

TITLE

Taking Women off the Cross: Reflections on Power, Male Violence, and Women's Ordination

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ABSTRACT

Herein the essay offers a reflection on the cruciform nature of pastoral ministry and its life-giving implications for the oppressed. In particular, the essay invites us to consider the question of women's ordination in light of the legitimate feminist quest to "break the tradition of male destructive domination of [the woman's] body and soul." The first section utilizes the liberationist paradigm of El Salvadorian theologian Fr. John Sobrino for assessing the historical ways in which oppressive male power has all too often "put women on the cross." The second part examines the self-denying example of the crucified Jesus, and how his cruciform use of power has helped to liberate women. The third section considers St. Paul's pastoral ministry as a continuation of Jesus's cruciform "cross-releasing" mission. The final section concludes with some reflections on how all of the above, combined with the work of the German theologian Susanne Hiene, informs our understanding of Jesus's maleness, the feminist *telos* of male power, and the logic of women's ordination.

“All power...to which we are exposed in our sexual determination...stands under the criticism of [Jesus’s] way of lowliness.”¹

Susanne Heine

“Arguments that have been made for and against women priests have far-reaching presuppositions and implications...Their spiritual and practical consequences may be of much greater importance than the ordination question itself.”²

Nonna Verna Harrison

The “question” of women’s ordination is increasingly no longer a question for many in North America. Happily, women have made strides in nearly all sectors of society—education, entertainment, business, politics, even sports. Why not also the church?

Since the 1960’s, the rise of the modern feminist movement(s) have chastised much of the established patriarchal structures of society. Male hegemony has been broken up in many quarters, and women in the Western world have gained recourse to greater freedoms and privileges than perhaps at any point in human history. Here in the United States, the 2020 election of Kamala Harris underscores the laudable progress that women have made in reaching the highest echelons of influence and prestige. Yet despite these advances, gender diversity within the ecclesial office of presbyter (*priest*, or *pastor*, depending on one’s ecclesiastical

¹ Susanne Heine, *Matriarchs, Goddesses, and Images of God: A Critique of a Feminist Theology* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg, 1989), 141.

² Nonna Verna Harrison, “Orthodox Arguments Against the Ordination of Women as Priests” in Thomas Hopko, ed., *Women and the Priesthood* (Crestwood, New York : St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1999), 165–87.

tradition), has not kept pace.³ While globally, many Protestant churches—consisting of both mainline and evangelical churches—have increasingly moved toward the ordination of women, just as many (perhaps more) remain committed to male-only ordination. The Roman Catholic Church formally closed its intra-church debate on the question of women’s ordination in 1994, deciding in favor of its long-standing tradition of male-only priests.⁴ And the Eastern Orthodox tradition has likewise maintained its traditional stance on male-only ordination.⁵ Given the gains of women in the broader western culture, how are we to understand Christianity’s larger resistance to ordain women as presbyters?

In this essay I offer a reflection on the nature of pastoral ministry—it’s cruciform calling, and the life-giving implications of this cruciform calling for the oppressed and the marginalized, most especially women. In particular, I invite us to consider the question of women’s ordination in light of the legitimate feminist quest to “break the tradition of male destructive domination of [the woman’s] body and soul.”⁶

This essay is divided into four parts. The first section utilizes the liberationist paradigm of El Salvadorian theologian John Sobrino for assessing the historical ways in which oppressive male power has all too often “put women on the cross.” The second part examines the self-denying example of the crucified Jesus, and how—in his power—he went to the cross to release those hanging there—women not least. The third section highlights the example of St. Paul and the earliest presbyters, and considers how pastoral ministry was ordained by Jesus as a

³ For a survey of the ecclesial landscape, see William G. Witt, *Icons of Christ: A Biblical and Systematic Theology for Women’s Ordination* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2020), 3–5.

⁴ The first magisterial intervention on the issues of women’s ordination dates back to 1975, with Pope Paul VI’s response to Donald Cogan, Archbishop of Canterbury, who had informed the Pope by letter that the Anglican Communion no longer had objections to the ordination of women. In his response to Cogan, Paul VI affirmed the Roman Catholic Church’s traditional stance. This position has been consistently upheld to the present day. See Pope John Paul II’s *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, in 1994, as well as Pope Francis’ affirmation that John Paul II has “spoken in a definitive formulation” and stating that the “door is closed” on the issue of women’s ordination. See Christian D. Washburn, “Doctrine, Ecumenical Progress, and Problems with Declaration on the Way: Church, Ministry, and Eucharist,” in *Pro Ecclesia*, Vol XXCI, No. 1, 2017, 68–72.

⁵ For a helpful survey of the Eastern Orthodox response to this issue, see Thomas Hopko, ed., *Women and the Priesthood* (Crestwood, New York : St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1999).

⁶ Heine, *Matriarchs, Goddesses*, 48.

continuation of his cruciform “cross-releasing” mission. And the final section of the essay concludes with some reflections on how all of the above, combined with the work of the German liberal theologian Susanne Hiene, informs our understanding of Jesus’s maleness, the feminist *telos* of male power, and the logic of women’s ordination.

We begin with the historic plight of women, hung upon the cross by a misuse of male power.

I. Putting Women on the Cross

Feminism draws attention to the general hardships of women. But even more so, feminism is concerned with the hardships of women that have been caused by male power. Modern feminist progress notwithstanding, the rapacious nature of male power has not been wholly eradicated. The open misogyny of past generations has, in many cases simply retreated into darker corners and continued to fester. Males—who by nature of their maleness—occupy the cultural positions of power, still too frequently use their power in Nietzschean and totalizing ways. Male bodies oppressing, marginalizing, violating—even killing—female bodies has been the way of the world since time immemorial. Not all men, of course. And women are not saints. But the pages of history are filled with the troubling narrative of women suffering at the hands of men.

The history of men oppressing and marginalizing women is a longer story than can be told here. (And no doubt others are better qualified to tell it.) And yet even a quick look at the book ends of western history—from the Greco-Roman world at the dawn of the first millennium, to the #MeToo movement at the dawn of the third—brings into sharp focus the ongoing abuse of women at the hands of male power.

As is well known, the power structures of the ancient Greco-Roman world were not kind to the weak. It was a world in which justice was only the “advantage of the stronger”⁷ and in which the stronger took as much as their power enabled them to get away with.⁸ Male power

⁷ The nature of justice is debated by Socrates and Glaucon in Plato’s *Republic*. See 2.366d. Glaucon argues that justice is a only a charade, made up by those in positions of power to justify their actions.

⁸ The Greco–Roman conception of power is clearly illustrated in Thucydides’ *Histories*, 5.89, where he records the speech of the imperial Athenians as they invade the small island of Mytilene. “For our part, we will not

toward women was no exception. This can be clearly seen in the way the Greco-Roman culture viewed rape. In the Greco-Roman context, rape was primarily considered a crime against the man to whom the violated woman belonged—her father, husband, or owner. To violate the woman was to violate the property rights of the man.⁹ Thus the sanctity of the female body was derivative, borrowed from the sanctity of her male guardian. An unattached woman was therefore especially vulnerable to rapacious male power. Indeed, the ancient Greeks and Romans did not even have a term for “rape,” insofar as forcing a woman to have sex against her will was not an inherently criminal offense (provided it didn’t infringe on the rights of a male Roman citizen).¹⁰

An examination of ancient mythology offers additional and disturbing insight into the historic plight of women in the Greco-Roman world. Sex in the ancient pagan myths (not unlike the “real” Greco-Roman world) was largely viewed as an assertion of superiority and dominance. To be penetrated was to be subservient, subject to another’s power.¹¹ In pagan myths, human women frequently engaged in sex (wanted or unwanted) with the gods, yet escaped unscathed;

make a long speech no one would believe....that we are coming against you for an injustice you have done to us....Instead, let us work out what we can do on the basis of what both sides truly accept: we both know that decisions about justice are made in human discussions only when both sides are under equal compulsion; but when one side is stronger, it gets as much as it can, and the weak must accept that.” Quote taken from Thucydides, *On Justice, Power, and Human Nature*, trans. Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Publishing, 1993), 103. The time period is over 300 years prior to the Roman empire, but the concept of power is the same all throughout the Greco–Roman era.

⁹ Yet not even “belonging” to a man guaranteed a woman’s safety from an even more powerful man. The Roman historian Cassius Dio recounts the rapacious atrocities of the Roman emperor Nero—who was the ultimate expression of male power in the Greco–Roman world. Nero and his imperial cronies acted without restraint, taking any women they chose, ignoring even the “property laws” that regulated Roman culture. See Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, 62.15.5. When one is the emperor, one need respect no power but one’s own.

¹⁰ Nghiem L. Nguyen, “Roman Rape: An Overview of Roman Rape Laws from the Republican Period to Justinian’s Reign,” in *Michigan Journal of Gender & Law*, vol. 13.1 (2006), 74, 80.

¹¹ This same logic explains Roman views on homosexuality. Homosexual “relationships” did not typically involved mutual penetration. There was no shame in being a dominant male who penetrated another male; the shame of homosexuality was born by the penetrated and socially inferior male (slave, young boy) who had no legal recourse to prevent the sexual act. See Sarah Ruden, *Paul Among the People: The Apostle Reinterpreted and Reimagined in his Own Time* (New York: Image Books, 2010), 45–71.

the proper “order” of power had been observed—the greater god had penetrated the lesser human. But when human men engaged in sex with goddesses, the normative sexual power structure became inverted; the greater had been penetrated by the lesser. As a consequence, the goddesses often destroyed their human lovers as a way of reasserting the proper order of power between goddesses and mortals.¹² All of this left real Greco-Roman women in a perpetually vulnerable position. They were not goddess and could not destroy those who penetrated them. Even in the marriage relationship, Greco-Roman women were always the penetrated, the powerless.

Violence against the female body did not disappear with the passing of the Greco-Roman world. Like their Greek and Roman sisters from long ago, women today are still too often the victims of male violence. The #MeToo movement has recently drawn attention to the continuing problem. Men in positions of power—especially those in the entertainment industry—have often used their power to take sexual advantage of the women who worked for them. Though much justice has been properly served in the wake of #MeToo, the dark shadows cast by the likes of Harvey Weinstein, Bill Cosby, and Robert Kelley (to name only a few) still haunt the cultural landscape. Historian Tom Holland’s comment about oppressive male sexual power in the Greco-Roman world still rings true today: “The freedom to [force another to have sex] when and as one liked tended to be, in antiquity, the perk of a very exclusive sub-section of society—powerful men.”¹³ Violence against women has ebbed and flowed throughout history—sometimes less, sometimes more.¹⁴ Perhaps we have not come as far from the Greeks and the Romans as we might have hoped.

¹² For example, note the sexual encounter between the goddess Venus and the human Anchises, who became terrified when he realized he had unknowingly slept with a goddess. See the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, 180–90. See also Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, 3.131ff, wherein the goddess Diana turns the mortal man Acteon into a stag and sets his own hunting dogs upon him. The “ever-virgin” Greek goddesses Athena (goddess of battle) and Artemis (goddess of the hunt) are both goddesses of power and dominance; thus they are never “subjected” to sexual relations with mortals or even the other male gods.

¹³ Tom Holland, *Dominion: The Making of the Modern World* (London, England : Little Brown, 2018), 511.

¹⁴ The precarious position of women becomes especially (and painfully) evident during times of war. During World War 2, German and Polish women were victims of mass sexual assault at the hands of the Soviet troops. The numbers are staggering. By the end of the war, historians estimate that two million German women and

The work of the Spanish liberationist theologian Fr. John Sobrino is insightful here. Sabrino is a Jesuit priest and theologian in El Salvador. He has spent his life ministering to the poor, the marginalized, the oppressed. Sobrino knows firsthand the advantages of the affluent western world. (He grew up in Spain, and then studied in America and Germany.) But upon his arrival to El Salvador as a young priest, he was confronted with a level of poverty he had never before experienced. In a poignant statement he writes, “The first thing we discovered in El Salvador was that this world is one giant cross for millions of innocent people who die at the hands of executioners.”¹⁵ Sobrino goes on to refer to the marginalized people of Latin America (and indeed the marginalized people of the world) as an “entire crucified people”—victims of the First World’s greater military and economic power. From a historical perspective, “the cause of sufferings in the Third World are, to a great extent, to be found in the First World.”¹⁶ The First World, concerned primarily for its self and its own advantages, has turned a blind eye—indeed often exploited—the vulnerabilities of the third world.

Sobrino’s paradigm helps us think about power in gender relations. Looking back over the broad sweep of human history, it is not difficult to conceive of women (when considered in relation to men) as an “entire crucified people.” In the ancient world, the Roman cross was the fate of the marginalized, the shamed, the oppressed. Metaphorically considered, women have been put on the cross by male tyranny. Men, primarily occupied with their own advantage, have all too often turned a blind eye—indeed even exploited—the vulnerabilities of women.

The experiences of women are not individually the same, of course. Many women, especially those in First World countries, do not live with a daily sense of being oppressed by men. They do not bitterly lament their lot in life, and their political, communal, and familial contexts would not be fairly characterized as “crosses.” Yet even in our egalitarian, twenty-first century western society, the simple and hard fact is that women are more vulnerable than men,

girls had been sexually assaulted by Soviet troops. See “Silence Broken on Red Army Rapes in Germany,” N.P., <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=106687768>, accessed on November 5, 2015. See also Antony Beevor, *The Fall of Berlin: 1945* (USA : Penguin Books, 2002), 59–63. When men plunge whole societies into the chaos of war, the guardrails that protect women and govern male restraint are destroyed.

¹⁵ John Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 4.

¹⁶ Sobrino, *Principle of Mercy*, 29.

and that men too often take advantage of this vulnerability. My wife cannot walk down the main street of our town at midnight with the same freedom and security that I can. My daughter cannot get into a car with a young man with the same freedom and security that my son can. Women, when considered in relation to men, continue to suffer disproportionately in the workplace, the home, and the public sphere. Male power, considered in broad historical perspective, has too often put women on the cross. In a strictly Darwinian world, where “nature is red in tooth and claw,” the male violence waged against the female body is consistent with the ancient Roman maxim that power only serves the desires of the powerful.

And yet into this strictly Darwinian world—a world which is “one giant cross” for (too) many women—the Son of God has come. Going to the cross, he has taught—and continues to teach—us how to free the ones who have been hung there.

II. Putting Jesus on the Cross

Jesus was no stranger to violence. Very little is known of his developing years, beyond the fact he grew up in an obscure working class Jewish village. And when he did make his appearance on the public stage, worldly prestige did not appear with him. His message was controversial, his associations lowly, his prestige suspect. His entire life was an embodiment of his teachings of “death to self,” “choosing the narrow way,” and “the last shall be first.” And at the pinnacle of his life, at the height of his physical and spiritual powers, he suffered a horrible and shameful death—even an unjust death upon a Roman cross.

In the earliest days of the church, Jesus’s disciples were forced to grapple with the meaning of this unexpected event. The Messiah, they had believed, was supposed to come and take God’s people off of Roman crosses, not end up there himself. How was the shameful crucifixion of Jesus to be understood? Generations of theologians have grappled with the same question. Albert Schweitzer, the famous twentieth-century German liberal theologian viewed Jesus as a mistaken messiah. In some of his most memorable lines, Schweitzer wrote,

There is silence all around. The Baptist appears, and cries: “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” Soon after that comes Jesus, and in the

knowledge that He is the coming Son of Man lays hold of the wheel of the world to set it moving on that last revolution which is to bring all ordinary history to a close. It refuses to turn, and He throws Himself upon it. Then it does turn; and crushes Him. Instead of bringing in the eschatological conditions, He has destroyed them. The wheel rolls onward, and the mangled body of the one immeasurably great Man, who was strong enough to think of Himself as the spiritual ruler of mankind and to bend history to His purpose, is hanging upon it still. That is His victory and His reign.¹⁷

According to Schweitzer, Jesus's "mangled body" was crushed beneath the draconian powers of human history. Penetrated by Roman pins and spear, he reached for the golden apple of messianic glory and fell short. He ended his life publically shamed as powerless and impotent.

Except he wasn't impotent. Jesus's disciples knew something about the crucifixion that Schweitzer didn't. Jesus had risen. However one understands the Messiah on a cross, it meant more than defeat. Christianity does not tell the story of an impotent Jesus, a sad martyr—a mere victim of imperial power. He was crucified, to be sure. But his crucifixion was not a statement of his weakness, but of his power. The remarkable and unexpected message of Christianity is that God allowed himself to be bested by his own creation—by rebellious crowds, by a petulant empire, by hypocritical religious leaders. In love, he joined the crucified peoples of the world upon the cross; and in so doing, he set free those who were hanging there.

The church fathers tell the story this way:¹⁸ in the beginning, humanity had been created prone to decay—like the rest of the finite creation. But God, in his gracious kindness, uniquely created humanity with a share in the *imago Dei*—the image of God. Clothed in the *imago Dei*, humanity was stayed from creation's innate proclivity to decay. But alas, humanity desired autonomy and independence. Seduced by the Devil's lies, humanity discarded the *imago Dei* like an unwanted cloak. The result was not life and liberation, but corruption and slavery. Humanity

¹⁷ Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, trans. W. Montgomery (Great Britain: A. & C. Black, Ltd, 1910), 370–71.

¹⁸ The following soteriological sketch is drawn primarily from St. Irenaeus (the second-century bishop of Lyons and the church's first theologian), as well as St. Athanasius (the intrepid third-century bishop of Alexandria and the faithful defender of Nicene Christology).

fell under the yoke of the dark lord. Doomed to live forever in corruption and subject to tyranny, the divine sentence was passed—death. Human beings were cast out from God’s presence and condemned to return to the dust from whence they had come. Alone in the dark, bereft of God’s provision, humanity began to claw at each other in a desperate quest for salvation. Fear led to sin, which led to violence, which led to more fear and sin and violence. The powerful tyrannized over the weak. Crosses were erected, and the weak were hung upon them.

And yet amidst the chaos and carnage of the world, the grace of God did not wholly abandon humanity. Taking matters into his own hands, the Word of God, the divine Son, robed himself in the (now broken) human body he himself had made. Cloaked in the *imago hominis*—the image of humanity—the Son willfully and freely joined humanity upon the cross. The Devil’s power of oppression—death—was released upon him. Yet in an unexpected twist, Jesus absorbed the Devil’s power and turned the power of death back upon itself.¹⁹ Death, the great weapon of the Adversary that had been used to tyrannize over humanity, was deployed against humanity’s sin and brokenness. Jesus climbed upon the cross and “offered his body on behalf of all”²⁰ in order to release those who were hanging there. Through the crushing of his body beneath the wheel of oppressive history, through the penetrating of his body on the shameful cross, death was put to death and the *imago hominis* was once again reunited with the *imago Dei*.²¹

Jesus’s work of releasing the crucified people from the cross established a pattern—a moral sensibility—that recalibrated the world’s understanding of power. Power was to be used in service of the other—most especially the powerless and the oppressed and the marginalized.

¹⁹ “He endured the insolence of men that we might inherit immortality,” Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 54. All subsequent Athanasius quotes taken from Edward Hardy, ed., *The Christology of the Later Fathers* (Louisville, Ken.: Westminster John Knox).

²⁰ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 31.

²¹ “The Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who did, through His transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself.” St. Irenaeus. *Adv. Har. 5*: Preface. Taken from *ANF* vol. 1, 526. So too the same sentiment in St. Athanasius, “For he was humanized that we might be deified,” *On the Incarnation*, 54. St. Maximus likewise presses this same general framework when he notes how Jesus lowered himself *in order to* “assimilate humanity to himself and elevate us to a position above the heavens,” Maximus, *Ad Thal. 22*. A host of other passages could be cited from St. Gregory, St. Augustine, and on into the reformation with Calvin and Luther.

Through the voluntary breaking of his body Jesus had ushered in a new age in which the true use of power could finally be seen—not the old Roman use of power to put vulnerable bodies upon crosses, penetrated and shamed—but the new divine use of power to put *one's own body on the cross in the place of oppressed bodies, and so free the oppressed bodies from the cross.*²² Power in service of love, for the sake of the vulnerable and marginalized. That was the way of Jesus. When he could have asserted himself he lowered himself. When he could have lorded it over all, he went up onto the cross to bring us down.

Historian Tom Holland, himself not a Christian, has argued persuasively in his *Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind*, that Jesus's death was the thread that began to unravel the sweater of oppressive Roman power. Like a depth charge dropped beneath the turbulent surface of Rome's tyrannical sea, the cross of Jesus pacified and overturned—if not in practice, then at least in ideal—the ancient assumptions of the powerful. In the ancient Greco-Roman world, power was used openly and without apology in service of self. It was socially acceptable for men to tyrannize over women, parents over children, masters over slaves, patricians over plebeians, the rich over the poor—in sum, the strong over the weak. And yet today, such open uses of draconian power are no longer socially acceptable. The tyranny of the strong still happens, to be sure. But the strong must mask their tyranny and oppression—hide it behind closed doors, lie about it, recast it in a benign light. No longer can politicians such as Caesar—who openly started a war and killed nearly a million provincials of Gaul in order to advance his political career (and enslaved nearly a million more)—be elected and hailed as a hero on the basis of such actions.

Holland walks his reader through more than two thousand years of western history—from Athens in the fifth century B.C. to the present day. Throughout his work Holland attempts to answer a singular question: how did we get from there to here? How did the Roman world in which power was the rightful preserve of the powerful, to be used in service of self as much as one had the power to get away with, become the modern western world of classical liberalism, in which every human being has dignity, and in which power is to be used (in principle, even if not in practice) to protect the weak and vulnerable and oppressed? Holland's answer—unexpected

²² “Now everything gets turned around. What was above is below; what was below is raised up.” Heine, *Matriarchs, Goddesses*, 138.

for one of his liberal orientation (unexpected even to himself, he admits)—is Jesus on the cross. Christianity, Holland writes, began a “revolution that has, at its molten heart, the image of a god dead on the cross.”²³

Only because of Jesus on the cross, Holland argues, has victimhood come to be seen as something that must be respected and, where possible, rectified. So successful was Jesus’s cruciform vision of power, that in our day, the “victim card”—a card which had absolutely no currency in the Greco-Roman world—has become the ultimate trump card. The old Greco-Roman order “rooted in the assumption that any man in a position of power had the right to exploit his inferior...had ended. [St] Paul’s instance that the body of every human being was a holy vessel had triumphed.”²⁴ The brokenness of Jesus’s body on behalf of the victimized had paved the way for the marginalized and the oppressed to be treated with dignity and honor. And women, despite the ongoing problem of male violence, have been the beneficiaries.

In his final chapter, Holland applies his central thesis to gender. With profound analysis, Holland show how the #MeToo movement was funded by Christian assumptions about power, sexuality, and human dignity. In an ancient Roman world where it was socially permissible for men to do as they pleased without respect for the dignity of women, Jesus (and then St. Paul) insisted that male power must be deployed in service of women. Women, just as much as men, were co-heirs of the kingdom of God. Female sexuality was to be honored, not exploited. The #MeToo movement succeeded, Holland argues, precisely because Jesus had invested the plight of female victims with the gravest moral authority. Jesus’s willingness to go to the cross on behalf of victimized women unleashed an unstoppable wave of cruciform power that has been steadily taking women down from crosses ever since. “Two thousand years of Christian sexual

²³ Holland, *Dominion*, 525. See his entire book for his careful and compelling account of how Christianity has overturned the Greco–Roman conceptions of power that so governed the ancient western world. Holland does not naively insist that contemporary western culture always *embraces* a Christian use of power; much that we see today runs contrary to Jesus’ vision of power. But he rightly points out that western culture universally embraces Jesus’ *ideal* of power—namely, that power is to be deployed in service of the weak and vulnerable. Or again, that power should be used to take the vulnerable off of crosses, rather than used to put them there.

²⁴ Holland, *Dominion*, 263.

morality had resulted in men as well as women widely taking [the sanctity of the female body] for granted. Had it not, then #MeToo would have had no force.”²⁵

The Christian faith, while not blind to the very real ravages of crimson teeth and bloody claws, has spoken a word of divine hope to the powerless and the oppressed—women not least. All is not as it should be; but neither is all as it was. Christianity is the story of power willingly spent on behalf of the vulnerable; strength deployed to protect the weak. It is the story of the strong choosing to play the victim on behalf of the oppressed, to spare them from ignominy and shame. The story is not yet complete, but the decisive blow has landed. Through the broken body of God’s only Son, the sacrificial love and presence of God has become manifest in the world. The Son became crucified so that the crucified people of the world could be taken down from the cross. This is the great reversal that Jesus brought to women (and men).

But more needs to be said. Despite the general success of #MeToo, crucified people—indeed women—still too often remain on crosses. Heaven is not without an answer. Jesus has called forth his presbyters as little “christs” to continue his pattern of suffering on behalf of the oppressed and marginalized.

III. Putting the Presbyter on the Cross

Jesus’s cruciform act was not a solo, one-time event. Even as Jesus ascended to heaven, crucified people still remained on crosses. Women, children, slaves, the poor, the sick. So Jesus called his disciples to go and do as he had done—to join such as these upon the crosses of the world, to identify with them in their suffering and pain, and then to take their place and release

²⁵ Holland *Dominion*, 515. There is much to say on this point. Contrary to the assumptions of many, the #MeToo movement was not a product of the Enlightenment, nor was it fixing a problem created by Christian patriarchy. Holland argues persuasively that Christianity was the generative power that funded the persuasiveness of the #MeToo movement. Only because Jesus’ cruciform vision of power and St. Paul’s vision of sexual chastity had triumphed over the old Greco–Roman norms, was the #MeToo movement able to succeed. Holland makes the same basic argument with respect to the Civil Rights movement. See *Dominion*, 499–525. Social historian Rodney Stark argues along the same basic lines in his *The Triumph of Christianity: How the Jesus Movement Became the World’s Largest Religion* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011). See especially all of chapter seven for Stark’s analysis of how Christianity changed things for the better for women (121–36). See also Ruden, *Paul*, 72–118.

them—as much as was within their power—from the crosses upon which they had been unjustly hung. Sobrino’s liberation theology is again helpful here. Christian theology, and thus Christian mission, Sobrino insists, must see itself as an “exercise whose primary purpose is to eliminate this kind of suffering. Briefly stated, suffering in today’s world means primarily the suffering of the people who are being crucified, and the purpose of theology [and Christian mission] is to take these people down from the cross.”²⁶

True enough, Jesus’s disciples could not atone for humanity’s cosmic and primordial sin—not in the way Jesus had done. But they could (must!) become little “christs”—who emulated the cruciform pattern of their Lord—the strong sacrificing for the weak, the powerful sacrificing for the oppressed. Through their cruciform calling on behalf of the weak and marginalized, Jesus’s followers would preach by their example the life giving message of Jesus’s ultimate sacrifice. Through cross-bearing, they would recapitulate Jesus’s cruciform example and portend of the day when Jesus would come again, at the last, to fully and finally release all of his people from their crosses of oppression and injustice. So Jesus’s disciples were charged, and so they did.

Jesus’s cruciform example became the mandate for all of his followers—great and small, rich and poor. Everyone with strength was to use their strength for those with less. But the call to cruciformity was most especially the domain and responsibility of church’s first presbyters. There, within the leadership of the church, Christ’s cruciform example and vision of power had to be most visible, most potent, most vital. The draconian power structures of the Greco-Roman world had to be overturned; and they could only be overturned when a new vision of power arose to supplant it. And so Jesus set up his church to carry on his cruciform vision. As such, the presbyters of the church were not defanged, stripped of their power. Instead, they were placed in the power-position of Jesus himself. And then they were called to suffer.

Just like Christ suffered on behalf of the weak and oppressed, the *vicarii*²⁷ of Christ were likewise called to suffer in his name on behalf of the weak and oppressed. Not merely for the sake of the church, but for the sake of the church’s witness in the world. The entire world needed to learn of Christ’s cruciform vision of power, wherein the powerful sacrificed themselves for

²⁶ Sobrino, *Principle of Mercy*, 29.

²⁷ From the Latin *vicarius*, meaning “vicar, representative, deputy, substitute.”

the weak. And the presbyters—as the church’s leaders—were uniquely charged with proclaiming and embodying this vision.

Perhaps no other presbyterial example so “extended the story of the cruciform love of Christ” like that of St. Paul.²⁸ Michael Gorman, who has written widely and deeply on Paul’s theological and pastoral framework, has argued persuasively that cruciformity lies at the center of Paul’s thought. It is Paul’s “master story.”²⁹ Paul’s cruciform vision of pastoral ministry is radically different than what one sees in the pagan world of his day (and ours).³⁰ In the pagan world, leadership brought prestige, honor, and wealth. But Paul’s cruciform vision of leadership stands in opposition to all such notions. Ecclesial leadership is not about worldly power, but about death. It is for those who, like Jesus, “have been sentenced to death” so that others might live (1 Cor 4:9–10).³¹

Paul’s cruciform vision of the presbyter is woven all throughout his writings, but is especially noteworthy in his Corinthian correspondence.³² In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul offers an ironic and culturally counter-intuitive defense of his apostolic ministry. He writes,

²⁸ Michael Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul’s Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001), 178. Gorman’s work is the seminal work on Paul’s cruciform vision of pastoral ministry. In particular see 178–213. See also Michael Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul’s Narrative Soteriology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009). For more on Paul’s cruciformity, see Todd Wilson, “The Pastor Theologian as Cruciform Theologian” in Gerald Hiestand and Todd Wilson, *Becoming a Pastor Theologian: New Possibilities for Church Leadership* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2016), 69–77; as well as Scott McKnight, *Pastor Paul: Nurturing a Culture of Christoforimity in the Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2019), 1–30, 147–68.

²⁹ Gorman, *Inhabiting*, 12.

³⁰ To be sure, Paul—like the original twelve disciples—was a traveling apostle, not a local presbyter. And yet the ministry of Paul and the twelve was essentially “presbyterial.” Note that in 1 Cor 4:17, Paul connects his apostolic ministry to Timothy’s pastoral ministry. Timothy, through the example of his life, was to remind the Corinthians of Paul’s cruciform way of life, which was itself an extension of Jesus’ cruciform life. The apostles saw themselves as the vital link between Christ and the local presbyters. See McKnight, *Pastor Paul*, for a book length treatment on the “presbyterial” nature of Paul’s apostolic ministry.

³¹ All biblical quotations are taken from the English Standard Version.

³² See McKnight, *Pastor Paul*, 147–68, for Paul’s cruciform response to the Corinthians’ criticism of his ministry.

For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things (1 Cor 4:9–13).

A number of expressions stand out. Paul insists that he (and the other ministers of the gospel) are “sentenced to death,” “spectacles,” “fools,” “weak,” “poorly dressed,” “buffeted,” “homeless,” “reviled,” “persecuted,” “slandered,” “scum,” and “refuse.” This is not an especially gratifying list for those interested in worldly glory. And lest we imagine that Paul was merely having a bad week, it hadn’t gotten any better by the time he penned his second letter to the Corinthians. Writing again in defense of his apostolic ministry, Paul notes his “labors,” his “dangers,” his “imprisonments,” his “countless beatings,” the times he was “often near death,” his “three shipwrecks,” and beyond.³³ In keeping with Jesus’s cruciform vision of leadership, Paul insists that the genuine marks of pastoral leadership are not crowns, but crosses.³⁴ What more proof of his apostolic ministry was needed?

Paul’s vision of pastoral ministry is not masochistic; he sees no value in suffering for suffering’s sake. In Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians he assures the Corinthians that his sufferings and hardships are for their sake. He writes,

For we [ministers of the gospel] who live are always being given over to death for Jesus’s sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. *So death is at work in us, but life in you.* Since we have the same spirit of faith

³³ See all of 2 Cor 11:16–33 for Paul’s full list of “toil and hardship.” Elsewhere Paul goes on to say that as a minister of the gospel, he “fills up in his flesh what is yet lacking in Christ’s afflictions” (Col 1:24). And to the church in Galatia he points to his scars as proof of his Christ-like authority in their lives (Gal 6:17).

³⁴ See Gorman’s helpful analysis of the parallels between Jesus’ cruciformity in Phil 2:6–8, and Paul’s cruciformity in 1 Thess 2:5–12. Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 192–95. Likewise, McKnight, *Pastor Paul*, 158–59.

according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. *For it is all for your sake*, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God (1 Cor 4:11–15, emphasis added).

Suffering is always in service of love. Like Jesus before him, Paul's life is poured out as a "drink offering" to God on behalf of those he was called to serve (2 Tim 4:6). Like Paul, all of the church's first presbyters, save John, were martyred. And John died in exile. Their lives were poured out like drink offerings on behalf of the weak and the marginalized. Cruciform, indeed.

And now at last we arrive at our question of women's ordination. In what way, if any, does Jesus's cruciform example, and the extension of this example through the cruciform calling of the presbyters, inform our understanding of women's ordination? Is Christianity's stance on male-only ordination a holdover from the misogynistic power structures of the Greco-Roman world—unwanted barnacles not yet fully scrubbed? Or is it, in a surprising and counter-intuitive way, the key signpost—the lynchpin—that Jesus has given to the world to help us hold at bay the misogynistic tendencies so latent within the male psyche? For the answer, we look to Professor Susanne Heine.

IV. Taking Women off the Cross

Susanne Heine is Professor for Practical Theology and Psychology of Religion at the University of Vienna. She is, by all accounts, everything one expects a German university scholar of religion to be—progressively minded, sympathetic to German higher criticism, critical of the Pauline tradition (Paul didn't write the pastoral epistles), and critical of the church's historic stance against women's ordination.³⁵ Though Heine is critical of feminist scholarship, she is quite sympathetic to the feminist agenda in which she "senses an experience of suffering, a

³⁵ Heine, *Women and Early Christianity*, 46. "The struggle of women for ordination in Protestant churches has only achieved its aim in very recent years, while in the Roman Catholic sister church resignation and perplexity are widespread."

hatred that can be sympathized with, and an understandable longing for another world which is better for women than our own.”³⁶

In a short sermon, “Jesa Christa, or the Critique of the Ideal” Heine considers the value of a hypothetical female messiah—“Jesa the Daughter of God” over and against the historical “Jesus the Son of God.”³⁷ Wouldn’t a female Christ rather than a male Christ, Hein wonders, have given more dignity to women in the midst of their crucified oppression? Heine’s answer is, surprisingly, no. Despite Heine’s sympathy with the feminist cause, she argues that Jesus’s maleness was exactly what women needed.

On the way to making her point about the feminist advantages of Jesus’s maleness, Heine insightfully reimagines a wilderness temptation in which Jesa Christa, rather than Jesus Christ, is tempted by the devil to wield her power in service of self. Heine’s reimagined portrayal is worth quoting at length. In response to the devil’s temptations, Jesa Christa says,

No, I do not want to live at any price. [The devil responds] You are right, you too should not live at any price but perish in the fulfilment of your motherhood.

Jesa Christa says:

No, God’s power cannot be hired out, as kings and princes may believe. [The devil responds] You are right, you should not become either king nor priest, that is reserved for males.

Jesa Christa says:

No, ruling is not God’s business, but serving. [The devil responds] You are right, it is for you to serve and not to rule.

³⁶ Heine, *Matriarchs, Goddesses*, 80. While Heine is a friend of the feminist agenda, she is no friend of feminist scholarship. See for example how she takes Elaine Pagels to task for her feminist reinterpretation of Gnosticism (*Women and Early Christianity*, 106–23), as well as the subtitle of *Matriarchs, Goddess and Images of God—A Critique of Feminist Theology*. For Heine—herself an able scholar—shoddy feminist scholarship only undermines the feminist cause. In Heine’s estimation, most feminist scholarship is shoddy.

³⁷ The following is drawn from Hein’s sermon, “Jesa Christa, or a Critique of the Ideal” found in *Matriarchs, Goddesses*, 137–45.

The devil would soon agree with these answers from the mouth of a woman. The rejection of such temptations would be impossible for a woman because what she could chose instead of the devil's offer would be [what is already] attributed to her: serving, renouncing, perishing.³⁸

...It is not insignificant that a man opposed the seductions of power.³⁹

For Heine, Jesus's greater power as a divine *man* is precisely what made his sacrifice of power so potent. When he could have used his power to save himself from humiliation, he chose instead to go to the cross on behalf of the humiliated. In contrast, Jesa's voluntary refusal of power would have taught men nothing about the proper use of power.

A woman could not represent the humiliated because she herself is already where these people are. Representation involves the voluntary renunciation of power and privileges. It makes a difference whether we are already with others in the same boat or whether we voluntarily get into the boat out of love. Therefore, God who does not sit with us in the boat, comes to us in the boat. The one who could have kept away, journeys with us and becomes our companion.⁴⁰

A crucified Jesa would have only furthered the marginalization of women. Men, who occupied the power position in Greco-Roman culture, needed to see *power* crucified, not *weakness* crucified. A woman being crucified for the sake of men would have been only an occasion to shrug. What else can a woman be except crucified? But Jesus's sacrificial use of power arrested the attention of powerful men and taught the male world a new use of power. And for that very reason, Heine insists, it was necessary that the Word of God became incarnate as a man, not a woman. "Jesus the man turns things upside down. Jesa the woman would have always

³⁸ Heine, *Matriarchs, Goddesses*, 139–40. The English translation of the German awkwardly reads, 'always what is attributed to her.'

³⁹ Heine, *Matriarchs, Goddesses*, 140.

⁴⁰ Heine, *Matriarchs, Goddesses*, 140.

been at the bottom.”⁴¹ For Heine, Jesus’s maleness serves as a fixed signpost—fashioned in the shape of a cross—that power exists for love.⁴²

It is here, I believe, that Heine’s counterintuitive insight about the feminist advantages of Jesus’s maleness provides an equally counterintuitive insight about the feminist advantages of male-ordination. If Holland is correct that Jesus’s cruciformity has been instrumental in unmasking the tyrannical powers of the Greco-Roman world, and if St. Paul is correct that Jesus’s vicars have been appointed by Jesus to carry on his example of cruciformity, and if Heine is correct that the effectiveness of Jesus’s cruciformity was sourced in his maleness, then it makes sense that the presbyter’s maleness is not an inconsequential aspect of the presbyter’s identity.

Men, more so than women, need to see an arresting example of cruciformity. Cruciform female clergy do not dismantle the pernicious male hegemony so naturally latent within the world. Jesa the cruciform presbyter, just as much as Jesa the cruciform Christ, proclaims nothing more to men than they already expect to see—the suffering and crucifixion of the oppressed. Jesus does not appoint women as presbyters to suffer for the sake of men, because women already suffer too often for the sake of men in everyday life—and often against their will. That is the reality that Jesus is looking to overthrow. But the cruciform male presbyter, like the cruciform male messiah, arrests the attention of the male world and serves as an extension of the fixed signpost raised by Jesus—that power exists for the sake of the other—especially the oppressed and the marginalized.

⁴¹ Heine, *Matriarchs, Goddesses*, 141.

⁴² Heine uses the same logic to affirm the feminist advantages of a Heavenly Father, over and against a Heavenly Mother. “I take no offense at the father God because he is an invitation to our fathers to be perfect, and stands over against all fathers who lay claim to godlike authority. A mother God would be the same standard for mothers; but I think that fathers still need it more.” Heine, *Matriarchs, Goddesses*, 38. Heine is right. Men do need it more. Men are not only more prone to abuse their power, they have more power to abuse. William Witt utilizes the same logic. “In designating God as Father, Jesus also undermined traditional patriarchal understanding of what it means to be a father. Fatherhood is not be defined by the expected actions of typical fathers, but by the character of the God whom Jesus called Father.” See his *Icons of Christ*, 84–85.

1. *Yes, but why male only?*

Here I anticipate a “Yes, but.” One may grant the necessity of male cruciformity for the sake of women; and one may even grant the “sign-post” function of male-cruciformity within the presbyter’s office. But why should these truths limit the office of the presbyter to men? Doesn’t it make sense to have both male *and* female cruciformity equally represented in the presbyter’s office? After all, women are called to be cruciform, too. But here we draw again upon Heine’s central insight about gender and power: male cruciformity, not female cruciformity, is the key to female flourishing. For Heine, the liberation of women does not depend upon *women* learning cruciformity, but upon *men* learning cruciformity—for it is male power that oppresses and tyrannizes over women—not the reverse.

Somehow, males must be taught that they—even more so than women—are uniquely called to “cruciform” their power. It will not suffice for males to view cruciformity as a calling that applies equally to all humans beings (however true this may be); men have the stronger arms, and their swing of the cultural sledge breaks the bigger cultural rocks. Thus men especially must be taught that they have a unique and non-transferable role to play in the world with respect to the flourishing of women.⁴³ Insofar as Jesus’s cruciformity is carried forward in the life of the presbyter, Jesus’s appointment of only male presbyters underscores the unique contribution that male power is called upon to make in the cause of women’s liberation (and the liberation of all those who are oppressed).

Given the cruciform nature of the presbyter’s calling—wherein the strong sacrifice for the marginalized and oppressed—the inclusion of women within the priesthood mutes the priesthood’s message of male-cruciformity on behalf of women. Male and female presbyters serving side by side equalizes the call to cruciformity between men and women, when in fact the burden of cruciformity must fall heaviest on men. Ironically, women’s ordination (however well intended) subverts Jesus’s model of male cruciform power on behalf of women, and instead asks

⁴³ Women too, of course, have a unique and non-transferable role to play in the world with respect to men. But the one in the weak position does not enable the flourishing of the one in the strong position in the same way as the reverse. See my brief reflections on this in section VI. C below, which draws upon the work of Alexander Schmemmann, *For the life of the World* (Yonkers, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2018), 99–114.

women to be cruciform on behalf of men. The unique feminist import of male cruciformity is lost.

The Christian impulse that animates women's ordination is right and good. But women's ordination is an example of "*des idées chrétiennes devenues folles*"—it is a Christian idea gone senseless.⁴⁴ An all-male cruciform priesthood emphasizes the need for male cruciformity and thus rewrites the script of male tyrannical power. But women's ordination weakens the very branch upon which the feminist project hangs. As such, I fear that even the best instances of women's ordination do not serve well the overall cause of women, when considered in the long run. Thus male-only ordination is not an unfortunate left-over from Christianity's Greco-Roman past, but is an extension of Jesus's potent, culture transforming pattern of male cruciformity. Male ordination—insofar as it is an extension of Jesus's male cruciformity—is the feminist key that has been so instrumental to the liberation of women in the Christianized world.

This does not mean that the church has a pristine track record on gender. Lest we over-realize our eschatology, the priestly sex scandals that hit the Roman Catholic Church in the early 2000's, and the more recent falls of Protestant evangelical celebrity clergy like Bill Hybels and Carl Lentz, as well as the scandal of evangelist Ravi Zacharias, are painful reminders that not even the church has entirely shed the world's draconian notions of power and sexual predation. *Kyrie, eleison*. We Christians still have reason to be ashamed.⁴⁵ But despite the failures of some presbyters, the church is full of many faithful, cruciform presbyters who daily take up their crosses and follow Jesus to Calvary. Their names do not make the headlines; and yet their steady and humble cruciformity has been slowly changing the world for all of the oppressed and marginalized. Whatever progress has been made by men on behalf of women has occurred not in spite of male ordination, but because of it—since it is in male ordination that Christ's male cruciformity lives on in the church, and thus in the world.

⁴⁴ The expression is from Alexander Schmemmann's, *The Liturgy of Death* (Yonkers, New York: St. Vladimir's Press, 2016), 36.

⁴⁵ #ChurchToo, which started in the wake of #MeToo, is a clear indicator that much work yet remains to be done.

2. *Playing the Long game*

I anticipate a second “Yes, but.” Given the relatively pacific nature of contemporary western culture, is the sign-post of male-cruciformity within the presbyter’s office really still necessary—especially since an all-male priesthood eliminates a key leadership opportunity in the local church for women who have strong leadership and shepherding gifts? This is an important question.

Here one’s confidence in the long range wisdom of the catholic tradition is put to the test. Holland charts a history of Christian liberation and redemption for women that spans two millennia. Pagan Rome was not Christianized in a day, and it will not be un-Christianized in a day. My argument is not that single instances (or even many instances) of female clergy will have a negative effect on Christ’s message of male cruciformity. Insofar as male clergy functions as a sign-post of cruciformity, the removal of a few signposts does not signal an immediate or complete severing from the truth of the thing signified. But my concern is for a future in which the unique importance of male cruciformity is forgotten—when male cruciformity is viewed as having no more or less cultural impact for women than female cruciformity.

The catholic tradition has offered a variety of theological and anthropological reasons throughout its history for the logic of its position on male-only ordination (regrettably, not always charitable toward women).⁴⁶ And yet though its theological rationale has shifted, it has nonetheless instinctively held on to the practice of male ordination throughout its long history. Ought not Protestants pause before breaking faith with such a long established practice? If *male* cruciformity is indeed the decisive cruciformity needed for women to flourish, and if male cruciformity is uniquely carried forward in the presbyter, then the loss of a distinctly male-cruciformity in the priesthood imperils women—not immediately perhaps, but over time. If men cannot remember to be cruciform, women (more so than men) will suffer the consequences; history has shown this to be true.

The western feminist impulse has succeeded to the degree that it has been championed by men who have been taught cruciformity by the church (whether they realize it or not). But

⁴⁶ This a point well-made by William Witt, *Icons of Christ*, 19–37. So too by Nonna Verna Harrison’s chapter “Orthodox Arguments Against the Ordination of Women as Priests” in Thomas Hopko, ed., *Women and the Priesthood* (Crestwood, New York : St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1999), 165–87.

kicking away the sign post of male cruciformity now that we live in a more egalitarian age, is like throwing away the canteen when one has reached a watering hole in the middle of the desert. We have not arrived in glory, and much of the desert journey remains. Men have been taught cruciformity in spite of their innate impulses; but what they have been taught, they are prone to forget. Male ordination is a constant reminder to men that male power must be cruciform.

Note here that the fundamental logic against women's ordination is not related to female gifting or ability. Women are uniquely (in ways different than men) just as smart as men, just as dynamic, just as capable of leadership.⁴⁷ As such, I affirm that in many instances, a woman can be just as capable of leading a congregation—often even more capable—than a man. I am friends with a number of female clergy who lead their congregations with grace, intelligence, and integrity. Heine again: “Women can indeed acquire the same qualification as theologians, and no one seriously wants to meddle with the workings of the Holy Spirit and deny the possibility that the Spirit also calls women; nevertheless, because Jesus was a man only men can be active as priests.”⁴⁸ Her final sentence is telling. What Heine observes as a frustrating non-sequitur, is truer than she realizes. Ordination to the priesthood—precisely because it involves going to the cross on behalf of the marginalized and oppressed—is a burden that must not be assigned to those innately prone to be marginalized and oppressed.

It does not follow from this conclusion that Christianity frowns upon women assuming leadership roles more generally. Insofar as the logic of the male presbyter is fundamentally feminist in orientation, it makes sense that the New Testament—indeed the entire Bible—provides a positive vision of women leading and serving beyond the presbyter role. Heine again: “Men and women can make war on one another or separate from one another...but it is together that they make up the reality which is human life.”⁴⁹

Given the feminist agenda of male ordination, the presbyters of the church (and Christian men in general) should be intentional about creating opportunities for women to flourish both

⁴⁷ In the words of an old Islamic poem, “There is no comparison between men and women... Women are not equal to men, But, then, men are not equal to women.” Quoted by Kallistos Diokleia in “Man, Woman, and the Priesthood of Christ,” in Thomas Hopko, ed., *Women and the Priesthood* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1999), 37.

⁴⁸ Heine, *Women and Early Christianity*, 46.

⁴⁹ Heine, *Women and Early Christianity*, 13.

within and outside of the church—not only for the benefit of the people of God, but for the whole world. And most notably, for the benefit of men. Women are not men; as such, they offer a unique and distinctly feminine account of the world. Men impoverish themselves *as men* when they suppress this unique feminine perspective.⁵⁰ Thus women who are gifted teachers can and should teach (both women and men); women who are gifted leaders can and should lead (both women and men). In contexts where congregations are led by a team of presbyters, women should be invited to share their insights and leadership perspectives during council meetings. Male presbyters—following Jesus’s cruciform suffering on behalf of the church—should take the lead in creating space for, and encouraging, women to pursue whatever God has gifted them to do and be—in their homes, in their congregations, in their world.

The Western world has changed much in the past fifty years—and so too has congregational leadership. Protestant female clergy are likely here to stay. I acknowledge the complexities. Given the genuine good that female clergy do on behalf of the church, and given the ecclesial and family complexities of abandoning one’s post, it is not my recommendation that women clergy—even if they are eventually persuaded by the arguments for male-only ordination (and I pray they will be)—immediately resign their positions without regard for the well-being of their congregations and families. Likewise, I do not believe that traditionalist male clergy should engage in aggressive or heavy-handed campaigns to defrock well-intended female clergy, or refuse to engage in missional partnership with (otherwise theologically orthodox) women-led congregations. Such male power-moves against women strike me as contrary to the true feminist

⁵⁰ More needs to be said here. In this essay, I’ve largely focused on a proper and cruciform use of male power; but too often traditional accounts of male-ordination stall out here. There remains yet a need to offer a full and robust account of the interdependent relationship that exists between men and women. Just as women depend upon a cruciform use of male power, so too men depend upon a cruciform use of female power. This mutual dependence can be seen biologically (i.e. procreatively, c.f., 1 Corinthians 11:11–12), as well as theologically. In keeping with the latter, the Augustinian concept of *totus Christus* is particularly illuminating. For Augustine (and Barth, and von Balthasar, and arguably Calvin and Luther) Christ has so united himself to the church—which is his Body—that he cannot bring life to the world independent of the church; for it is only in the church that the “fullness of Christ fills all in all” (Ephesians 1:23). These biological and theological frames help inform the larger cultural frame. More to come in a future essay on *totus Christus*, the interdependency of Christ and the church, and the interdependency of the Man and the Woman.

spirit of male-only ordination. Humble, cruciform male power is the way forward for the flourishing of Jesus's humble, cruciform—and feminist—vision of male-only ordination.

V. Conclusion

In Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, the cynical Ms. Crawford offers the following remark about the Rev. Dr. Grant, a local clergyman: "Oh! no doubt he is very sincere in preferring an income ready-made, to the trouble of working for one; and has the best intentions of doing nothing all the rest of his days but eat, drink, and grow fat. It is indolence...and the love of ease...which make men a clergyman. A clergyman has nothing to do but to be slovenly and selfish—read the newspaper, watch the weather, and quarrel with his wife. His curate does all the work, and the business of his own life is to dine."⁵¹

Alas, all too often true. Ms. Crawford's critique is quite the damning, even if humorous, assessment of the clergy. But however accurate Ms. Crawford's observation about eighteenth-century English clergy (and twenty first-century American clergy), her conclusion about the real nature of ordained clergy misses the mark by a considerable distance. Contrary to Ms. Crawford, the business of the clergyman is not to dine, but to die.

Tragically, most of us do not grasp the feminist import of male ordination because we no longer view (perhaps never viewed) the presbyter's calling as fundamentally cruciform. In most churches, we tend to think of the presbyter's calling as one of prestige and honor. The presbyter is at the top of the congregational pyramid, his position is one of privilege and influence. This is not what Jesus intended. We can blame Constantine and his Edict of Milan; we can blame the rise of the Holy Roman empire and the regnant primacy of the Pope; we can blame the political supremacy of "Christian" America. Whatever the reasons, contemporary North American presbyters often look more like Greco-Roman imperial delegates than they look like Jesus or Paul. (God forgive us presbyters.) From this perspective, to deny a woman a seat at the presbyter's table is to deny her access to a privileged position. Who can blame women for lamenting this injustice?

⁵¹ Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park* (London, England: Penguin Classics, orig. 1814, r.p. 2011), 130.

Indeed, from such a perspective, one might argue that male presbyters choosing to serve as associate presbyters beneath female presbyters is the ultimate expression of male cruciformity. But this logic only works when we forget the innate cruciform nature of the presbyter's ministry. Asking one's wife to get out of bed in the middle of the night and "go into the basement to find out what that crashing noise was" is not a cruciform use of male power, nor does it ultimately create a context for the wife's flourishing. The elevation of women to the presbytership's office (in the long view) puts women, generally considered (not just female presbyters), beyond the protection of male cruciform power; it is an unintended step back toward the old Greco-Roman power structures that Jesus came to overturn.

In establishing the office of presbyter, Jesus is not calling his vicars to the catbird seat, but to the cross. Not every sea voyage requires the captain to go down with the ship. And in the same way, not every moment of congregational life requires the presbyter's ultimate sacrifice. But the presbyter is nonetheless called to embody a life of cruciformity on behalf of the vulnerable and marginalized, even if in mundane and less ultimate ways. And should the occasion demand, the presbyter must be prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice on behalf of Jesus's people.

The church is the guardian of Jesus's secret cruciform fire; it is the keeper of his cross-lit Promethean flame. The church alone knows, through its human-divine Lord, what it has cost for the feminine *imago hominis* to be wed again to the masculine *imago Dei*. Just as Jesus sacrificially used his power to protect and empower humanity, so too the man is called to sacrificially use his power to protect and empower the woman. It makes sense then, that the structure of the local church reflects—is consistent with and proclaims—the deeper truths of this cruciform reality. Male ordination, when conducted in the cruciform Spirit of Jesus, sits as a fixed signpost at the center of the church, which is itself the center of the world, and proclaims the true cruciform nature of power.

We finish where we began, with the epigraphic quote from Eastern Orthodox theologian Nonna Verna Harrison: "Arguments that have been made for and against women priests have far-reaching presuppositions and implications... Their spiritual and practical consequences may be of much greater importance than the ordination question itself."⁵² Harrison is right. The office

⁵² Harrison, *Orthodox Arguments*, 165.

of presbyter has been appointed to teach the world many truths beyond ordination itself. And at least one of those truths is that male power is for taking women off of the crosses upon which they have been unjustly hung by a hostile and violent world, and freeing them to flourish in the all the ways that God intends.

VI. An Addendum in Defense of Heine's Sermon: Answering Three Objections

Susanne Heine's sermon "Jesa Christa, or the Critique of the Ideal" serves as the pivot point in this paper's defense of male-only ordination. Given that her perspective is communicated in a short sermon, without references, and in a pastoral style, she does not offer a detailed or scholarly defense of her central claim that Jesus's maleness was the decisive aspect of his cruciformity. As such, I offer this brief addendum with the aim of buttressing Heine's central claim against three potential objections. All three objections acknowledge the significance of Jesus's cruciformity, but argue that Jesus's maleness was not a decisive aspect of his cruciformity. The three objections are related to: 1) race and ethnicity, 2) wealth, education, and political leverage, and 3) Jesus's divine nature. I begin with race and ethnicity.

1. *Objection one: race and ethnicity.* The first two objections are *reductio ad absurdum* arguments against my use of Heine's claim that Jesus's maleness was indeed the decisive element in his cruciformity. Both objections run along the same lines: if Jesus's cruciformity was effective precisely because—in his biological maleness—he represented the height of cultural power, wouldn't this necessarily imply that other aspects of cultural power such as race, wealth, education, and political leverage, are likewise essential to the identity of the presbyter? And if so, wouldn't this mean that only white, wealthy, educated, and politically connected men are capable of being presbyters? Or stated in the reverse, doesn't my use of Heine's argument imply that the racially oppressed, financially oppressed, and politically oppressed are not eligible to be presbyters?

Answering the first two objection requires us to reflect on the origins of cultural power—first as it relates to the question of racial power (the first objection), and then second as it relate to other non-biological forms of cultural power such as wealth, education, and political leverage (the second objection). For Heine's argument to stand, we must demonstrate that maleness is distinct from, and more basic, than these other elements of cultural power.

My response: ethnic and racial privilege does indeed have a clear bearing on contemporary cultural power. But racial power—unlike the power that comes from gender—is not fixed and irrevocable. Racial and ethnic power has shifted back and forth throughout history. Whiteness (though currently dominant in the West) is not inherently more powerful than non-

whiteness, nor has racial identity been the sole basis by which one group has been able to dominate another. Put starkly, one group dominates another when the males of the dominant group develop sufficient power to dominate the males of the competing group—regardless of race. The shifting tides of racial power throughout history show this to be the case (e.g., Israel vs. the Philistines; the Gauls vs. the Romans).

But the power-dynamic related to gender operates differently. Heine observes that there has never been a point in history when women (as a class) have dominated men as a class.⁵³ Males (as a class) have always retained a cultural power-advantage over females (as a class). Implicit within Heine’s sermon is the idea that there is something *inherent within maleness itself* that has given men this universal and pan-historical power-advantage. Whatever this inherent male “something” is, it has rendered the innate power difference between men and women fixed and irrevocable.⁵⁴ Men can be taught to use their greater innate cultural power in benign ways; but insofar as the greater power of the male is sourced in biological maleness itself, men (as a class) cannot become innately less powerful than women (as a class). Thus the unique importance of male cruciformity.

All of which is to say, biological maleness is a more fundamental, first-order seat of power than race or ethnicity. Whites will not always be at the top of the food chain; but males will. Jesus, in choosing to incarnate as a male, has revealed the fixed, transcultural power—namely biological maleness—that most fundamentally accounts for the power-advantage that one group of humans has over another. For this reason, the male gender of the presbyter is essential to his cruciform identity, while his race is merely accidental.

Objection two: wealth, education, and political leverage. The second objection runs along the same lines: if the effectiveness of presbyter’s cruciformity depends upon the presbyter occupying the cultural position of power, doesn’t this imply that other aspects of cultural

⁵³ Heine is solidly in her professional field of study on this point. See her *Matriarchs and Goddesses*, 74–103, wherein she effectively dismantles feminist conceptions of pre-historical matriarchal societies.

⁵⁴ It is not necessary to identify the source of the male power-advantage in order to admit its existence. My own view is that the male’s greater cultural power is related to the male’s greater physical power—the latter is metabolized into the former. See Gerald Hiestand, “Put Pain Like That Beyond My Power: A Christocentric Theodicy with Respect to the Inequality of Male and Female Power” in Gerald Hiestand and Todd Wilson, eds., *Beauty, Order and Mystery: A Christian Vision of Human Sexuality* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic), 101–118.

power—such as wealth, education and political leverage—are likewise essential for the presbyter’s cruciformity?

My response: here it is helpful to distinguish between first and second-order elements of cultural power. Second-order elements of cultural power are those things that do indeed grant the possessor high degrees of cultural power, but are nonetheless “second-order” precisely because one must first have a more basic “first-order” power in order to acquire them. Thus for instance, I can make money, but only if I am given an opportunity; I can become educated, but only if I am given access to education; I can advance in politics, but only if I am allowed access into the network of the political elites. Thus wealth, education, and political leverage are all second-order elements of cultural power.

Historically and universally, the second-order elements of cultural power have been policed by males. One need only read the pages of history and listen to the feminist lament to see that this is so. Throughout history, tyrannical male power has demonstrated its ability (and willingness) to lock women out of wealth acquisition, education, and political influence. From whence comes this ability? Once again, the most obvious explanation is that biological maleness contains within itself, indeed *is itself*, a first-order power that gives men a distinct advantage over women in grasping the second-level elements of cultural power.⁵⁵ This does not mean that simply being male ensures that individual males will always have more cultural power than wealthy, educated, and politically connected women; it takes more than maleness to achieve cultural power. But maleness nonetheless is the principle building block of power that positions the male class to more easily grasp the second-order aspects of cultural power. How else do we

⁵⁵ This is the conclusion drawn by third wave feminist Camille Paglia. Paglia, herself not a Christian, freely acknowledges the greater cultural power of men, and then calls upon men to use their greater power in service of women. See her *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 1–39. Heine does not identify herself as a feminist, but she strikes me as having the same sort of perspective as Paglia. For Heine, feminism is right when it observes that males (as a class) have a poor track record in their treatment of women; and she is in agreement with feminism insofar as it calls males to use their power to protect and empower women. But for Heine, feminism is fundamentally misguided when—in the same breath—it denies that men are innately more powerful than women. Heine is the sort of feminist who acknowledges that men have more innate cultural power than women, and that men are prone to abuse this power; and she is also the distinctly *Christian* sort of feminist who points to Christ’s cruciform example as the model for how the male’s greater cultural power should be used.

explain the male class's universal, transcultural, and pan-historical ability to control access to these second-order powers (and never the reverse)?⁵⁶

In sum, biological maleness is a first-order element of power, and is more basic than second-order elements of power such as wealth, education, and politics. As such, Heine is correct to insist that the cruciformity of *male* power is the most basic form of cruciformity, and is necessary for overturning all other second-level power constructs.

Thus Jesus's incarnation as a male human being was not arbitrary or inconsequential. The Word of God, who was himself the apex predator of the universe, assumed the form of world's apex predator—the male human being—and then took this apex predator to the cross on behalf of the marginalized and oppressed. Cruciform male presbyters are the continuation of Christ's apex cruciformity.

3. *Objection three: the Word's divinity.* A third objection to Heine's thesis discounts Christ's creatureliness altogether. It runs as follows: The Word's divine condescension—as reflected in the incarnation and the cross—was itself sufficient to establish the importance of cruciformity. Thus the significance of the Word's cruciformity was the Word's *divinity*, not the Word's *gender*.⁵⁷ As such, a crucified divine Jesa, no less than a crucified divine Jesus, would have been sufficient to communicate the importance of cruciform power.

My response: While, the cruciformity of a condescending divine Word does convey the import of cruciformity,⁵⁸ it is necessary here to distinguish between *divine* cruciformity and *creaturely* cruciformity (for creation too is called to take up its cross). Divine cruciformity is the self-emptying of the stronger in order to fill up the weaker; this is the Word's cruciformity. Creaturely cruciformity is the self-emptying of the weaker in order to be filled up by the

⁵⁶ Here again I suggest that the decisive thing is the male's greater physical strength, metabolized into cultural power. See Hiestand, "Put Pain Like that Beyond My Power."

⁵⁷ One catches a whiff of Apollinarianism here, insofar as this objection seeks to locate the significance of Jesus cruciformity in his divinity alone, irrespective of his particular human existence.

⁵⁸ For Michael Gorman, Jesus' cruciformity reflects an essential reality of God's Trinitarian nature. "[The Bible's] distinctive understanding of human holiness is grounded in the cross, which reveals three interconnected realities: the narrative identity of Christ the Son, the essential character of God the Father, and the primary activity of the Spirit." See Michael Gorman, *Inhabiting The Cruciform God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009), 106. Anglican theologian Matthew Wilcoxon argues along similar lines in his *Divine Humility: God's Morally Perfect Being* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2019).

stronger; this is humanity's cruciformity. Further, divine cruciformity is prior to, and makes possible, the creature's cruciformity. Thus divine cruciformity is initiatory, while creaturely cruciformity is responsive. Divine cruciformity can exist independent of creaturely cruciformity, but never the reverse. We empty ourselves as creatures only because God first emptied himself in Christ in order to fill us up. Which is to say, we love God with cruciform love, because he first loved us with cruciform love.

Insofar as the Man and the Woman both exist as creatures made in the *imago Dei*, it is fitting that together they both reflect the cycle of self-emptying and self-giving cruciformity that exists between God and humanity. Yet even though the Man and the Woman are both called to a life of cruciformity, their lived experience of cruciformity *with respect to each other* is harmonizing, rather than identical.

The Man, because of his innate cultural and bodily power, is uniquely fitted to emulate the initiatory self-emptying of God whereby God fills up the weaker vessel of creation with himself. And the Woman, because of her innate cultural and bodily vulnerability, is uniquely fitted to emulate the responsive self-emptying of creation whereby the weaker vessel of creation is filled up with the stronger power of God. Eastern Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann writes, "True obedience is thus true love for God, the true response of Creation to its Creator. Humanity is fully humanity when it is this response to God, when it becomes the movement of total self-giving and obedience to him. But in the 'natural' world the bearer of this obedient love, of this love as response, is the woman. The man proposes, the woman accepts. This acceptance is not passivity, blind submission, because it is love, and love is always active. It gives life to the proposal of man, fulfills it as life...."⁵⁹ In this way, the Woman uniquely embodies—for both men and women—humanity's proper response back to God.

But this does not mean that divine cruciformity is only displayed by the Man, and creaturely cruciformity is only displayed by the Woman. The Man and the Woman must both learn to model divine and creaturely cruciformity—for the Man made in the *imago Dei* is also a creature, and the Woman who is a creature also exists in the *imago Dei*. And to learn the truth of who they are, they must both look to the other.

⁵⁹ Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (Yonkers, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2018), 103.

The Man, in mediating God's cruciform love to the world, teaches the Woman (and all of humanity) of God's cruciform, initiatory self-giving love, wherein all human beings in Christ—both women and men—are destined to be partakers of the divine nature. And the Woman, in mediating creation's cruciform love back to God, teaches the Man (and all of humanity) of creation's proper response back to God, wherein all human beings in Christ—both women and men—learn what it means to be faithful creatures. Thus both the Man and the Woman are called *to teach each other* the twin truths of what it means to be male and female creatures made together in the *imago Dei*.⁶⁰

Insofar as the Man's iconic purpose is to mediate the cruciform and initiatory life of God to humanity, it is fitting that the Word communicated *God's* cruciformity through the medium of male cruciformity. Which is to say, Heine is correct to link Jesus's *divine* cruciformity with creaturely maleness.

⁶⁰ This way of viewing the iconic nature of male and female will be familiar to readers of Schmemmann. For a beautiful and fuller expression, see Alexander Schmemmann, *Life of the World*, 99–114.