in a semi-circle "like the half of a round threshing floor." Moreover, the Jewish as well as the Christian character of this eucharistic celebration, together with its very early date, is accentuated by a rough Hebrew inscription in the foreground.

The second point about this wall painting to which I wish to draw attention is that a woman is presented as concelebrating with men at the breaking of bread. Priscilla (or Prisca) is a *presbytera* officiating along with *presbyteroi* in the central act of the worship of the church. At first sight this is rather startling in view of the statements of St. Paul: As in all the churches of the saints the women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church in the context of speaking in tongues (1 Cor 14:33-35). If our Jewish friends are right, what St. Paul has in view here relates to the customary arrangement of synagogues in which women, who usually occupied seats apart from, or overlooking the main area, were forbidden to chatter or otherwise interrupt the conduct of worship. That may well be how we are to regard St. Paul's injunctions here. Otherwise the passage is rather difficult to understand, since in an earlier chapter in the same Epistle it is assumed that women do pray and prophesy aloud in church—although it is made clear that when they do so they must have their heads covered, if only out of respect for their husbands' authority over them (1 Cor 11:3f). Should anyone question this, however, St. Paul agrees that no such custom is found among them, or in any of the churches (1 Cor 11:16). Thus it would appear that the Apostle has no objection to women praying or prophesying in church provided that they wear a fitting cover over their heads. In the same Epistle (1 Cor 16:19) he refers to the church in the house of Aquila and Prisca in which it is hardly likely that Prisca kept silent!

Another passage from St. Paul's First Letter to Timothy must also be considered: Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. (1 Tim 2:11-12). Here women are explicitly enjoined not to talk (*lalein*), but also not to teach (*didasklein*) in public, and perhaps also not even to teach their husbands in private! This hardly accords with the way some Jews interpret the passage just



St. Augustine:

WHILE MAN AND WOMAN TOGETHER ARE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD, WOMAN ON HER OWN, CONSIDERED APART FROM HER CHARACTER AS A HELPMATE FOR MAN, IS NOT IN THE IMAGE OF GOD."

cited from First Corinthians, but whatever it means it must surely be understood in accordance with the activity of Prisca in Ephesus, as recorded by St. Luke, when along with Aquila, she expounded the way of God more accurately to Apollos (Acts 18:26). It is hardly surprising, then, that St. Paul applies to her along with Aquila the term "fellow-worker" (*synergos*) which he used to refer to people associated with him in the ministry of the gospel like Timothy (Rom 16:3,21—cf also 1 Tim 3:2; 1 Cor 3:9), or Clement (Phil 4:3), or Mark and Luke (Philem 24).

One must also recall how St. Paul mentioned in a similar way women such as Nympha—like Priscilla she had a church in her house (Col 4:15)—or Junia, his female relative, to whom he referred as a noted apostle (Rom 16:7). Reference should be made as well to

the four virgin daughters of Philip the Evangelist who were spoken of as endowed with the gift of prophecy, that is, with the gift of proclaiming the gospel as well as foretelling events. In his own list of those endowed by the ascended Lord with gifts for the ministry St. Paul put apostles first, prophets second, evangelists third, followed by pastors and teachers (Eph 4:11). That order gives some indication of the way in which the great Apostle to the Gentiles regarded the ministry of women like his kinswoman Junia and the daughters of Philip. St. Paul also speaks of women as holding the office of deaconess (1 Tim 3:11), with explicit mention of Phoebe in the church at Cenchrea (Rom 16:1), with which should be associated the order of "widows" who were not ordained but held a place of honor in the apostolic Church in fulfilling a ministry of prayer and intercession (1 Tim 5:3-16).

All this must be taken fully into account in reaching any balanced understanding of what St. Paul meant in the two passages commonly adduced by those who oppose the ordination of women in the ministry of the gospel. When we consider all that is recorded in the New Testament in this regard, it is rather difficult, to say the least, to accept the idea that there is no biblical evidence for the ministry of women in the Church. It also helps us to understand why the early Christians, who were hounded to death in the Catacombs of Rome for their fidelity to the gospel and the normative tradition of the Apostles, should have left the Church with such a definite depiction of the place of a woman presbyter at the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

The office of deaconess was developed in the early centuries of the Catholic church, appointed through the laying on of hands by the bishop (*Apostolic Constitutions*,

3.15), but there is no canonical record of any office of woman presbyters. There were evidently no women serving with men in councils of "elders of the people" (*seniores plebis*) in the North African Church who, although not reckoned among the clergy (*cleri*), assisted bishops, presbyters and deacons in the public life of the local community. Mention is sometimes made of elderly women who exercised a prominent role in the worship of a congregation, known as *presbytides*, but, as Epiphanius insisted, they were not to be regarded as female presbyters or priestesses (*Haereses*, 79.4). Attempts were obviously made by authorities in the early Church to play down the New Testament evidence for women in the ministry, apparent in alterations introduced into the Greek text of St. Paul's references to Junia and Nympha, which were changed to Junias and Nymphas, thereby making them out to be men! However, in spite of this depreciation of the female sex widely found in the Mediterranean Church, there were strange exceptions to the canonical restriction of clerical office to women. For instance, in a mosaic still extant in the Church of *Santa Praxeda* in Rome, built by Pascal I toward the end of the ninth century in honor of four holy women, one of whom was his mother Theodora, we can still read around her head in bold letters *THEODORA EPISCOPA!* And so we have papal authority for a woman bishop and an acknowledgement by the pope that he himself was the son of a woman bishop! The word *episcopa* was evidently used at times to refer to the wife of a bishop, as *presbytera* was sometimes used (and still is in Greece) to refer to the wife of a presbyter, but that does not seem to have been the case in this instance.

It is, of course, the case throughout the general history of the Church in East and West, and until recently in Protestant churches as well, that tradition regularly restricted the priesthood or ordained ministry to men, but that was done on grounds of ecclesiastical convention and canonical authority. Appeal has also been made to dominical authority for, as we learn in the gospels, our Lord appointed only men to be his disciples and apostles, which was in line with traditional Jewish convention. These men, of course, were all Jews, so that it must be asked whether the Church departed from the example and authority of Christ when it appointed Gentiles to be presbyters and bishops. The point is, as St. Paul himself wrote to the Galatians, a radical change had come about with Christ, for in him there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither



**On Theodora:**

"AND SO WE HAVE PAPAL AUTHORITY FOR A WOMAN BISHOP AND AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT BY THE POPE THAT HE HIMSELF WAS THE SON OF A WOMAN BISHOP."

he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man, for man was not made from woman but woman from man (1 Cor. 11:7-8). Appeal is also made to St. Augustine's interpretation of these words offered by way of a comment upon what is written in Genesis: God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he them; male and female created he them (Gen. 1:27).

This means, St. Augustine once claimed, that while man and woman together are in the image of God, woman on her own, considered apart from her character as a helpmeet for man, is not in the image of God. Man may be in the image of God apart from woman, but not woman apart from man (*De Trin.* 12.7.10—contrast St. Basil, *De con.hom.*, *Or.*, 1.22f, and Didymus, *De Trin.* 2.7)! If that were the case, the mother of Jesus considered in herself as a virgin could not have been said to be in the image of God!

This is a quite offensive notion of womankind that conflicts directly with the truth that in Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female; it even contradicts Augustine's own statement in the same passage that "human nature is complete only in both sexes"! And it conflicts directly with our Lord's teaching that in the beginning God made man male and female in such a way that what he has joined together may not be put asunder (Matt 19:4f; Mark 10:6f). It thus conflicts with the biblical and orthodox teaching that woman as well as man was made in the image of God, and may therefore be said to be an *ikon* of God as well as man. And of course it also conflicts with the orthodox understanding of the incarnation as the saving assumption of the whole human being, male and female, and as the healing of our complete human nature. This must surely be understood as involving the healing of any divisive rela-

slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you all are one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28). This means that in Christ there is no intrinsic reason or theological ground for the exclusion of women, any more than of Greeks or Gentiles, from the holy ministry, for the old divisions in the fallen world have been overcome in Christ and in his Body the Church. That applies to the division between male and female just as much as it does to the division between Jew and Gentile, or between slave and free.

In modern times it has been argued that only a man can represent Christ in the celebration of the Eucharist, for it is only a man who can be an *ikon* of Christ at the altar. To back up this claim, reference is often made to the Pauline statement that man ought not to cover his head, since

tion between male and female due to the curse imposed upon them at the Fall (Gen 3:16), while sanctifying the distinction between them. It thus rejects any Manichaistic denigration of the female sex (and St. Augustine, it should be remembered, was a Manichee for nine years before his conversion).

Moreover, the fact that the Son of God became man through being conceived by the Holy Spirit and being born of the Virgin Mary, that is, not of the will of the flesh nor of the will of a human father, but of God (John 1:13), means that at this decisive point in the incarnation the distinctive place and function of man as male human being was set aside.

Thus, as Karl Barth pointed out, in the virgin birth of Jesus by grace alone, without any previous sexual union between man and woman, there is contained a judgment upon man (*Church Dogmatics*, I.2, p. 188ff). This certainly implies a judgment upon the sinful, not the natural, element in sexual life, but it is also to be understood as a judgment upon any claim that human nature has an innate capacity for God; human nature has no property in virtue of which man may act in the place of God. Moreover, the sovereign act of God in the virgin birth of Jesus carries with it not only a rejection of the sovereignty of man over his own life, but also a rescinding of the domination of man over woman that resulted from the Fall (Gen 3:16). Thus any preeminence of the male sex or any vaunted superiority of man over woman was decisively set aside at the very inauguration of the new creation brought about by the incarnation. In Jesus Christ the order of redemption has intersected the order of creation and set it upon a new basis altogether. Henceforth, the full equality of man and woman is a divine ordinance that applies to all the behavior and activity of "the new man" in Christ, and so to the entire life and mission of the Church as the Body of Christ in the world.

In thinking and speaking of the incarnation it is important for us to keep close to the biblical witness that in becoming man (i.e., *anthropos*, not *aner*—*homo*, not *vir*) the Word was made flesh, not just male flesh. All human flesh was assumed in Christ, the Son of God, the Creator Word become man, so that now all men and women alike live and move and have their being in him. We must not forget that our Lord regularly identified himself as "Son of Man" (*ho huios tou anthropou*), which clearly had divine and final import, as Jesus acknowledged before the high priest (Mark 14:62). The Being of Jesus, the Son of the Virgin Mary, was not just male being but divine-human Being with universal import as the Savior of all humankind. This is not, of course, to deny that he was physically a male, but to hold that the human nature of Jesus as Son of Mary was taken up into and united with his divine Nature in one indivisible personal reality—it is as such that he was and is the incarnate Son of God.

Hence it would be a grave biblical and theological mistake to bracket the incarnation with the gender or sex of Jesus in such a way that everything in his incarnate life and

work depended on his maleness, for that would seriously call in question the salvation of female human being and detract from the incarnation as the assumption of complete human being and the redemptive recapitulation (*anakephalaiosis*) in Christ of the whole human race of men and women. After all, the Greek term for incarnation adopted by orthodox Christian theology from the beginning, in line with the biblical witness, was *enanthropesis*, i.e., inhomination.

It should be noted that the Pauline argument about the first Adam and the last Adam in the redemption of mankind does not have to do specifically with Adam as a male but with Adam as the one made from the ground, *adamah* in Hebrew, and so in Hebrew "Adam" means "earthling," just as our word "human" derives from the Latin "*humus*" meaning "soil." This is reflected in St. Paul's statement: The first man is from earth (*choikos*, of the dust), the second man is the Lord from heaven (1 Cor 15:47). That is to say, the argument of St. Paul about the saving recapitulation and renewing of the whole human race in Christ the last Adam has to do with the first Adam as "human being," and not just with the maleness of Adam, while certainly a femaleness of Eve (as elaborated rather fancifully in patristic typology), and with the second Adam, while certainly a human being and historically a male, as man "from heaven." The first Adam was not generated (*gennomenos*) like other human beings but brought into existence (*genomenos*) by a creative act of God from the earth as a human being to be the beginning of the human race, and the second Adam so far as his flesh was concerned was brought into existence (*genomenos*) by a creative act of God to be the beginning of the renewed human race—but in contrast to the first Adam he was man from heaven. The new humanity is not begotten through Christ as a male, but brought into existence by the downright act of God from heaven, and it is in him that the whole human race is gathered up and redeemed by him as Lord and Savior. The maleness of Jesus just does not enter into the argument.

In view of this soteriological nature of the incarnation, it is understandable and highly significant that the Augustinian conception of man apart from woman was never employed, to my knowledge, in any official council of the universal Church as a theological reason for the claim that only a male human being may image or represent Christ at the altar (but cf. statements in *Didascalia Apostolorum* 15, or *Apostolic Constitutions* 3.6.1f to which appeal is sometimes made). This strange pseudo-theological idea is a modern innovation evidently put forward by some rather reactionary churchmen in the nineteenth century, but has recently been revived as a convenient (although specious) argument for the exclusion of women from ordination to the Holy Ministry, and has been made to look ancient by being cast in the terms that only a man can be an *ikon* of Christ at the altar (a misuse of 1 Cor 11:7 which applies only to relations in the order of creation).

What happens here is that an old ecclesiastical convention is being put forward quite wrongly as a theologi-

cal truth or a dogma of the Apostolic and Catholic church. Hence I believe that Dr. George Carey, the new archbishop of Canterbury, was quite right in his assertion that the idea that only a male can represent the Lord Jesus Christ at the Eucharist is a serious theological error. He was not declaring that those churches and churchmen who reject the ordination of women, because it conflicts with a convention long sanctioned by catholic tradition or canonical authority, are to be judged heretics, but asserting that it is a very grave mistake for anyone to convert such a convention, no matter how strongly enforced by catholic tradition, into a dogma or an intrinsic truth of the Christian faith.

I would also add that it is a serious epistemological error (often denounced by the great theologians of the Early Church) to confuse what may be held on conventional grounds (*thesei*) to be the case with what must be held on true or real grounds (*physei*).

Basic to this whole discussion is the theological use of creaturely terms and images taken from God's self-revelation to humankind in the Holy Scriptures. "Image" is surely to be understood in a strictly relational sense in accordance with the Old Testament teaching that God has created human beings (i.e., man and woman) for fellowship with himself in such a way that, in spite of the utter difference between them as Creator and creatures, human beings are made after the image and likeness of God. The Latin translation "*ad imaginem Dei*" is quite right, for it does not mean that the image of God inheres in man's nature, far less in male or female nature, as such, but that it is a *donum superadditum*, a gift wholly contingent upon the free grace of God—that is why St. Athanasius used to refer to "the image of God" as "the grace of the image" (*he kat' eikona charis*, e.g., *De Inc.* 12). Hence we are not to think that men and women through creaturely human nature, by virtue of some intrinsic analogy of being, reflect God's uncreated Nature, but that they are specifically destined by grace to live in faithful response to the purpose and movement of God's love toward them as his creaturely partners, and thereby to live and act in personal conformity to what God reveals of himself to humankind through his Word.

In making himself known to human beings God certainly communicates with them in human forms of thought and speech, so that there is necessarily an anthropomorphic ingredient or coefficient in his revelation which is very evident in the Holy Scriptures. Nevertheless God makes his self-revelation shine through all anthropomorphic forms of thought and speech in such a way that under the transforming impact of his Word they are not opaque distorting media, but become transparent forms through which his divine Word and Truth are conveyed to us. That is why in the mediation of his self-revelation through the Hebrew Scriptures of the Old Testament which are replete with dramatic imagery, there is a persistent denunciation of all images of God conceived by the human heart, whether conceptual or physical, as forms of idolatry. And that is

why there is built into the self-revelation of God an absolute rejection of all naturalizing of religion, typified by the worship of *Baalim* and *Astaroth* with its heathen projection of creaturely sex, male and female, into God.

The proper understanding of "image" was a crucial issue that cropped up in the fourth century Church in the debates between Nicene theologians and heretical Arians about the way in which they were to think of Christ as the image of God and of themselves as conformed to his image. Stress was laid by the Church Fathers upon the fact that since God is Spirit (John 4:24), all the language used of God in biblical revelation and in Christian theology must be interpreted in a wholly spiritual, personal and genderless manner, in accordance with God's intrinsic nature which infinitely transcends all human imaging or imagining. Thus any images taken from creaturely being such as "father" and "son" have to be understood in a diaphanous or "see-through" way; they are to be used like lenses through which vision of truth make take place, and so in such a way that the creaturely relations they express in ordinary mundane usage are not projected into Deity. When used theologically they are forms of thought and speech that refer to truth independent of themselves, and are themselves to be understood in the light of that truth to which under the thrust of divine revelation they refer. In short, when used theologically, creaturely images in language about God have a referential, not a mimetic relation to the divine realities.

It is surely in this way that we are to think of "father" and "son," as terms expressing creaturely images which divine revelation uses and adapts in speaking about God, and so as transformed terms which Christian theology is bound to use about God. It is only in and through "father" and "son" as they are appropriated and adapted by God for his self-revealing in accordance with who he really is, that we are to know him and think of him and worship him in spiritual ways that are true of him and worthy of him, without reading the creaturely relations and images in them back into his divine nature.

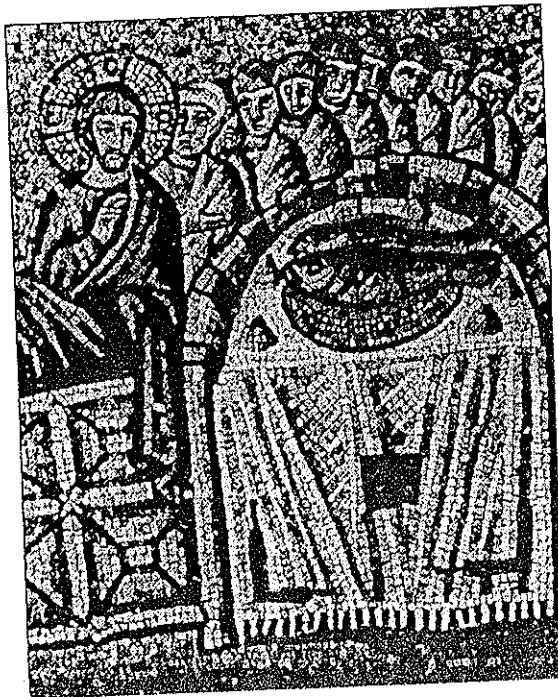
It should be emphasized, then, that the understanding of the words "father," "son," "spirit," "deity," "trinity," "being," "nature," etc., when used theologically of God may not be governed by the gender which by linguistic or cultural convention they have in this or that language, for sex belongs only to creatures and may not be read back into the Being of God as Father. Moreover, since the Son and the Spirit are consubstantial with God the Father (that is, of one and the same Being with him), they are likewise beyond sex in their Being. This remains true of God the Son, even though as incarnate he is also the Son of Mary, for we cannot speak of his being begotten of the Father before all ages as true God of true God in sexual terms. Moreover, as we have noted, in becoming man it was complete human being and nature that he assumed for our salvation, not just male nature. In all these statements about God, "father" and "son," as theological terms and images harnessed to God's self-revelation in Christ, are transformed under the



impact of his Word and Spirit and are to be understood spiritually, in accordance with the transcendent Nature of God who is Spirit (John 4:24). Just as the self-revelation of God as three Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, transcends the category of number, so it transcends the category of sex or gender. Hence, as St. Paul has taught us, human fatherhood may not be used as a standard by which to judge divine Fatherhood, for it is only in the light of the divine Fatherhood that all other fatherhood is to be understood (Eph 3:14-15).

**W**e come back to our consideration of the place of men and women in the ministry. It should now be clear to us that when we are told that the Lord Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God and that we are renewed in Christ after the image of the Creator (Col 1:15, 3:10), "image" must be understood in a wholly spiritual and transparent way without the intrusion of material relations and properties such as sex.

What are we to say, then, in view of this theological understanding of image, about the assertion that it is only a man or male human being who can image or represent Christ at the Eucharist? Fundamentally, that depends wholly on how we are to think of Christ himself as present at the Eucharist, and correspondingly of the way in which he is represented at the Eucharist by the celebrant. At the institution of the blessed sacrament of the Lord's Supper during the Passover Celebration in the Upper Room on the night in which he was handed over, Jesus ministered himself to his disciples, giving them communion in his own body and blood, which he did in his unique identity as the incarnate Son of God. Thus it is utterly unthinkable that the body and blood given to us by the Lord Jesus in our communion with him is to be regarded as restricted to male body and blood, for it was the body and blood of *the Son of Man*, the bread which came down from heaven: Truly, truly, I say unto you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood, abides in me and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me (John 6:53-56). That explanation of eucharistic Communion was given by Jesus in the synagogue at Capernaum in anticipation of the Last



#### On The Eucharist

"IT IS UTTERLY UNTHINKABLE THAT THE BODY AND BLOOD GIVEN TO US BY THE LORD JESUS . . . IS TO BE REGARDED AS RESTRICTED TO MALE BODY AND BLOOD, FOR IT WAS THE BODY AND BLOOD OF THE SON OF MAN."

representative capacity of his or her own, as male or female, but solely in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ who sent him or her, and only in virtue of his real presence as the unseen Celebrant who in his atoning love communicates himself to us as often as we eat the bread and drink the wine. He commanded us thus to do in remembrance of him: This is my body, this is my blood given for you. It is as High Priest and Atoning Sacrifice united indissolubly in his one Person, that Jesus Christ comes among us and ministers himself to us in the celebration of the Eucharist, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world and gives us his peace, the Savior who presents us to the Father in union with himself as those whom he has redeemed and consecrated through his one eternal self-offering.

The general line of our response to the strange idea that it is only a man, or male human being, who can image Christ or represent Christ at the altar which he himself is, should now be clear. However, three considerations in particular ought to be stressed.

- (1) If the notion of image is retained, it must be a diaphanous image through which the reality to which the image is directed can show itself unhindered and unobscured. Since the ministerial celebrant acts in Christ's name, he does not and dare not obtrude himself or his sex into the celebration; instead of imaging Christ in the form of a transparent medium, that would obscure Christ by coming in between Christ and the communicants. At the Eucharist the minister or priest does not act in his own name or in respect of his own status as a male human being, but only in the name of Jesus Christ and in virtue of his

Supper. And so when it actually took place in Jerusalem, as St. John tells us, Jesus ministered to the disciples as he who had come from God and went to God, and spoke to them at length of his oneness in being with God in terms of a mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son in one another.

The union of the disciples with Jesus through their communion with him was grounded in his own union with the Father. There the image of Jesus as male just did not come into the picture, for in the supper Jesus was present in the midst of his disciples as the Son of Man clothed with the glory of the Father: in receiving him they received the Father who sent him. That is the real presence of the Christ, God incarnate, crucified, risen and ascended, at every Eucharist: when the appointed celebrant on earth acts not in any

incarnate significance as the one Mediator between God and human being.

It may help us here to recall what happened at the transfiguration of Jesus on the mount when a cloud overshadowed the disciples and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my beloved Son: hear him." When the disciples looked round they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves. It is surely something similar, *mutatis mutandis*, that takes place at the Eucharist, when the celebrant is robed with the garments of office symbolically blotting his own human self and sex out of the picture so that Christ in his own self-presentation may be the sole focus of worship, unobscured by the opaque image of the celebrant, male or female. If the notion of image is used of the celebrant at all here at the Eucharist, it must be image, not in its picturing or mimetic sense, but in its referential sense in which the image points beyond itself altogether and in so doing retreats entirely out of the picture.

(2) The celebrant officiates at the Eucharist, not as a male or female human being, but as a person set apart and sanctified in Christ for this ministry. Christ himself presides at the Eucharist as he in whom human nature and divine nature are indissolubly united in his one Person. As we have seen, it was as man, not just as male, that the only-begotten Son of God became incarnate, and it was human nature in its completeness and not just male nature that he assumed and united to himself in his divine Person. Hence to claim that it is only a male who can represent Christ at the altar savours of a heretical Nestorian separation between human and divine nature in the one Person of Christ. Even St. Augustine, in spite of what he had written earlier in the *De Trinitate* about the image of God, finally insisted that while the Trinity himself is three Persons, "the image of the Trinity is one person." (*De Trin.* 15.23.43) That is to say, if reference is to be made to the notion of image, it is strictly not as man or woman (or man and woman together) that is to be thought of, but man or woman as person. It should be remembered, however, that the concept of person, quite unknown in antiquity in Hebrew or Greek tradition, arose under the creative impact of the doctrines of Christ and the Trinity and takes its creaturely pattern from the uncreated relations between the three Divine Persons who are the Triune God. This is a concept of person in which the relations between persons belong to what persons are, and is not the same as the modern psychological notion of



Athanasius:

"THE LORD JESUS IS BOTH THE DISPENSER AND THE RECEIVER OF GOD'S GIFTS, WHO MINISTERS THE THINGS OF GOD TO US AND THE THINGS OF US TO GOD."

human being, yet even so not in virtue of his or her own personal being but solely in virtue of his or her sacred commission to act in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

(3) Above all, however, we must take into account what the celebration of the Eucharist means, as the sacrament of the atoning self-sacrifice of Christ made in our place, on our behalf and in our stead, for that governs absolutely the way in which we must think of the celebrant as representing Christ at the altar. We must also remember, as Athanasius expressed it, that the Lord Jesus is both the Dispenser and the Receiver of God's gifts, who ministers the things of God to us and the things of us to God (*Con. Ar.* 3.39f; 4.6f). In becoming man for us and our salvation, he became one of us and united us to himself, really becoming what we are in order to be ourselves in our place in his identity as very God and very Man, in such a way that he acts for us and on our behalf in all our responses to God, even in our acts of belief and worship.

Thus we believe in God through sharing in Christ's vicarious faith or faithfulness toward him, and we worship God through sharing in Christ's vicarious prayer, worship, and adoration of the Father. In fact, in a very basic sense Christ Jesus is himself our worship and it is as such that he is actively present with us and in us at the Eucharist, as through him, with him and in him we are brought into such a communion with the Father through the Son and in the Spirit, that we are made to participate in the real presence of God to himself. It is strictly in accordance with this vicarious presence of Christ in the Eucharist that we must

personality in which the person is turned in upon himself or herself. Christ himself is Person in a unique sense, as personalizing Person, whereas we are persons in a dependent and creaturely way as personalized persons, who exist in inter-personal relations, which transcends the distinction between male and female.

It is person in that contingent relational sense that is the image of God, not male or female human being as such, which fits in very well with the biblical notion of the creation of man for fellowship with God which we noted above. Hence, it should be argued here, that if Jesus Christ is present to us in the Eucharist as God and Man in one indivisible Person, we should think of the celebrant acting in his name or representing him as a human person, not as a male or female

think of our part in its celebration whether as participants or celebrants. "Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to thy cross I cling." As participants we hold out empty hands at the altar or the holy table to receive the bread and wine, and by faith to partake of Christ's body and blood. For we bring to it no sacrifice or worship of our own, or if we do, we let our worship and sacrifice be replaced by the sole sufficient sacrifice of Christ, and it is through him, with him, and in him alone that we worship the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

It is not otherwise with the celebrant. At the Eucharist the celebrant ministers not in his own name, but in the name of Christ, acting through him, with him, and in him, and thus in such a way that he yields place to Christ, lets Christ take his place, never in such a way that he takes Christ's place or acts in his stead. That is how his representation of Christ is to be understood, through a personal and liturgical inversion of his/her own role with the role of Christ who is the real Celebrant. The rule of John the Baptist must apply supremely here: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

If we speak of this celebration in terms of eucharistic sacrifice, as I believe we should, answering sacramentally to the one atoning vicarious sacrifice of Christ himself on the cross, it must be asked how we offer a sacrifice, even sacramentally, which by its essential nature is one offered on our behalf, in our place and in our stead. The substitutionary as well as the representative nature of the atoning sacrifice must be kept fully in view throughout when, pleading Christ's eternal sacrifice, we set forth the *anamnesis* (remembrance) of it which we are commanded to make. That is a eucharistic sacrifice in which we may not combine any sacrifice of our own with the atoning sacrifice of Christ, and into which we may not obtrude anything of ourselves or seek to harness it with what we are and do; that would be to sin against the unique unrepeatable and completely sufficient nature of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. However, in view of this representative and substitutionary nature of the sacrifice of Christ, to insist that only a man, or a male, can rightly celebrate the Eucharist on the ground that only a male can represent Christ, would be to sin against the blood of Christ, for it would discount the substitutionary aspect of the atonement. At the altar the minister or priest acts faithfully in the name of Christ, the incarnate Savior, only as he lets himself be displaced by Christ, and so fulfils his proper ministerial representation of Christ at the Eucharist in the form of a relation "not I but Christ," in which his own self, let alone his male nature, does not come into the reckoning at all. In the very act of celebration his own self is, as it were, withdrawn from the scene.

It is surely, partly at least, for that reason, that the celebrant wears vestments (which have no reference to his sex), for he does not act in his own significance, or in his own name but only in the name of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is rather in the office or "persona" with which he is clothed to act in Christ's name that the

representation of Christ is to be recognized, not in the self of the celebrant, and certainly not in his male nature. It is actually the unseen Christ who in the real presence of his divine-human Person ministers at the Eucharist, not the person of the presbyter or bishop as such except in the name of Christ, and then only in a humble, self-effacing way. Hence the celebrant is not to be regarded as a sacrificing priest who repeats the atoning sacrifice of Christ, even though in an "unbloody" form, but is only one who serves the eucharistic proclamation of Christ's full, perfect and sufficient, all-prevailing sacrifice, offered once for all. It is upon Christ our ascended High Priest that the Father looks and only on the celebrating priest on earth as found in him. Thus, however we look at it, to insist that man, precisely as man or as male, alone is able to represent Christ, would amount to a serious intrusion of male self-consciousness and assumed preeminence into our understanding of the priestly office of Christ, and would be tantamount to some form of psychological sacerdotalism and eucharistic Pelagianism.

We conclude that in spite of long-held ecclesiastical convention, there are no intrinsic theological reasons why women should not be ordained to the Holy Ministry of Word and Sacrament; rather, there are genuine theological reasons why they may be ordained and consecrated in the service of the gospel. The idea that only a man, or a male, can represent Christ or be an *ikon* of Christ at the Eucharist, conflicts with basic elements in the doctrines of: the incarnation and the new order of creation; the virgin birth, which sets aside male sovereignty and judges it as sinful; the hypostatic union of divine and human nature in the one Person of Jesus Christ who is of the same uncreated genderless Being as God the Father and God the Holy Spirit; the redemptive and healing assumption of complete human nature in Christ; and the atoning sacrifice of Christ which he has offered once for all on our behalf, in our place, in our stead.

And therefore it conflicts also with the essential nature of the Holy Eucharist and the communion in the body and blood of Christ given to us by him.

As in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, so there is neither male nor female, for all sinful separation and gradation between them resulting from the Fall of mankind have been done away, while God-given distinctions have been preserved, renewed and sanctified. Through the incarnation, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ humanity has thus been set upon an entirely new basis of divine grace, in which there is no respect of persons, and women share equally with men in all the grace-gifts or *charismata* of the Holy Spirit, including gifts for ministry in the Church (cf. *Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho*, 88). □