

THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION OF THE MALE EXCLUSIVE PRIESTHOOD : ANY JUSTIFICATION IN THIS GENDER EQUALITY ERA ?

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Abstract

There are two major problems endangering the future of the ministerial priesthood : the issue of celibacy which is not our central concern here, and the exclusive reservation of the priesthood to the male gender. Though the second problem dates back to the Apostolic times following the choice made by Christ, it is very well known that cultural conditions of his times where women were regarded as « unfit » and « subservient » to men, influenced his choice of males. In the 21st century when cultural inhibitions have been largely overcome, why has it not been reflected in the church ? Our attempt is to expose the Greek philosophical anvils upon which the church's stand has been formulated, a stand largely influenced by Saint Thomas Aquinas. Our approach here is hermeneutical where we expose and interpret the texts that have kept the church counter gender-inclusive in the ministerial priesthood. Both the Inter Insigniores and the Ordinatio Sacerdotalis of the Church will be shown to have male superiority undertones inherited from the Greek philosophers. Though Christ selected Jews and married men to the ministerial priesthood, the church was able to change both situations. Thus we ask : is the church's exclusive male ministerial priesthood justified ? Most scholarship in this field have been historical, sociological and theological. Among other things, we wish to improve the philosophical contribution to this question.

Keywords : Priesthood, Gender Equality, Catholic Church, Celibacy, Christ

Introduction

The Catholic priesthood in both the Eastern and Western Rites, is open only to the male sex. This has been the tradition of the Church from the apostolic times. Most recently however, and even on a regular basis, there has been calls from various groups and even from some women religious for the Church to change its law and include women in the priestly ministry. If not for anything else, at least for the sake of inclusion and equality. This was the case in 1979 when, at the visit of Pope John Paul II to the United States of America, the head of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, Sr. Theresa Kane, made a request that « half of mankind » be considered worthy and fit to be « included in all the ministries of the Church. » In his response, the Pope reminded the religious women that Virgin Mary who should be their model, was not a priest (Kwitny, 1997, p.340). In this little article, we wish to examine the philosophical foundations that have knowingly or unknowingly helped

entrench the arguments of a male exclusive priesthood in a world that has become totally inclusive. The philosophical tradition that has seen its influence dominate the arguments for the exclusion of women from the Catholic priesthood, would be seen to span, in its most developed form, from Plato to Saint Thomas Aquinas and to the most recent papal documents. Even the *Code of the Canon Law* in its most recent revision states it clearly in canon 1024 that « only a baptized male validly receives sacred ordination » (Coriden, 1999, p.723). The major structure of their arguments range from the basic physical and intellectual superiority of the male sex over the female sex to the superior worth of the former over the latter considering the latter's biologically induced ritual impurity. Though some of the assumptions have scientifically been proven wrong, they constituted a long tradition that has left its impact on the Western mind and on the Catholic institution of the priesthood. These chosen philosophers have been able to crystallize their positions and those of their « less » famous predecessors into a consistent fusion of biology, metaphysics and revelation. An author whose work will be a reference point, because of the exhaustive way in which she examined the concept of woman in relation to man with reference to four cardinal points of interaction : Generation, Opposites, Wisdom and Virute, is Sr. Prudence Allen (1985). We shall be referring to her when necessary as we bid to examine the Church's major documents that still argue for the male exclusive Catholic priesthood in a world that not only preaches but is gradually seen to practice gender equality in almost all fields of human endeavor. It is on note that the Church of England began ordaining women as priests in 1994 and consecrating women as bishops in 2014. Of seismic importance is the most recent appointment of Sarah Mullally, the Bishop of London, as the next Archbishop of Canterbury, thereby making her the first woman ever to head the Church of England. Our attempt here is to raise awareness on this issue, which though may not be the preoccupation of the Church in Nigeria at this point given the rising number of seminarians in line for the priesthood, demands attention as we shall better prepare the future if we understand and control the present. Let us then do the philosopher's job of examining some of the philosophical principles upon which the Church's justifications for the male exclusive priesthood are built.

A. The Philosophical Foundation for the Male Exclusive Priesthood

1. Plato : (c. 428-347 BC)

A disciple of Socrates, Plato was the first important Greek philosopher that tried to develop a consistent and systematic philosophy of nature based on the basic principles of all things as matter and form. In his account of the Universe, Plato in the *Timaeus* conceives the idea of « the receptacle, and as it were the nurse, of all Becoming » (Plato, *Timaeus*, 49a-c). If there is a receptacle, 'wherein' something becomes, then, there must also be the source 'wherefrom' the becoming is produced. Thus Plato likens the receptacle to a Mother, and the source to a Father and what is engendered between the two to the Offspring. Do we not see in this analogy, the likening of the Father—the active source of generation to the concept of form and the Mother—the passive receptacle to the concept of matter? Maimonides would later identify Plato as the originator of this metaphysical association of matter with female and form with male. What interests us more now is the qualifications

with which Plato describes the receptacle :

Wherefore, let us not speak of her that is the Mother and Receptacle of this generated world, which is perceptible by sight and all the senses, by the name of earth or air or fire or water, or any aggregates or constituents thereof : rather, if we describe her as a Kind invisible and unshaped, all-receptive, and in some most perplexing and most baffling way of partaking of the intelligible, we shall describe her truly (Plato, *Timaeus*, 51b).

That the Receptacle is described in the feminine nature of woman is without doubt. Plato further qualifies her as « invisible and unshaped, all-receptive. » To confirm its receptive and passive nature, Plato argues that if she had any nature of her own apart from what is given her, « it would copy them badly, through obtruding its own visible shape. » Therefore, it is right that the Receptacle « should be void of all forms » (*Timaeus*, 50^e). And Allen (1985) is correct, the mother Receptacle has simply become the « metaphysical concept of prime matter » (p.59). Thus, it is on this natural generation of elements, that Plato invests with the male—female sex identity.

When it comes to the bodification of the soul in reincarnation, Plato gives a value far more inferior to the female sex in relation to the male sex. He suggests that what becomes of the female in the material world is a cowardly or unrighteous male in his earlier life. He repeats this assertion in two different passages of the same book :

And he that has lived his appointed time well shall return again to his abode in his native star, and shall gain a life that is blessed and congenial ; but whoso has failed therein shall be changed into woman's nature at the second birth (Plato, *Timaeus*, 42b-c).

Thus, to punish a man for his indiscretions, he is reincarnated into a female nature. What a way to confirm that the female is inferior to the male, « the superior sex » that hereafter « should be designated 'man' » (*Timaeus*, 42a). It is this male superiority theme that Aristotle would turn into a biological and metaphysical theory.

2. Aristotle : (384-322 BC)

Arguably the greatest thinker of all times, he developed a highly systematic and comprehensive argument, based on scientific findings, for the natural inferiority of women compared to men.

When it comes to generation, Aristotle in *De Generatione Animalium* argues that the male seed in relation to the female seed, (*is a principle and a cause, and the male is such in virtue of a certain capacity and the female is such in virtue of an incapacity*) stands as formal cause to the female which is the material cause of conception. As the actuating principle, the male seed dominates, determines and produces conception in the female body, which being the receptacle contributes passively to conception. (Aristotle, *On the Generation of Animals*, 766a30-768). That is why the female is described as passive — *un élément passif* and the male as male is active—*un élément actif*. (Aristotle, *On the Generation of Animals*, 729b10-15). We know that science has proven Aristotle wrong in this. The female is not just

passive, it is also active because it contributes the female gamete to the constitution. Lacking this knowledge, Aristotle makes a clear metaphysical association of woman with matter because lacking power, and man with form because a principle and cause of movement and generation. Just as form brings completion to matter, so does the male sex bring perfection to the female sex. It is worthwhile to note that all important Aristotelian distinctions between « form and matter », « mover and moved, » « actuality and potentiality, » are, according to Lynda Lange (1983), « all used to distinguish male and female. His theory of sex difference is at the very least interwoven in a consistent manner into the fabric of his philosophy » (p.2). And by so doing, Aristotle raises male superiority to a metaphysical principle that has controlled man-woman relationship even to the present day. As well indicated in his *On the Generation of Animals* :

Again, as the first efficient or moving cause, to which belong the definition and the form, is better and more divine in its nature than the material on which it works, it is better that the superior principle should be separated from the inferior. Therefore, wherever it is possible and so far as it is possible, the male is separated from the female. For the first principle of the movement, or efficient cause, whereby that which comes into being is male, is better and more divine than the material whereby it is female (732a3-10).

Aristotle states clearly that the principle of movement for generated things which is the male, is something more divine since it approximates to Actuality itself. The woman is only matter and passive and is very much inferior to the male. Allen (1985) reacting to this notes that with Aristotle's belief in the superiority of form to matter, « the metaphysical structure for sex polarity was established » where the female identified with matter, « was defined as both opposite and inferior to the male » (P.92). Further, Aristotle identifies woman as « an impotent male—*un mâle stérile* » and is woman on account of a « certain incapacity—*impuissance* to concoct semen out of the final state of nourishment (that is either blood ; or its counterpart in bloodless animals) *en raison de la froideur de sa nature*—because of the coldness of its nature.» (Aristotle, *On the Generation of Animals*, I, 20, 728a15-20).

The biologically induced natural inferiority of women is fully evident in the different rational abilities of both sexes. Though the rational faculty is complete in all human beings, this faculty differs in degree in slaves, women, children and men :

Although the parts of the soul are present in all of them, they are present in different degrees. For the slave has no deliberative faculty at all; the woman has, but it is without authority, and the child has, but it is immature (Aristotle, *Politics*, 1260a10-15).

To say that the woman's deliberative faculty « is without authority » has far reaching implications. Apart from its inherent inability to control the lower parts of the rational soul, it has the inability to engage in proper deliberation and intellection. The consequence is that women remain on the lower epistemological ladder of opinion and hardly ascend to the

level of knowledge. It is this that justifies the said « different degrees » of the parts of the soul in both man and woman. This difference even manifests itself in the possession and practice of moral virtues which Aristotle agrees, belong to both sexes. However, the temperance, courage and justice of a man and a woman are not the same.

The courage of a man is shown in commanding, of a woman in obeying. And this holds of all other virtues... All classes must be deemed to have their special attributes, as the Poet says of women, « silence is a woman's glory, » but this is not equally the glory of man. (Aristotle, Politics, 1260a23-31).

Since the final virtue of women is to obey, it enters into the natural disposition of things that the man rules and the woman is ruled. The implication is that she has not the capacity to assume a leadership position. Realities of today however have proven that women can become and do become leaders in their various positions, and leadership positions are not even gender sensitive.

3. Moses Maimonides (1135-1204)

The Great Eagle of the Synagogue discovered the Aristotelian systematic thoughts through the Islamic Peripatetics. It is no debate that he provided a basis for intercultural dialogue between the Jewish, Arabic and Christian worlds. His biggest influence is even seen on Saint Thomas Aquinas. Before we come to the latter, let us note that Maimonides's interpretation of matter and form presented the female nature further in a very negative and sometimes demeaning light. Most of the analysis we shall make here have already appeared in an earlier book published by Anyaeibu (2015) the author of this article. In the *Opus Magnum* of Maimonides (1963) - the *Guide of the Perplexed*, he draws attention to the terms man {'ish} and woman {'ishshah}. Normally, he gives three level interpretation of terms-the physical, derivative and philosophical interpretations. On the physical level, the terms-man and woman, signify « a human male and a human female » (p.31). Moving on to a more derivative meaning, Maimonides (1963) notes that the term woman designates :

Any object apt for, and fashioned with a view to being in conjunction with some other object. Thus it says : The five curtains should be coupled together, a woman to her sister (Exod. 26 :3) (I :6, p.31).

To describe a woman as « any object apt for and fashioned with a view to being in conjunction with some other object, » shows the receptive, dependent and passive character that is ascribed to the female nature. To complete this derivative meaning, Maimonides gives it a philosophical garb by calling it « matter » and ascribes to this « other object » to which the former « object » aspires as « form. » The designation of « woman » as « matter » and of « man » as « form » is, according to Maimonides (1963), a tradition that goes back to Plato and his predecessors (p.43). Because of its apparent readiness to be « in conjunction with some other object, » Maimonides gives matter-woman the image of a « married harlot » who in spite of her attachment to a man, is ever in search of other men for continuous adventures. In other words, matter-woman can never exist independent of

form-man.

How extraordinary is what Solomon said in his wisdom when likening matter to a married harlot, for matter is in no way found without form and is consequently always like a married woman who is never separated from a man and is never free. However, notwithstanding her being a married woman, she never ceases to seek for another man to substitute for her husband, and she deceives and draws him on in every way until he obtains from her what her husband used to obtain. This is the state of matter. For whatever form is found in it, does but prepare it to receive another form (Maimonides, 1963, III :8, p.431).

Beyond the metaphoric language that is used by Maimonides, is a consistent presentation of the female nature as that which is dependent, corrupt and corruptible, inherently indeterminate and integrally effervescent. To put the issue light, the female nature is corrupt and deficient. On the epistemological ladder, matter is seen as a dark veil that prevents intellection.

Matter is a strong veil preventing the apprehension of that which is separate from matter as it truly is. It does this even if it is the noblest and purest matter, I mean to say, even if it is the matter of the heavenly spheres...Hence whenever our intellect aspires to apprehend the deity or one of the intellects, there subsists this great veil interposed between the two (Maimonides, 1963, III :9, p.436f).

Cast in the image of a « strong veil, » Maimonides presents the female nature as very weak in reaching the heights of intellection necessary for intellectual perfection. Does this not bespeak of Aristotle's assertion that women's deliberative faculty is « without authority ? » Maimonides (1963) enumerates four ways in which people are considered to be wise : (1) the possession of rational virtues ; (2) the possession of moral virtues ; (3) the possession of practical arts ; and (4) the aptitude for stratagems and ruses (III :54, p.632). It is very interesting to know that Maimonides mentions women only in the category of those that are wise according to practical arts.

The term is applied to acquiring arts, whatever the art might be...and [to] all the women that were wisehearted (Maimonides, 1963, III :54, p.632).

The implication of this is that women are limited to the third level of wisdom, the level of practical arts that are distant from the knowledge acquired through rational application of the deliberative faculty. Because women's souls are as Aristotle said « without authority, » over their lower parts, Maimonides also reasons that women should be under the full control of men.

As women are prone to anger, being easily affected and having weak souls, there would have been grave troubles, quarrels, and disorder in the house, if their oaths had been under their control...Therefore, the matter, with everything pertaining to it, is given into the charge of the master of the house (Maimonides, 1963, III :48, p.600).

Maimonides's writings exerted much influence even beyond the Jewish world that, according to Allen (1985) major Christian philosophers and writers like Nicholas of Cusa, Meister Eckhart, St. Albert the Great, and St. Thomas Aquinas found in him, solid philosophical arguments and structures for their religious explanation of the human nature. (p.361) He was one of the channels through whom St. Thomas Aquinas came to the appreciation of Aristotelian philosophy. We recall that Maimonides was a medieval Jewish scholar whose idea was circumvented by the cultural realities of his day

4. Saint Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274)

It is a well known fact that Aquinas was one of the best disciples of Aristotle. The contents and structures of his arguments, bespeak of great influence of Aristotle. Through him, the Church adopted or allowed herself to be influenced by some of the basic principles of Aristotelian rationale for the inferiority of women. Drawing his analogy from the difference that exists between God and prime matter as that of actuality and potentiality, Aquinas argues that one's closeness to the pure actuality of God determines the degree of one's resemblance of the image of God. As intelligent nature, the human being—male and female—equally resemble the image of God. But in a secondary sense, it is man that more fully possesses the image of God. In the *Summa Theologiae*, (henceforth ST) Aquinas thus argues :

But as regards a secondary point, God's image is found in man in a way in which it is not found in woman; for man is the beginning and the end of woman, just as God is the beginning and end of all creation. Thus after saying that *the man is the image and glory of God, while the woman is the glory of man*, the Apostle goes on to show why he says it, and adds : for the man was not from the woman, but the woman from the man ; and the man was not created for the woman, but the woman for man. (ST, Ia, q.93, a.4, ad.1).

It is the same image of woman as derivative and passive systematically developed by Aristotle that has found its way in the theological formulation of the Christian idea of creation as represented by Aquinas. The male is actuality while the female is potentiality. In generation, Aquinas remains faithful to the Aristotelian claim which describes the birth of an individual woman as a mistake in nature. He sanctions the idea of man as « perfect sex » and woman as the « imperfect sex. » In the *Disputed Questions on Truth*, St. Thomas Aquinas noted :

The active principle in the male seed always tends toward the generation of a male offspring, which is more perfect than the female. From this it follows that conception of a female offspring is something of an accident in the order of nature—in so far, at least, as it is not the result of the natural capacity of the particular agent. (Truth, q.5, a.9).

As the « imperfect sex, » St. Thomas goes on to argue in an Aristotelian fashion that even in the area of reasoning, the woman's power is weak and cannot in actual fact, attain the level of intellection required for the acquisition of rational virtues. This is what he says in his

commentary on Aristotle's *Politics* :

But since a woman is free, she has the capacity for understanding but her capacity is weak. The reason for this is on account of the changeableness of nature, her reason weakly adheres to plans, but quickly is removed from them because of emotions, for example, of desire, or anger, or fear, or something else of the kind.

We are here made to understand that the lower parts of the rational soul, the parts that include the vegetative and the appetitive faculties, exercise much stronger control over the female nature than the male and thus, the female nature is easily distracted and weak in attaining rational intellection. Is this not the reason behind St. Paul's injunction that « women should keep silent in the churches and if they wish to learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home? » (I Cor.14 : 34-35) Instead of pursuing intellectual virtues, women are encouraged to acquire the virtue of silence. According to the interpretation of Allen (1985), « the view that it was woman's special virtue to remain silent in public was bound to lessen the possibility of women achieving any degree of intellectual virtue. Indeed, it would add to the perceived weakness of the female intellect, for it takes constant exercise of the intellect to develop the capacity for reasoned argument » (p.400). Not being able to hold a public discourse, the female is more and more rendered incapable and unfit for the exalted office of ministerial priesthood. Man must always rule over the woman. It is the same reasoning that resonates in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* (SCG) where St. Thomas observes :

For the female needs the male, not merely for the sake of generation, as in the case of other animals, but also for the sake of government. Since the male is both more perfect in his reasoning and stronger in his powers. (SCG, III, 123, 3)

The supposed lesser image of God in the female has borne its fruits : the woman is of lesser intellectual capacity, and must naturally be subjected under man whose prerogative is to rule over the woman. Bringing forth the Aristotelian inspired argument of male superiority, Aquinas in the *Summa Theologiae* gives his opinion on the question of women ordination :

Since it is not possible in the female sex to signify eminence of degree, for a woman is in the state of subjection, it follows that she cannot receive the sacrament of Order (ST, Suppl., q.39, a.1).

If the female nature does not fully contain the image of God, it cannot fully represent the image of Christ to whom the priest is configured by the sacrament of orders (Allen, 1985, p.404). For a sacrament to fully signify what it represents, it must not only be both valid and lawful, but that representation must be by « natural resemblance. » As well said in the ST, « since a sacrament is a sign, not only the thing, but the signification of the thing, is required in all sacramental actions ; » (ST, Suppl., q.39, a.1). Example is the Sacrament of Extreme Unction or Sacrament of the Sick. St. Thomas argues that for this sacrament to be valid and lawful, there must be a sick person to signify the need of healing. Thus, for the Sacrament of Orders to signify the reality (which is Christ) that it represents in a valid and lawful manner, the male sex is an absolute necessity (ST, Suppl., q.39, a.1). This logic has entered into

papal documents explaining the Church's reason behind the male exclusive Catholic priesthood. It is the same philosophical base for male superiority that has found its way into the religious language of sacramental signification.

B. The Church's Official Texts for the Male Exclusive Priesthood

There are two papal documents where the Church have tried to explain her reasons for keeping the Priesthood only to the male sex. It is to these documents that we now turn.

1. *Inter Insigniores* : On the Question of Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood. (Pope Paul VI, 1976).

This document released by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, under the mandate of Pope Paul VI on Oct. 15, 1976 makes attempt at explaining the Church's exclusion of women from the Sacramental Priesthood. The Church recognises the contributions of women in the various fields of life, and shows this appreciation by conferring with the title of Doctors of the Church, on two foundresses of religious families : St. Teresa of Avila and St. Catherine of Siena for their writings that are very rich in spiritual doctrines. Recognising the changes taking place in the other Christian communities admitting women to the pastoral office on a par with men, the document notes that « questions have been asked whether she too could not modify her discipline and admit women to priestly ordination » (Pope Paul VI, 1976, para.4). In response to this demand, the document proffers some explanation. First is the argument of tradition which teaches that the Catholic Church has never felt that priestly or episcopal ordination can be validly conferred on women. As we shall see latter, any sacramental signification, should be seen to signify by « natural resemblance. » Second is the attitude of Christ who Himself, did not call any woman to become part of the Twelve, nor invest any woman and not even His Mother Mary, with the apostolic ministry. Third is the practice of the apostles who remained faithful to the attitude of Jesus towards women (Pope Paul VI, 1976, para.6-14). Sensing the *fragilité* of the « image of God » argument which philosophers have argued exist in a lesser degree in women, the Church changes to the argument of the « natural resemblance » to the « image of Christ, » an « image » that is exclusively interpreted corporally to be « male. »

2. Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* of Pope John Paul II on Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Alone. (Pope John Paul II, 1994)

This letter released on the 22nd May, 1994 only came to definitively confirm what the earlier declaration—the *Inter Insigniores*—has made known to the World, that is, « that the Church in fidelity to Christ, does not consider herself authorized to admit women to Priestly ordination. » (Pope John Paul II, 1994, para. 5). It called on the testimony of the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles to « attest that this call was made in accordance with God's eternal plan » (Pope John Paul II, 1994, para.2) and that it concerns « the Church's divine constitution itself. » (1994, para.4). It reiterates the well known fact that « priestly ordination, which hands on the office entrusted by Christ to his Apostles of teaching, sanctifying and governing the faithful, has in the Catholic Church from the beginning always been reserved to men alone. » (1994, para. 1). The Pope recalls that

the exclusion of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and of the Church, from the mission proper to the Apostles and from the ministerial priesthood « cannot mean that women are of lesser dignity, nor can it be construed as discrimination against them. Rather, it is to be seen as the faithful observance of a plan to be ascribed to the wisdom of the Lord of the Universe » (1994, para. 3). In the final analysis, the Pope declares « that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church's faithful » (1994, para.4). Even those who have doubts must have to accept this teaching as the « will of God. »

Excluding Women : Any Justification ?

Given that this tradition dates back to Jesus Christ and to the apostolic times, the question that comes to mind is why it took the church more than a thousand years to publish her first document explaining her reasons for the male exclusive priesthood ? The two documents above reaffirm the arguments of tradition and the practice of the Apostles themselves for the exclusion of women from the Catholic ministerial priesthood. It is the *Inter Insigniores* which went further by talking about the sacramental representation of what is signified where the priest must be seen to be acting « in *persona christi*, taking the role of Christ, to the point of being his very image, when he pronounces the very words of consecration. » (Pope Paul VI, 1976, para.5). The stitching point of the sacrament argument is the transformation « into the image of Christ. » This must be distinguished from the « image of God. » The philosopher had earlier talked about woman having « a lesser degree » of the deliberative faculty. St. Thomas moved a step higher by arguing that man more fully possesses « the image of God » by the mere fact of priority in creation—for man was not from the woman but woman from the man. The major question we are now asking is this - in what consists the image of God and the image of Christ ? Is this « image » a corporeal quality ? Does the quality of this image depend on the priority in time or in creation of the possessor ? The *locus classicus* of this is found in Genesis 1 :26-27 where God says : « Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. » It is to Maimonides and St. Thomas Aquinas that we turn as we try to understand what is meant by « image and likeness of God » in man created male and female.

Maimonides recognises the equivocal nature of the term « image » which could mean « the shape and the configuration of a thing, » and in certain circumstances, even a body. But the real meaning is :

The natural form, I mean the notion in virtue of which a thing is constituted as a substance and becomes what it is. It is the true reality of the thing in so far as the latter is that particular being. In man that notion is that from which human apprehension derives. (Maimonides, 1963, I:1, p.22).

Here Maimonides describes it as « the natural form of man, » that is the essence of man—that without which man could not be man. Further, he calls it « that from which human apprehension derives. » Thus, instead of a physical form, our mind is turned to an

inner meaning, an incorporeal essence that tells us not only about the nature of man, but also of God. (Maimonides, 1963, I :1, p.23). God must not be conceived corporeally. Maimonides (1963) applies the same approach to « likeness, » which refers to « a likeness in respect of a notion and not with respect to a shape and a configuration » (I :1, p.23). Hence, to say that man is created in the « image and likeness » of God, » does not refer to any corporeal likeness or quality between God and man, but to an incorporeal property in man, his intellectual apprehension, an incorporeality that is the hallmark of the deity. (Anyaegbu, 2015, p.292) Regardless of the later misgivings he may have had against women, Maimonides acknowledges that the « image of God » that is found in man created as male and female, is incorporeal. The logical analysis is that being corporeally male or female could not take away this incorporeal and « divine » quality. Hence if « incorporeality » is what assimilates man to God, then man created as male and female, resembles God. There should be no degree in the resemblance.

It is the same reasoning that is found in St. Thomas Aquinas. In a very brief manner, he confirms that it is « on the basis of his intellectual nature » that man is said to be created in the image of God. (Aquinas, ST, 1, q.93, a.4) Recognizing the male—female polarity of created man, he says that « the image of God is found both in the man and the woman as far as that is concerned in which the concept of the image chiefly consists, namely, the intellectual nature » (ST, 1, q.93, a.4, ad.1). Once it is now determined that what constitutes the image of God is man's intellectual nature that is both shared by the male and female, why, one may ask, is the female nature still excluded from access to the ministerial priesthood? The answer is found in the distinction made of the « image of Christ » where « image » is derobed of its incorporeal nature and imbued with corporeal

According to the explication of the Church's position in the two documents under examination, the « image of Christ » among other things approximates to the physical or corporeal nature of Christ as incarnated in the male sex. This means that whosoever must receive the Sacrament of Orders, must be approximated by what St. Thomas insinuates in both his ST and in his *Commentary on the Sentences* as « natural resemblance, » to the physical resemblance of Christ as male. In the language of *Inter Insigniores* :

The Christian priesthood is therefore of a sacramental nature : the priest is a sign, the supernatural effectiveness of which comes from the ordination received, but a sign that must be perceptible (18) and which the faithful must be able to recognise with ease. The whole sacramental economy is in fact based upon natural signs, on symbols imprinted on the human psychology: “Sacramental signs,” says Saint Thomas, “represent what they signify by natural resemblance.”(19) The same natural resemblance is required for persons as for things: when Christ's role in the Eucharist is to be expressed sacramentally, there would not be this “natural resemblance” which must exist between Christ and his minister if the role of Christ were not taken by a man: in such a case it would be difficult to see in the minister the image of Christ. For Christ himself was and remains a man. (Pope Paul VI, 1976, para.5)

From the intellectual nature resemblance of the « image of God » that does not discriminate between male and female, to the corporeal nature resemblance of the « image of Christ » whose major characteristic is male, the Church justifies her decision to permanently exclude women from the Catholic ministerial priesthood.

There is another way of looking at what constitutes the « image of Christ. » It is by looking at the principal agent of this configuration. While treating the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, St. Thomas Aquinas tells us that whoever would perform an action in another's stead, « must do so by the power bestowed by such a one » (Aquinas, ST, III, q.82, a.1). For the same reason, « the priest bears Christ's image, in whose person and by whose power he pronounces the words of consecration. » (ST, III, q.82, a.1, ad.3) This second way of interpreting sees the « image of Christ » not in the possession of masculinity, but in the conferment of this priestly power received during ordination to pronounce the words of consecration and to teach, sanctify and govern the faithful. Though the « image of Christ » may consist in this power, it must be noted that this power must be conferred on no other but a masculine nature. Otherwise, there will be no « natural resemblance » of what is signified.

The only reservation we may have, if our thinking is correct, is why the efficiency and signification of the Sacrament of Orders should be limited to the corporeal characteristic of masculinity? Could the power of the Sacrament not confer the inward grace of configuration into *persona christi* on the female nature? Aquinas says No, this configuration cannot be on the female nature because since « the female sex » « is in a state of subjection, » she « cannot signify eminence of degree. » The philosophical tradition of female inferiority comes up again as the major reason why women cannot signify some degree of eminence. St. Thomas Aquinas this time gives credence to the Aristotelian foundation of his arguments by distinguishing subjection into two senses—subjection by weakness and subjection by the demands of civility.

As the individual nature, woman is defective and misbegotten, for the active force in the male seed tends to the production of a perfect likeness in the masculine sex; while the production of woman comes from defect in the active force or from some material indisposition (Aquinas, ST, 1a, q.92, a.1, ad.1)

In the second case, woman is subjected by her lack of eminent power of reason to lead and organize.

For good order would have been wanting in the human family if some were not governed by others wiser than themselves. So by such a kind of subjection woman is naturally subject to man, because in man the discretion of reason predominates (Aquinas, ST, 1a, q.92, a.1, ad.2).

It is all these that show male superiority as the bedrock of the arguments for the reservation of the Catholic priesthood to men alone. In that case, there would seem to be no configuration taking place into *persona christi* as the person to be configured is already in the « image of Christ » which is masculine. The implication is that the candidate during

ordination receives on his male nature the « power » to minister in the name of Christ. What this would mean, were this to be correct then, is that the sacramental ordination only confers the power and the authority to minister in *nomen christi*. But this reasoning may actually not be correct since what the Sacrament of Orders does is to confer on this legal and valid candidate that is a man « an office or the power to do something » in *persona christi*, and this power he receives « for the sake of exercising hierarchical duties in the Church » (Aquinas, ST, Suppl., q.34, a.4, ad.4). Restricting the legality of the candidate to the male sex not only bespeaks of a conscientious reservation of the sacrament to a particular group, but also shows the Church's effort to make up for what is lacking in her definition of the matter and form of the Sacrament of Orders. If the matter of the Sacrament of Orders is the « laying on of hands » and the form is the pronouncement of the words of ordination by the minister, then there is room for inclusion since the « laying on of hands » could be done on any qualified human being.

As to the question of justification, there are two sides to it. Given that Christ has given the church the power to rule over it, we can understand why the church decides the template for the admission into the ministerial priesthood. If the church has the power to overstep the « Jewish character » of the chosen twelve, and the « married state » of most of the apostles, she could as well overstep the « natural resemblance » argument just as she made « maleness » an absolute necessity and « celibacy » a fundamental condition for the ministerial priesthood. On the other hand, the challenges of the 21st century and after, make it unjustifiable for the church to continue along her chosen path. As the numbers of male candidates to the priesthood continue to decline in the western world, as they close their doors to the idea of importing candidates and priests from the south, the option of including the female gender is becoming more and more probable for the future of the ministerial priesthood. If that option is jettisoned, then opening the door to married priests and ending celibacy will become impossible to ignore. The challenge for the church is to find the courage to alter or modify the idea of the Angelic Doctor Saint Thomas Aquinas whose works were largely responsible for the defense and the continuation of the tradition.

Conclusion :

In conclusion, the reality is that the Sacrament of Orders belongs to the Church and she alone, decides who to admit, what can change and how to interpret the attitude of Christ who did not confer the apostolic ministry on any woman. As noted by *Inter Insigniores*, the Church's position, « can be truly understood only in this light. » This is fundamentally different from that of the Church of England whose theological rationale for the inclusion of women to the sacred order of the priesthood is based on the possession of the image of God by both sexes. The priests of the Church of England are neither ordained as *alter christi* nor do they act *in persona Christi*, qualities considered as part of the divine constitution of the sacrament and therefore not open to change in the name of inclusivity or gender equality. Any conferment of the priestly duties on a female is considered by the catholic church to be both illegal and invalid because the essential qualification of « natural resemblance » has not been satisfied.

The catholic church has professed her belief in the equal dignity of men and women since both are made in *imago Dei*-in the image of God as revealed in Genesis 1 :2. This equality of the *imago Dei* confers on both sexes dignity and worth before God. Where they differ is in their different vocation and function in the life of the Church. Hence, the catholic church's stand on the male exclusive priesthood is not about gender inequality as misunderstood and misinterpreted by the world in this era of inclusivity, but rather, the expression of theological difference in the understanding of the priesthood.

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