

ty carried official function and authority and were, as deaconesses and widows, part of what later was called “the clergy.”

We should also note that, contrary to a number of explanations found in many biblical translations, deacons and deaconesses, who received the Holy Spirit through the imposition of the hands of the community (1 Cor 11: 5) at least until the 12th century, were not just in charge of the poor and needy. Paul also ordains that the community supervisors (bishops) be married. The Didaché (first half of the 4th century) and the Apostolic Constitutions of laws and regulations put together in the 5th century, speak routinely about the deaconesses and their ordination by the imposition of hands by the community. The Testamentum Domini Nostri Jesu Christi (second half of the 5th century) also includes the widows among the members of the clergy. Even the legislation of Theodosius and Justinian (4th, 5th, and 6th centuries) lists deaconesses among the members of the clergy.

Now, we know that Paul’s Epistles contain a couple of discrepancies. For example, in 1 Cor 11, Paul does not object at all that women prophesize within the community; but then, in 1 Cor 14: 34-35, he apparently contradicts himself by insisting that women refrain from speaking during liturgical celebrations. The first explanation is that perhaps first Paul speaks of a general principle, then he refers to the specific problems of the Corinthian community, a city where prostitutes operated within the shrine of the Mother Goddess of Ephesus. Roger Grayson (The Ministry of Women in the Early Church, Collegeville, MN, 1976) also argues that here we have “two Pauls,” the one who, in the first case, speaks personally; then, the “other Paul,” namely, the male who edits Paul’s letter and cannot hide his androcentrism. Grayson adds that 1 Cor 14: 34-35 is probably an interpolation for two reasons: these passages break the continuity of the reasoning, carry linguistic and grammatical details strange to Paul’s writings, such as “as the law says,” and clearly contradict what the Apostle says in his epistles about

women and equality within the Christian community. What many theologians and exegetes have done throughout the centuries with 1 Cor 14: 34-35 was to interpret it vis-a-vis 1 Tim 2: 11-12, which is plagiarized from that interpolation. Other biblical interpreters added weight to their interpretation by quoting passages from the Old Testament and from Greek philosophy in order to add weight to the banishment of women from the priesthood.

Now there are great hopes that the Catholic Church, under Pope Francis, will finally rid herself of the stranglehold which has been choking her all these centuries. A major reason for optimism that androcentrism and misogyny will soon be malaises of the past is the activism of thousands of women, many of them theologians and members of religious Orders, who are engaged in shaping a new Church of true equality. In the United States, there are more than 35,000 nuns, and a large number of them could be ordained to provide the Eucharist to many parishes that no longer have a pastor, as the number of priests has been declining sharply since the late 1960s. In fact, a good number of these women already have been running the affairs of parishes around the Catholic world. Many of them are members of “Sisters against Sexism,” the “Women’s Ordination Conference,” and the “Leadership Conference of Women Religious” organizations which lead the way towards a new Church that has embraced the Preferential Option for the Poor. Their involvement has greatly increased since Vatican II and Pope John Paul I’s beautiful declaration: “Yes, God is a Father; and even more, also a Mother.” Through the power of the Spirit and the total engagement of women in pastoral ministry, God’s Reign will steadily grow within the equality and the mutual love modeled by our trinitarian God.

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# Ancestors

We consider our ancestors and their legacies.  
How we take them in as air to breathe  
with nary study or thought.

Centuries of weapons: battleaxes and  
battleships  
catapults and cannons, rockets and  
nukes.  
And wars among tribes and empires  
to bloodshed worldwide.

So masculine, virile, forceful.  
Determined to dominate all,  
even nature’s Mother.

Starting with women, each, every and all.  
Stealing their self-sustaining powers,  
making them property, chattel, cattle.

Some came up with Adam’s rib  
giving birth to women and  
a Father-god cursing our birthing with pain.



We consider, also, heritage of even earlier ancestors.  
A sapiens-time when we survived not with weapons  
yet to become but by banding and bonding,  
expressing ourselves in crafting handheld statues  
of Earth Mothers birthing, nursing, planting, herding,  
holding families together, enabling peace.

Thus, comes our clashing legacies:  
Death dealing warriors, life giving mothers.

—Tom Keene and Muse