

September 3, 2009

Greetings in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ:

I am pleased to present to you a paper on women's ordination that I asked vestry member Toby Eisenberg and Fr. Clint Kerley to write. I thank them for their hard work and thoughtful essay, and I commend it to you.

The issue of women's ordination is like no other issue that we have faced in the church in recent times. Good, solid, Bible-believing followers of Christ can be on opposite sides of this issue. As I see it, no other contemporary issue coalesces so many different and important values and understandings. Among them are: *How do we interpret the Bible? What is the role of women and men in the church? How can a church speak in and to a culture remarkably different than the culture of the early apostles? How should traditions in the church be judged or evaluated? What are we comfortable with? What did God intend for the roles of men and women in the family? Is there a slippery slope behind any change in tradition? What is the role of the church in the life of the believer? What is the priesthood for?* And on and on.

This paper is not necessarily a summary statement of the mind of the vestry or the staff as a whole or as individuals. Neither the vestry nor the staff is in charge of ordination practices or policies. We are in a jurisdiction (the AMiA and the ACNA) that provides for, supports and oversees women clergy. However, I would like for you to see this paper as a contribution to the ongoing communion-wide discussion about the ordination of women. It also outlines and answers some questions that others may be asking. Certainly at Christ Church we have been in our own process of understanding.

I am thankful for the comments I have received on my blog about this issue. For the most part they show that our church is thinking and wrestling intelligently with a very important issue. I continue to encourage you to direct your thoughts, comments and questions to me.

For the sake of Him who binds us together in unity and calls us to reach a world with the Good News of Jesus Christ...

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Men, Women, Ministry, and the Mission of God

I. Introduction

Do you know this riddle? *A father and his son are in a car crash. The father is killed instantly but the son is only injured and is taken to the hospital. He is rushed to the operating room, the doctor comes in, looks at the patient on the operating table, and says, "I can't operate on him, he's my son." How can this be?*

If you are stumped on this, you are not alone. It is not easy to figure out. But did you get it? It is deceptively simple: the doctor is the boy's mother.

It goes without saying that the times are changing rapidly. Previously defined and traditional roles for men and women in our cultures are overlapping or ill defined. Many women are as well trained, capable, talented, and career minded as many men. And in a culture like ours, you would expect that the roles of women within the church would need to be examined and where appropriate, challenged or changed. It would seem only natural that the church would not escape the relentless wave of change.

But the people of God within the church are like no other group of people. Any change we make to tradition or roles or common understanding should have a clear biblical rationale and should, in the end, be either allow or proscribed by our Scriptures. Christians live in a world that is sometimes hostile and sometimes vaguely friendly to the things we Christians believe. We are part of a culture that has seen more change, advancement, and deterioration that most of us have been able to keep up with.

Nevertheless, we cannot simply go with whatever the culture decides or promotes. And still, we can never escape our culture. Few of us live in a convent or a monastery.

We are, as Jesus said, in the world but still not 'of' the world. (John 17:14ff) So how can we meet the challenge of a changing world and swirling culture and still hold on to the basic values and structures of the church that both the bible and the traditions have given us? Moreover, how can we reach a world with the hope and power of the Gospel without unnecessary barriers or distractions to the Good News of the Gospel?

That is the question this paper seeks to address. This paper simply serves as a thoughtful and honest assessment of the issues at hand and suggests one way of thinking about the topic that we feel is helpful to gain a common understanding.

II. The Ordination of Women at Christ Church

Throughout its twenty-five year history, Christ Church has always seen our adherence to God's call to mission as a call to stretch ourselves to be a winsome and welcoming voice to those searching for a Savior. In seeking to live out that call to mission, we have consistently focused on three main essentials: strong Biblical teaching, worship as the central activity of the church, and a calling to the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ in Plano and beyond. Because of our culture's steadily increasing concern for women's equality, our call to mission requires us to examine just how far we can go to embrace that culture in order to remove any unnecessary barriers to our proclamation of the gospel.

Of course, Scripture is our ultimate authority, and it sets the boundaries for how far we can go to embrace a culture on any issue. As an Anglican church, we are not left to interpret Scripture by ourselves but are part of a worldwide communion that helps us understand God's word and our particular belief in how we live out our faith together. Yet, after more than thirty years spent studying the issue of women's ordination, a consensus in the Anglican communion still has not been reached. Our communion remains in a "process of reception" regarding women's ordination, whereby faithful Christians throughout the Anglican world bring their best arguments forward so that the entire Anglican Communion may weigh them in the balance as it seeks a consensus opinion.

While we wait for that consensus, our call to mission requires us to take a position on the matter. Our goal in this paper is to explain our position on women's ordination and why we think it is the most faithful position Christ Church can take as it seeks to live out the Christian mission in Plano, Texas. Our position is that women can serve as deacons and priests (including as rectors), though the office of bishop must be reserved for men.

We are certainly aware that some people will not agree with our position. Some would go further to embrace our culture's concern for women's equality, while others think we go too far. Few people come to the issue without pre-conceived notions, yet still fewer have ever studied the matter in any kind of depth. What those who have studied this matter closely can certainly agree to, regardless of their position on the matter, is that women's ordination touches on numerous important and complex issues related to the Christian faith: how best to interpret Scripture, the roles of community and tradition in the

interpretation of Scripture, the relationship between culture and the gospel, how best to engage a culture with the gospel, the nature of ordained ministry, the innate (versus culturally formed) differences between men and women, and on and on.

The purpose of this paper is to address our congregation with a fairly in-depth explanation of the reasoning behind our position on women's ordination. We ask that those who hold strong views one way or another prayerfully consider the arguments we make in this paper before drawing any conclusions about our position. We are convinced our position is fully consistent with Scripture, treats tradition appropriately, remains faithful to historic Anglicanism, and helps us proclaim the gospel more effectively in our own culture. Our position also resides within the boundaries set forth by the Anglican Mission in the Americas (AMiA) and the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA).

III. Summary of Our Reasoning

Our approach to the issue of women's ordination is perhaps best described as a "mission-oriented" approach because it attempts to bring Scriptural teaching on how to carry out the call to mission into the discussion on women's ordination. Far too many people attempt to address the issue of women's ordination by focusing *solely* on the passages of Scripture relating to husbands and wives and to women's roles within the earliest churches. Undoubtedly, these passages are important to the issue of women's ordination, but they are not the only important passages or even the most important passages on the matter. While few people would disagree with our view that God's mission to redeem humanity stands as the central theme in Scripture, many do make the mistake of attempting to address women's ordination without reference to whether mission has any relevance to the issue. Our approach sees mission as of great relevance to the issue of women's ordination and attempts to orient the discussion in terms of Scriptural teaching on mission.

While we are motivated by the realities of our culture to re-consider the role of women in ordained ministry, we must make clear that our position is *not* driven by concerns to *satisfy* broader culture. We have been given a mandate by Christ to live as salt and light to the world around us (Matthew 5:13-14). Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to look at our society and see ways that we can make the gospel as understandable and accessible as possible, while never compromising the commands and truth that we find in Scripture. The mission-oriented approach we take here enables us to do just that.

Christ Church's reasoning on women's ordination can be summarized as follows:

1. Scripture clearly teaches that we ought to take a mission-oriented approach when determining what teachings and practices we adopt as we proclaim the gospel to a particular culture. All *unnecessary* barriers to the reception of the gospel by a culture should be removed. The limits of what counts as “necessary” are to be found in Scripture, with traditional teachings and practices bearing testimony to Scripture though not having the same weight as Scripture. Traditional teachings and practices should be presumed correct unless a culture has changed so much that it is at odds with those teachings. If a culture has changed dramatically, the mission-oriented approach requires us to re-examine those traditional teachings and practices in the light of Scripture and its missional mandate to determine what from tradition must be kept (i.e., that which is the eternal truth of the Christian faith) and what can, and should, be modified.
2. The mission-oriented approach we apply here is bolstered by and follows the strong precedents of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral and the long-standing principle of contextualization widely upheld by Christian missionaries.
3. The best understanding of Scripture’s particular prohibitions on women preaching, teaching, and leading during worship is that those prohibitions are culturally conditioned (i.e., addressing particular problems in the original culture that do not now exist) rather than transcultural (i.e., rooted in the fundamental differences between men and women). New Testament scholar Scot McKnight unpacks this view in a helpful and understandable manner in part 4 of his recent book *The Blue Parakeet: Rethinking How You Read the Bible*.
4. The best understanding of Scripture’s teaching on male headship in *marriage* is that it is rooted in God’s different ordering of men and women (i.e., innate gender differences). While the scriptural teaching on male headship in *ministry* is perhaps less certain, a strong enough parallel between headship in ministry and headship in marriage appears to exist so that we are not prepared to part with the traditional teaching of male headship in ministry. Instead, we will wait for this issue to be resolved through the process of reception.
5. Bishops represent Christ as the visible heads of the local congregations under their pastoral care. Deacons and priests (including rectors) all serve under the covering of the headship of the bishop who, with their fellow bishops, guides the churches in their mission to proclaim the gospel in accordance with Scripture.

6. Therefore, we take the position that ordaining women as deacons and priests (with the ability to serve as rectors) but not as bishops is the most faithful response we can make to our mandate to proclaim the gospel in our surrounding culture.

In what follows, we will articulate in more depth the reasoning behind our mission-oriented approach and how we arrived at our position. We will first describe the mission-oriented approach in some detail, demonstrating Scripturally why we believe it to be of vital importance to the issue of women's ordination. Next we will talk about how mission and tradition are related to one another and how one decides whether traditional teachings and practices that create barriers to mission can or cannot be modified. We will then turn to a discussion of the interpretation of Scripture to show that understanding a passage from the Bible can be sometimes be difficult, though properly understanding the context and literary structure of the passage and reading the Bible in a wide community of faithful Christians enables the church to properly understand God's Word. We will then turn to consider the passages of Scripture that many people argue preclude women from ordained ministry, attempting to understand them in light of the mission-oriented approach and the proper interpretation of Scripture.

While we do affirm women in ordained ministry, we do not see Scripture permitting women to serve as bishops, based on the notion that Scripture teaches male headship in ministry. So, we have a section on the order of headship to discuss our understanding of this teaching. After closing the discussion with an admonition about living with differences, we list a series of frequently voiced objections and questions along with our responses to them.

IV. Understanding the Mission-Oriented Approach

Mission is at the Center of the Christian Message

One of the fundamental and overarching themes throughout all of Scripture is mission. In fact, the best way to understand the story of salvation taught throughout Scripture is in terms of God's missional activity to redeem humanity from sin and His involvement of His people in that activity. Mission is first and foremost God's heart to reach out and bring people into a right relationship with him through faith in Jesus Christ, but the message of mission beings in the earliest verses of the Bible.

In Genesis 3, after Adam and Eve had sinned, God is described as walking in the garden looking for them. God brought punishment to them and all of creation as a result of their sin, yet at the very same moment, God's mission to redeem and restore relationship with humanity was evident. As He brought punishment

to the serpent, He said, “I will put enmity...between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Genesis 3.15). This is a foreshadowing of the battle between Jesus Christ and Satan on the cross.

In Genesis 12, God told Abram that he would make him and his descendants a great nation, whom He would bless in order that they in turn would bless all nations. Many years later God freed that nation from slavery in Egypt and brought them to a mountain in the wilderness. There, God made a special promise of relationship with them, promising to be their God and to make them a unique and special people for Himself. The people were also invited to join God in His mission to draw all of the world into relationship with Himself. Throughout the law, God reminds the people to be kind to strangers because they had been strangers in Egypt (Ex. 22.21). But, he also provides for strangers living among the Israelite people to participate in their worship and in his covenant with them (cf. Ex. 12:48, Ex. 20:20). From the very beginning, then, we see God as a God on mission, ready and willing to break down social barriers to reach out in relationship to the nations. And, all throughout the Old Testament, God has included His people in that mission.

Of course, the greatest aspect of God’s mission was sending His only Son, Jesus Christ, to live among us and to die on the cross for us. Though He was God and the creator of all things, Jesus humbled Himself and took on human flesh (John 1.1-3, 14; Philippians 2.6). Not stopping merely to live among us as one of us, Jesus willingly went to the cross to bear our sins so that we might be reconciled to God, even though we were still enemies of God due to our sin (Rom. 5.1f). God’s heart and love for this world (John 3.16) could not be quenched, even by his hatred of sin. So, He sent Jesus to walk among us and to suffer death and punishment so that we would instead have life. In the greatest possible missional act God could have taken, God came to dwell among His people and to suffer the indignity of death at human hands, all with the purpose of drawing them into relationship with Himself.

Though Jesus’ ministry was aimed at His ultimate mission of dying on the cross, during His time on earth He reached out in unexpected ways. Jesus called a tax collector (Matthew) to be His disciple and ate meals with tax collectors, even though tax collectors were despised among the Jewish people. (Matthew 9.9-10; 10.1-4). Jesus reached out to the Samaritan woman at the well. It was rare that a Jewish man would engage in a conversation with a strange woman, but to talk to a Samaritan was especially unbelievable because Jews considered Samaritans to be half-breeds and unclean. Not only was she a woman and a Samaritan, she was also notoriously sinful. Jesus broke through all of these barriers to bring the gospel to her (John 4). Examples like these are numerous throughout the New Testament.

While Jesus greatly upset the religious leaders of His day with such interactions, Jesus continually challenged them to understand that he had come on God's behalf to break through social and cultural barriers so that God's mission of salvation would be accomplished.

God's missional activity continued even after Jesus' death and resurrection, when the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus' disciples and empowered them to proclaim the gospel. Beginning at Pentecost, God's mission to redeem all the nations through His people became a reality. There, the Holy Spirit broke down language barriers and enabled people from all over the world who were gathered in Jerusalem to hear in their own native languages what Jesus' disciples were saying, which in turn drew them to the gospel message Peter preached (Acts 2). The book of Acts is a record of the early days of the church, giving testimony to the power of the Holy Spirit as he came upon women and men who would further the mission of God.

Perhaps the greatest of all Christian missionaries, the Apostle Paul had a singular focus on the mission of proclaiming new life with God in Jesus Christ. Much of the New Testament is a record of Paul's missionary work and teaching, both in the second half of Acts and in the many letters Paul wrote to churches and individuals. Even when confronted with people preaching Jesus out of envy of him, he simply stated, "whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice" (Philippians 1.18). Because of the importance Paul placed on spreading the gospel, Paul had a very open philosophy regarding how it is to be proclaimed. This focus on the mission of God allowed him to affirm the gospel's proclamation in many different ways, according to the method that was best suited to the particular situation.

So, in 1 Corinthians 9.22-23, Paul explains that, for the sake of the gospel, he has become all things to all people in order that he may save some. Likewise, in 1 Corinthians 10.23-11.1, Paul exhorts his readers to imitate his example (just as he has imitated Christ's example) of exercising his freedom in Christ not for his own benefit but rather for the glory of God in a manner that avoids offending others and is for the benefit of others, so that they may be saved. The principle at work in Paul's thinking is clear: In seeking to proclaim the gospel and bring others to salvation, we seek to adapt ourselves and use our freedoms in a way that best enables others to receive the gospel.

Paul's intense focus on mission reflects his deep understanding of the lengths God was willing to go to carry out His mission. If we fail to understand the record of Paul's missionary work and teaching in light of his passion to proclaim the gospel to all nations, then we run the risk of misreading just what Paul did

and said. Our mission-oriented approach attempts to follow Paul's own missionary mindset and example as we seek to understand what he taught about women in ministry and how we are to engage our culture with the gospel.

The Mission-Oriented Approach and Its Deep Roots

Our mission-oriented approach to the issue of women's ordination seeks to minimize obstacles to the proclamation of the gospel within our culture, while adhering to the limits of what Scripture teaches and commands. This approach has played a prominent role in Christian thought, stemming all the way back to Paul's own approach to his ministry as we discussed above. Instead of remaining comfortable in our traditions and habitual ways of thinking, we must always be prepared to adapt our ways to the people and cultures we encounter, for the sake of the gospel and the glory of God. Of course, in seeking to promote the gospel in this way, we must never violate the gospel itself or anything taught or commanded in Scripture.

Not surprisingly, Paul's mission-oriented approach has been studied and practiced by missionaries who routinely encounter new cultures. They commonly refer to this approach as "contextualization" and define it roughly as the attempt to express and proclaim the gospel in a manner best suited to the target culture without compromising the integrity of the gospel. Missionaries are careful to distinguish between "contextualization" and what is called "syncretism" – when a missionary, congregation, denomination, or other group of Christians either purposely or unwittingly end up adopting the values of the culture rather than the value of the gospel while thinking that they are being true to the gospel. This "syncretism" is precisely what the prophet Jeremiah railed against and why God allowed His people to be scattered into Babylonian captivity. As missionaries are quick to remind us, we must never commit the sin of syncretism as we seek to fulfill the duty to contextualize the gospel within a culture. We are certainly mindful of this concern as we state our position on women's ordination.

Within official Anglican teaching itself, we need look no further than the well-known Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral to see a close parallel to the mission-oriented approach we are taking. The articles given there recognize the Biblical mandate for the visible unity of all Christians and lay out the principles and commitments officially adopted by Anglicans as they seek such unity among themselves and with non-Anglican Christians. The articles express both the "essentials" of the Christian faith which can never be compromised as well as a willingness and commitment to give up, whenever necessary for the cause of unity, the "non-essential" teachings and practices preferred by Anglicans. One of the four "essentials" relevant here is the belief that Scripture contains all things necessary for salvation and serves as the rule

and ultimate standard of the Christian faith. Additionally, the articles include as an “essential” the belief in the Historic Episcopate (i.e., succession of bishops) “locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the Unity of His Church.” We affirm the role and leadership that bishops give to each local church within the Anglican Communion.

So, while the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral is a statement about how to pursue visible Christian unity, it is much in line with the mission-oriented approach we are taking. Each seeks a fundamental calling of the Church – visible Christian unity on the one hand and effective proclamation of the gospel on the other. And, each seeks to maintain the fundamentals of the Christian faith in full integrity while adapting the teachings and practices of the local congregation to the particular needs of those people and their surrounding culture.

The mission-oriented approach we take here to the issue of women’s ordination seeks to take part in a long-standing tradition of adapting Christian teaching and practice to local needs, cultures, and peoples.

Applying the Mission-Oriented Approach

The mission-oriented approach says that when we are proclaiming the gospel within a particular culture, we are to affirm that culture as far as is possible without violating fundamental Christian teachings. So, when traditional Christian teaching and practice is at such odds with a culture that elements of the traditional material create barriers to the culture’s reception of the gospel, Christians are not only permitted but are duty-bound to reconsider whether any portion of the material offensive to the culture may be modified without compromising the fundamentals of the Christian faith. If Scripture gives us a command that clearly prevents us from affirming something in a culture, then being mission-oriented requires Christians to stand against that component of the culture.

As we show below, we are confident that our position of allowing women to be ordained and serve as deacons and priests (but not as bishops) preserves all things required by Scripture while eliminating unnecessary barriers to the gospel. In fact, we hold that we would be violating our scriptural mandate to adapt Christian teaching and practice to our local culture if we did not eliminate all unnecessary barriers to the gospel.

Given the ongoing controversy over ordaining practicing homosexuals and allowing and encouraging pastors to perform same-sex marriages, it is vitally important that we make two distinctives of our

mission-oriented approach clear. First, we are *not* suggesting that all who are within the Anglican world *must* ordain women, as if the Scriptures or God's current activity in the world demonstrated that ordaining women is required. Instead, we are taking an approach that says ordaining women as deacons and priests is *permitted* by Scripture. It should be considered by Christians engaged in cultures such as ours because of the scriptural mandate to eliminate unnecessary barriers to the gospel. Second, and related to the first point, we hold that equality is *not* a cause for us taking our position, as if there is a part of the gospel or the teachings of Scripture that would *require* women to be ordained. While we are not unsympathetic to this *concern* for women's equality and certainly see it as having roots in Christian teaching, we see any *mandate* for women's equality in the form of ordained ministry roles as stemming solely from our culture, not from Scripture or the from the gospel itself.

By contrast, some churches have been prideful in the ongoing controversy over Christian teaching on homosexuality. Instead of following Scripture or the broader Christian community, those churches presume to be "leaders" on the issue as the rest of Christianity "catches up" to what they believe God is doing. They have not been willing to listen to other voices throughout the world and instead have held themselves up as "prophets" who alone are able to see the truth that others will only come to see later. This is due to the fact that rather than Scripture, their own culturally shaped views of social justice serve as an uncompromising mandate for how they interpret (and arguably even ignore) Scripture. While social justice is certainly taught in Scripture, and certainly part of the gospel, we must live under the authority and boundaries the Bible gives us for how to conceive of such justice, not our own.

So, to be clear, our position is not based upon a finding that anything in the gospel or in Scripture *mandates* women's ordination, so we are not presuming to settle the issue for all Christians in all places. Nevertheless, given that the *concern* for women's equality is very strong in our culture, Paul's mission-oriented approach instructs us to consider how far we can go to embrace that concern. So, our position is that women's ordination is not mandated by any "liberating" trajectory of the gospel but equally that it is not prohibited by Scripture (at least not if women deacons and priests are under the headship of a male bishop). Instead, women's ordination is best understood missionally, in terms of how best to proclaim the gospel to a culture that holds to the fundamental right of women to hold every position that men hold.

In applying the mission-oriented approach, we are attempting to be faithful to the Church's mission of proclaiming the good news that salvation comes solely through the work of Jesus Christ to those who would hear the good news and receive Him as Savior and Lord. As Paul makes clear in Scripture, his

primary concern was to advance this gospel in every culture by seeking to minimize those things which might inhibit the reception of the gospel. We are simply attempting to do the same in our own culture.

V. Mission, Tradition, and Presumptions

It is with great care and thought that we take a position that differs from the tradition of the church. However, in this case we are compelled to do so. It is not until the last 40 years that culture has broadly held such a great concern for the equality of women in the form of access to ordained ministry. Because the Church has rarely had to deal with a culture of equality such as ours, there is no real precedent in tradition to explore this issue from a mission-oriented approach. The traditional teachings of the Church have generally (but not always) maintained that women should not be ordained as deacons, priests, or bishops. It is our contention that those teachings were the result of deep consideration by prior Church leaders of how to best engage Biblical teaching to their local cultures, which were, with rare exception, patriarchal. Without a reason to reconsider inherited teachings and practices, such teachings and practices should generally be preserved.

Indeed, traditional teachings and practices should be *presumed* to be true unless there is clear reason to change them. But, when culture changes so that it is at odds with tradition, the Church has *aduty* to re-examine its traditional teachings and practices to see if its mission of spreading the gospel would be compromised by clinging to traditional teachings. Anglicanism upholds Scripture as our primary authority and views tradition as bearing an imperfect but vitally important witness to what Scripture teaches. Even if we ought to be slow to go against traditional teachings, we can and sometimes must do so if we are to uphold our scriptural mandate to proclaim the gospel.

For, that which tradition transmits to us falls into three broad categories: (1) *eternal truths* (i.e., the fundamentals of the Christian faith, encapsulated in the gospel, to which the Scriptures and the Nicene and Apostles Creeds bear witness) which are transcultural and must be preserved and applied anew in every culture at every time through history, (2) *culturally conditioned yet faithful beliefs and practices* (i.e., the particular formulations and applications of the Christian faith to the particular cultures in which the Christian faith has been properly proclaimed and applied) which were good and useful in their day but may need to be modified at later times and places, and (3) *cultural contaminants* (i.e., those aspects of a prior culture that the Church failed to subject to the fundamentals of the Christian faith) which have infected and skewed the Church's proclamation of the faith in a manner that must be corrected. In short, there are some things in the Christian tradition (i.e., the second and third categories above) that can and

sometimes must be reconsidered if the Church is properly to carry out its mission of proclaiming the gospel in every culture.

Connecting these three categories with our discussion above, we hold that prohibitions against women's ordination coming to us through tradition fall into the second category and that our current time and place requires us to modify them. We even hold that Paul's express prohibitions against women preaching, teaching, and leading in public worship (in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy) were intended by Paul as second category teachings applicable to his own particular culture rather than first category teachings applicable to all cultures. While Paul does not expressly state that the prohibitions were culturally conditioned, we hold that the best scholarship on those passages suggests that this was Paul's intention. At the very least, the scholarship shows that it is unclear whether Paul intended those prohibitions as first category or second category teachings. (For an excellent description of the issues surrounding Scripture and culture, read John Stott's commentary on 1 Timothy *Guard the Truth*, particularly pages 74-81). It is important to note that our discussion of other churches' teachings above (i.e., in the ongoing controversy over proper Christian teaching on homosexuality) argued essentially that they see Paul's prohibitions as falling into the third category, as if Paul's view was at odds with the true teachings of the gospel. We flatly reject this idea.

Since, at the very least, it is unclear whether Paul's prohibitions are transcultural or not, we must use other principles to determine whether we understand his *specific* prohibitions as (1) binding in our own culture as specific prohibitions (i.e., the specific prohibitions themselves are transcultural) or (2) simply particular examples of how enduring principles are to be applied (i.e., the specific prohibitions are not themselves transcultural though the principles underlying them are transcultural). This is the difficult task of attempting to interpret Scripture faithfully when so many faithful Christians have come to different conclusions. How are we to proceed?

Initially, traditionalists have the presumption because of the mere fact that the Church has taught and practiced certain things for a long time. But, the mission-oriented approach can shift the presumption in favor of women's ordination. Paul's clear teaching elsewhere in Scripture that Christians should avoid unnecessary barriers to a culture's reception of the gospel carries more weight than any concern to preserve traditional Church teachings and practices for the sake of tradition itself.

So, if the mission-oriented approach suggests ordination of women to ministry would remove a barrier to the gospel's receptivity in a culture, then the presumption shifts from the traditionalist view to the view

that favors ordaining women. If maintaining the traditional teaching against ordaining women presents a significant barrier to the proclamation of the gospel, then we should shift from presuming traditional teachings to presuming a change in teachings. For, tradition serves as a testimony regarding how best to live out and proclaim the gospel. If traditional teachings ever come to stand in the way of proclaiming the gospel effectively, it would be a mistake to presume traditional teachings should not be changed because that would effectively be to value tradition itself more than the gospel which it seeks to proclaim. For the sake of the gospel, we must *presume* in those circumstances that change is appropriate and *then* seek to determine if there is anything in Scripture that prevents such change. Just as the initial presumption that traditional teachings and practices are to be upheld can be rebutted, the second presumption (that change is appropriate when it would eliminate a barrier to the gospel) can be rebutted. Neither presumption is conclusive in itself.

These presumptions are crucial since they determine who bears the burden of proof. So, traditionalists cannot just rest on the long-standing teachings and practices of the Church and argue that proponents of women's ordination bear the burden of proving their cause from Scripture. The mere fact that preserving the traditionalist view could stand as a significant barrier to a culture's reception of the gospel is enough to shift the burden of proof to the traditionalists.

It is worth noting that the Roman Catholic Church itself has officially determined that Scripture does not conclusively prohibit or allow women's ordination. In 1977, the Pontifical Biblical Commission (the committee of the most preeminent and well-respected Biblical scholars in the Roman Catholic Church who are charged with answering Biblical questions posed to them by the highest Roman Catholic teaching authorities) issued a report regarding their examination of what the New Testament teaches regarding women's ordination. They concluded that the New Testament, by itself, does not allow them to settle the question whether women may be ordained. They specifically mention 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 and conclude that it is possible that those passages refer only to particular concrete situations and abuses. In other words, they concluded that those two texts do not make clear whether the specific prohibitions were intended as transcultural teachings or not.

So, even the Roman Catholic Church, which was seeking scriptural guidance for their prohibition against women's ordination, concluded that no such support exists. Instead, their whole position rests on a presumption that traditional teachings and practices should be followed if there is nothing in Scripture to the contrary. Specifically, they presume that they are bound by traditional understandings of sacramental theology and of what Christ and the Apostles intended in ordaining only men as apostles. For a brief

discussion of each of these and other issues, see the “Frequently Voiced Questions and Objections” section at the end of this paper.

However, Anglicans have a more fluid understanding of tradition. Article 34 of the 39 Articles states that church tradition has been interpreted differently at various times in history and divergent places around the globe – and that it isn’t necessary that practices in one place match another. What can’t change, however, is adherence to God’s word. One other crucial point comes out in this Article. A change of tradition can’t be made “through...private judgment.” Change comes through the discernment of the church, through “common authority.” Anglicans believe this authority rests in the office of the bishop. Our openness to women’s ordination at Christ Church rests not in our own “private judgment,” but in the counsel of our Bishops. Archbishop Kolini of Rwanda, of which AMiA is a missionary arm, and Archbishop Duncan of the ACNA both support the ordination of women to the priesthood.

VI. The Interpretation of Scripture

While some people think the Bible is easy to understand, the realities involved in interpretation of ancient texts can sometimes make understanding Scripture difficult. Certainly, many, many passages of Scripture are easy enough to understand, such as the often quoted John 3:16. Other passages can be understood with just a little bit of work to understand the cultural context and literary structure, but some passages defy easy understanding even after extensive study by the most studious and astute Christians. This is not to say that God’s Word to us is beyond our ability to understand but rather that some passages are more difficult to understand than others without significant work to understand the cultural context and literary structure of the passage.

Because of the amount of work involved in understanding Scripture, interpreting what Scripture says and applying its meaning to everyday life can be challenging. Yet, however challenging this process might be, the Christian life must be built upon the practice of using the Bible as the ultimate authority and guide for faith. That is the work of hermeneutics: interpreting and translating a text from the context in which it was written into the context in which it is read.

For some, this may sound complicated and intimidating, but the reality is that we have all been doing this for a long time. Anyone who has read *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* had to do the work of interpretation. *Tom Sawyer* was written in 1876 and set in the fictional town of St. Petersburg, Missouri, along the banks of the Mississippi River. To properly understand this book, one has to know something

about late 19th century America, particularly the culture of the Mississippi River banks. One needs to know something about the vernacular, the “common,” language of that region. One also needs to understand that Tom, the main character, is a 12-year-old boy – and how his age and personality contributes to his actions and the story itself. With a little knowledge of the cultural context in which *Tom Sawyer* was written, it is not too difficult to grasp its meaning and even to apply any lessons from that text to our own lives.

Romeo and Juliet was written by Shakespeare in the late 16th century. Though written in English, it is Elizabethan English, which has many different words than 21st century American English – as well as many of the same words which had different meanings in Shakespeare’s day. Additionally, the customs and culture of our day are vastly different than in late 16th century England. And, Shakespeare wrote with such precision and structure to his poetry and prose that one cannot truly grasp all the meaning he intended to convey without grasping the details of the literary structures he incorporated into his text. Similarly, Homer composed *The Odyssey* at the end of the 8th century BC. The action and storyline take place in the Mediterranean world of ancient Greece. To understand this book, not only is there a translation from Homeric Greek to English, but cultural differences between ancient Greece and modern America. And, one needs to understand ancient mythology and ancient literary forms in order to have any shot at understanding this text.

What these examples illustrate is that as the distance widens between the language and culture of a text and our own language and culture, the hermeneutic task becomes more difficult. Furthermore, some ancient literary forms are completely different than the literary structures we use today, making the hermeneutic task even more difficult. While understanding *Tom Sawyer*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Odyssey* may require hard work, doing so is not impossible, at least not when we make use of the hard work of scholars who have dedicated their lives to uncovering those important cultural and literary details for us.

Interpreting the Bible brings all of these issues to the table as well – but expands them out over a longer period of time. The earliest books of the Bible, Genesis and Job, were written as early as 1400 and 1500 BC, while the last book of the Bible (Revelation) was written late in the first century. This period of nearly 1,600 years means that Scripture was written in an extremely wide variety of cultural contexts spanning not only across time but also across the vast geography of Egypt, Israel, modern-day Turkey, Greece, and over to Rome. Furthermore, the Bible was written in three main languages (Ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, and Koine Greek), none of which are spoken today. Furthermore, as any serious student of the

Bible can attest, Scripture utilizes a vast number of literary structures (even within any given cultural context). And, the gap between our own culture and any passage of Scripture we might attempt to read is between 1,900 and 3,500 years.

Given these facts, some might conclude that interpreting the Bible is nearly an impossible task. More frequently in our culture, however, are those who fail to appreciate the difficult work that must be done and simply jump to conclusions about Scripture that seem right to them. However difficult or easy the task of interpreting Scripture may *seem*, the reality is that the task can be quite difficult, requiring an incredible amount of time spent wading through scholarly works on the cultural context and literary structure of the particular passage being interpreted.

Even when faithful Christians have done all of their homework, they can and sometimes do come to differing interpretations of Scripture, especially the more difficult passages. At this point, some people resort to antagonistic debate. Rather than listening to other faithful Christians who have done their homework and yet arrived at a different interpretation, they presume they have made no mistakes in their own interpretation and seek to knock down the arguments of those who disagree with them. Usually, this antagonistic approach is rooted in a failure to understand the complexity involved in the interpretation of Scripture. It is also rooted in a misunderstanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in Biblical interpretation that sees God's promise to lead Christians to all truth via the Holy Spirit (John 16.13) as a promise to lead *individuals* to all truth regardless of their relationship to other Christians. Undoubtedly, individuals do have the Holy Spirit and often are led into truth through individual study. But, God's promise to lead Christians to all truth via the Holy Spirit is best understood as a promise to lead *the church* to all truth when it is properly functioning.

The "process of reception" within Anglicanism is built on the recognition that (1) interpreting Scripture can be quite difficult, resulting in faithful Christians coming to differing understandings and that (2) the Holy Spirit leads the *Church* to true understanding of Scripture when faithful Christians with differing interpretations remain engaged with one another in seeking to understand Scripture. Those who fail to appreciate the complexity of interpretation, and those who believe the Holy Spirit has led them *individually* to a true interpretation of Scripture (even when other faithful Christians disagree with them), are thus out of step with Anglicanism.

In spite of the difficulty of interpreting Scripture and the lengthy amount of time that the process of reception can take, we are confident that the Holy Spirit guides the church into all truth. And, we have

assurance from God Himself about His Word. First, Scripture is inspired by God. 2 Timothy 3:16 says that “All Scripture is breathed out by God...” This phrase means that Scripture comes straight from the mind of God. He might have used authors such as Moses, David, and Paul to do the writing, but they were inspired by His truth as they wrote. Further in this same passage, Paul says that Scripture is “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.” Furthermore, as Hebrews 4:12 tells us, “The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” Unlike the works of Twain, Shakespeare, and Homer, the Bible is made alive and active by God’s Spirit to help discern the realities and motivations of the heart, and bring conviction and change if it is needed.

So, there is assurance that God wants people to understand His Word, but there is still work to do in interpreting an ancient text for 21st century living. And, this work has to be done in conjunction with other faithful Christians, even those who happen to disagree with us. Our mission-oriented approach to women’s ordination seeks to uphold our Biblical mandate to mission in the midst of our culture while also remaining faithful to the process of reception on the issue. We have a pressing need to engage our culture and to explain our position to our congregation, yet we do not presume that our position is definitive for all Christians. We will remain engaged with other faithful Christians in the continuing process of reception on women’s ordination.

VII. Interpreting Paul’s “Prohibitions” on Women in Ministry

We are well aware of those faithful Christians who understand Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy as precluding women’s ordination. Yet, as we stated above, we are convinced by those other faithful Christians who understand Paul’s teaching in those passages as *not* precluding women’s ordination, especially when we take a close look at all of Paul’s teachings regarding women in ministry. Paul sometimes seems to affirm women in ministry and sometimes to preclude that practice. But, when seen within the context of mission, these seeming contradictions are easier to understand.

Throughout his letters, Paul affirms women in various leadership roles of the church. One example is Paul’s relationship with Aquila and Priscilla. Paul refers to Aquila and his wife Priscilla as fellow workers in his letter to the church at Rome (Romans 16.3). Paul originally met the couple in Corinth and stayed with them for a year and a half as they were tent makers, which was also Paul’s trade. When the Lord called Paul to continue his travels, Aquila and Priscilla went with him and stayed at Ephesus. There

they met Apollos, a teacher of Scripture from Alexandria. After hearing Apollos speak, they brought him into their home and together explained to him the gospel “more accurately” (Acts 18.26). In his letter to the Corinthians, he wrote that Aquila and Priscilla had a church that met in their house. They also had the role of mentoring and teaching the gifted minister, Apollos. Nothing from Paul seems to indicate anything but complete support for both Aquila and Priscilla (they are always mentioned together) and their common ministry, leadership, and teaching in the church (cf. I Corinthians 16.19, 2 Timothy 4.19).

A seeming contradiction to this, however, is found in 1 Timothy 2:8-15. Paul wrote the letter 1 Timothy to his young apprentice, Timothy, who he had left in charge of the church at Ephesus. In the second chapter, Paul gives directives to Timothy on how to order the public worship of the church. The verses that draw much attention, particularly for 21st Christians are “Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.” (1 Timothy 2.11-12) How is one to reconcile this statement with life in a very egalitarian culture like 21st century America? How does one even reconcile it with Paul’s affirmation of Priscilla’s leadership – and teaching influence over Apollos, another leader in the church?

The best explanation is to see both of these within the context of mission. Remember, nothing was more important to Paul than the mission of the proclamation of Christ (Philippians 1.18). On one hand, Paul affirmed how the work of Priscilla furthered the work of the kingdom through Apollos. But, the public teaching by women might have hampered the work of the gospel in a thoroughly patriarchal society. The admonition of 1 Timothy 2.11-12 is addressing two contexts: public worship and patriarchal society. It would have been a scandal for the Jews as well as members of the Ephesians society to enter a public place and be taught by a woman. Rather than causing a scandal that would detract from the mission of God to proclaim new life and new relationship in Jesus Christ, Paul admonished women not to teach publicly.

The question that then follows is this: Is this addressed just to the church and context of Ephesus or is this a universal – for all time and in all places – admonition? It would seem, based upon other places where Paul affirms the role of women in leadership that he meant the *specific* prohibition for this particular time and place. Yet, this is not to deny the universal application of Scripture. For, Paul’s teaching remains applicable today. More specifically, the enduring principle he taught in 1 Timothy remains applicable today: Worship should be done in an orderly way so that the teaching of God’s Word will not be preempted by disruptions. We need to dig a little deeper into 1 Timothy 2 to see this more clearly.

In Paul's day, the proper way for any novice disciple to learn from his teacher was submissively and quietly. Historically, women were precluded from corporate worship and even from *learning* in the synagogues. Instead, they were to be taught by their husbands or fathers. With Jesus, and with Paul, women were not only permitted to learn and to participate in worship but were instructed to do so. Though virtually all women were still novice disciples, a growing number of women in Ephesus were overstepping their newfound status as disciples and presuming to have an equal or superior understanding of the faith as those men who had long studied the Scriptures and better understood the Christian faith. As a result, these women were being easily deceived into improper understandings of the faith, leading to disruptions in the worship service as well as the spread of heresy in Ephesus through the teaching of ignorant teachers. Also, the wider culture would consider it scandalous if women were leading and teaching men. The culture was so patriarchal that this fledgling Jesus movement (still a tiny minority in the Roman empire) would be crippled in its efforts to proclaim the gospel if women were allowed to teach.

So, because of the danger of novice women disciples teaching in public worship and because of the surrounding patriarchal society which would flatly reject the gospel if women held teaching positions, Paul does not permit women to teach in the early church. The long-range solution Paul likely has in mind (given his demonstrated openness to women in positions of leadership in other New Testament passages) is that women must learn the way of faith so that, perhaps one day, they might not be precluded from teaching.

To be sure, there are other difficult passages within 1 Timothy 2. In verses 13-14, Paul refers back to Genesis 2 which depicts Eve being deceived (not Adam) and notes that Adam was formed first. Some see these verses as revealing that Paul thought women are to be submitted to men because of innate differences. Others see Paul's reference to Genesis 2 as indicating that Eve was easily deceived because she came along later and had not received instruction directly from God, suggesting that if Eve could have received proper instruction she would not have been deceived. Faithful Christians disagree on how to interpret verses 13-14. However, even if Paul is intending in these verses to teach some innate differences between men and women, the best interpretation (in light of 1 Timothy 2 and the rest of Paul's teachings) is not that women are to be precluded permanently from teaching but rather that women are to be under the covering of male headship.

Is also instructive to note that those who see 1 Timothy 2 as precluding women from teaching roles also tend to claim that they are interpreting Scripture “literally” and to imply that those who disagree with them are rejecting the authority of Scripture. However, very few if any of those people would say that Paul’s *specific* prohibitions in 1 Timothy 2.9 against braided hair or wearing gold, pearls, or expensive clothing still applies today. They would say Paul was teaching a *general* principle, that women should not be like notorious women or be a distraction to men in worship (or other times). Also, few would hold that women are literally saved through childbirth (1 Timothy 2.15, continuing the reference to Eve in Genesis 3), even though they read the other references to Genesis (i.e., 1 Timothy 2.13-14) in a more literal sense. In other words, those who claim to read Scripture “literally” do *not always* read it in that same “literal” manner.

Furthermore, and more importantly, we ourselves are claiming to read Scripture “literally”, though by that term we mean “according to the author’s intended meaning as best evidenced from a full understanding of the context of the passage, the usage of language, the literary structure, and other literary aspects of the passage.” Far too often, those who seek to interpret Scripture “literally” in the sense we describe are accused of abandoning the authority of Scripture by those (1) do not do their homework or (2) think they *individually* can interpret Scripture without the input of others (even when other faithful Christians disagree with their interpretation). So often, those who claim a “literal” interpretation of Scripture (as against those who disagree with them) are really *not* reading Scripture literally but rather from the standpoint of ignorance about the true literary structure and cultural context of the passage. Of course, faithful Christians who read Scripture literally in the truest sense of that word do come to different conclusions than we do, and this is why we remain submitted to the process of reception on this matter. However, those who disagree with us based on a false sense of literal interpretation need to understand the mistakes they are making.

Not all Scriptural passages relevant to women’s ordination can be treated in this paper with the same kind of detail as we have treated 1 Timothy 2 (and, indeed, there is much more that we could have said about that passage). We can only mention that when 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 (two other frequently cited passages from the Pauline corpus) are interpreted literally in the proper sense of that word, they are best understood as not precluding women from ordained ministry. We refer the reader to the AMiA report (referenced at the end of this paper) for a more in-depth consideration of these and other passages from the Pauline corpus and remind the reader that Paul’s teachings are best understood in light of his missionary emphasis.

V. The Order of Headship

In addressing issues of women and men, in the family relationship and in relationships in the church, Paul continually balances mission and order. Paul sees an order of relationship in the first couple, Adam and Eve. “Adam was formed first, then Eve” (I Timothy 2.13). This is affirmed in his discussion of familial relationships in Ephesians 5. “For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior” (Ephesians 5.23). In these verses are found orders of headship. Christ first, then the husband, and then the wife.

If there is any institution that closely mirrors the family, it is the church. In fact, Paul uses the metaphor of family in Romans, Galatians and Ephesians to describe the relationship believers have with God the Father. For example, he writes to the Romans, “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons [and daughters] of God...but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons [and daughters], by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Romans 8.14-15). Therefore, we contend that as God’s family the church has the same ordering of headship as the human family: Christ first, then men, then women.

We certainly understand the view of many faithful Christians that Paul’s teaching on male headship in families and in the church is best understood as culturally conditioned (i.e., applicable in patriarchal cultures but not in egalitarian ones such as ours). However, we are not convinced by arguments supporting this view and in fact see strong arguments in favor of the view that Paul’s teaching on male headship is applicable in every culture and is, therefore, transcultural. Indeed, we have consistently taught that male headship in marriages is a blessing to those spouses who practice it and to their children; when it is forsaken, we believe (and we hold that Scripture teaches) marriages and families suffer. However, it must be remembered that this headship takes place under the command of mutual submission in Christ (Ephesians 5:21). Headship is not “rulership.” It is mutual love and care given by God to husband and wife as well as the church.

Even though some see less scriptural support for male headship in the Church than they see for male headship in marriages, as we discussed above the church is the only institution in Scripture likened to the family. Therefore, we take the position that male headship as seen in the family should continue to be practiced in the Church. We do not believe that our culture would view a “male bishop only” position with nearly as much hostility as the “no women in ordained ministry” position. We do not think this position of headship is a significant barrier to the gospel, at least not currently. However, even if our position would create a significant barrier to the gospel, we are not convinced that the traditional view

(i.e., that Scripture requires male headship in the Church) is culturally conditioned (i.e., limited to patriarchal cultures). Therefore it is not subject to change even in the event it becomes a significant obstacle to the gospel. Instead, we see close scriptural parallels between headship in marriage and in the Church, and we are not convinced that the two issues can be separated.

We believe that there is to be order to the missional ministry of the church. While Paul affirms the role of women in leadership and teaching ministry within the church, he also affirms that these gifts are to be practiced in the context of order. This structure is affirmed in the Anglican system of bishops, priests, and deacons. In our understanding and practice of church structure and authority, the bishop is the head of each local congregation. Any priest there, rector or assistant, male or female, is operating on the bishop's behalf, and under his authority. The Anglican Church in North America affirms the Pauline order of male headship, while also recognizing Paul's affirmation of the gifting of women in pastoral roles of preaching and teaching. ACNA rules of order allow only men to serve in the position of bishop, while affirming that men and women can hold the pastoral offices of priest and deacon.

VI. Living With Differences

One of the realities of the church is that while it is a holy institution, it is also a human institution. And while we serve a God who is all-knowing and wise, we are creatures who are limited in our understanding and scope of knowledge. We trust that we, through the power of the Spirit, are able to discern God's Word as is best for our life of love and service to Him and the people God places in our life. However, even in our pursuit of God's truth we will sometimes find ourselves coming to differing conclusions as to what that truth is. And so the question arises, how do we faithfully live out Christ's command to "love one another as He has loved us"(John 15.12) in the context of differing opinion?

The first is by adopting the spirit of humility that Christ himself had. Paul reminds us that Jesus Christ humbled himself by taking on human flesh and going to the cross in obedience to God his Father (Philippians 2:5-11). Following his example, we as his followers are to live in unity and humility before our brothers and sisters, not assuming that our beliefs or agenda trumps that of another person in the family of God (Philippians 2.1-4). At the end of this letter, Paul affirms this again in urging Euodia and Syntyche to find a place of unity in whatever disagreement they were having (Philippians 4.2). The church is a family, and we must learn to live together under the same roof.

When coming to an issue like women's ordination, we must accept the fact that there will be differing opinions from people who are equally faithful to God and equally committed to the truth and authority of His word. So what are we to do? Heeding the word of James is an excellent place to start: "...Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God" (James 1.19-20). Scripture clearly teaches that we should listen first, and truly seek to understand another person's position. Then as we speak and dialog about our understanding of these issues, we don't let personal passion lead to anger. Rather we always seek to be in right relationship to God and our brothers and sisters in Christ.

VII. Frequently Voiced Questions and Objections

Question 1: Wouldn't a literal interpretation of the passages of Scripture that say a woman shall not speak in corporate worship (i.e., in 1 Corinthians 14 and in 1 Timothy 2) require that women never serve as ordained priests? How can we claim to be a Bible believing congregation if we do not read Scripture literally?

Answer: What often passes today as a "literal" interpretation of Scripture is instead the farthest thing from a literal interpretation. That is, reading a passage of Scripture the way the author intended it to be read requires that the reader first understand the literary aspects surrounding the author's writing, including the structure of the passage, the meanings of the words in the author's context and how the author himself used them, the author's overall purpose in the passages as it connects to surrounding passages, the facts and assumptions that shaped how the initial recipients of the author's writing perceived the world, etc. If the reader does not understand these literary aspects of the passage but instead simply presumes his own immediate impressions about the meaning of the passage are what the author intended, the reader has simply *not* read the Bible literally. Instead, it is to read Scripture as if it contained no literary aspects at all, but nothing could be further from the truth.

Taking into account the literary aspects of these passages, the best scholarship shows that they are to be understood as Paul's instruction to a particular people, in a particular place and time, answering an issue that was particular to them. They are not addressing the appropriateness for all times and places of women speaking in corporate worship but rather only the appropriateness for that particular time and place. Ignoring the literary aspects of the passages – that is, failing to read them literally – has led many to see these passages as giving transcultural prohibitions on

women's ordination. Of course, there are some who do attempt take into account the literary aspects of these passages and yet still conclude the passages teach timeless prohibitions. We respectfully disagree with those persons and hold that the better scholarship shows the opposite. Most importantly to the question here, we certainly have taken into account the literary aspects of these passages in our earnest attempt to read them literally.

The worst mistakes are made when people fail to read the passages literally (i.e., taking into account literary aspects), all the while accusing those who have done the homework of failing to read Scripture literally.

So, if a careful study of the literary aspects of the passages reveals that Paul's intent was to teach a prohibition that is to apply *only* to his audience and others in similar situations (and not to every people, in every place and time, regardless of the issues that confront them), then to presume the prohibition applies to every people in every place and time is to misread Scripture. Instead, the better practice is to understand what Paul is saying to his audience in their particular context and *then* to determine how it applies to our own context. If our context is vastly different than theirs, then the principles at work in the passage may be applied in a different form in our context, or they might not even be applicable to our context. To those who have not done the hard work of trying to understand the literary aspects of these passages, we invite them to do so before drawing conclusions about what counts as reading Scripture literally.

Question 2: If one opens the door to women in ordained ministry, isn't that taking a step down a slippery slope that allows one to make Scripture say whatever one wants it to say?

Answer: The mission-oriented approach to women's ordination does not enable one to make Scripture say whatever he wants it to say.

The surest way to go astray doctrinally is to "summarize" Christianity into broad themes and then apply them as you wish, as opposed to doing the hard work of looking at the details of what Scripture teaches.

For example, some have "summarized" Christianity as being about "love" and "freedom from oppression" and then continued to define what counts as "love" and what counts as "freedom

from oppression” based not on what the Bible has to say about those topics but rather based on their own notions of those concepts as suggested by their own cultures. Thus, the gospel is perverted into a message about women’s equality, increased rights for homosexuals, and other cultural-political causes since these are judged to be the “loving” thing to do and as leading to “freedom from oppression”. It is along these lines of thought that many have argued for the ordination of women, the ordination of practicing homosexuals, same sex marriages, and the like. Ignoring the detailed teachings of Scripture and instead “summarizing” the gospel with broad strokes is the formula for making Scripture say whatever one wants it to say.

However, while the gospel is about love and freedom from oppression, Scripture fills in the details for us. Only when we do the hard work of seeking to understand these details are we able to arrive at scripturally based ideas of love, freedom from oppression, and other themes related to the gospel.

The Bible always and specifically condemns homosexual practice as immoral (i.e., applicable in all cultures). Therefore, broad notions of “love”, “equality”, and “liberation” cannot be applied as to overcome specific condemned activities such as homosexual practice.

Instead of painting with broad strokes, we have paid attention to the details of what Scripture teaches, seeking to be obedient to those teachings. Our arguments in favor of ordaining women are driven by the scripturally mandated mission-oriented approach which attempts to eliminate obstacles to the reception of the gospel only when and to the extent permitted by the detailed teachings of Scripture. The detailed arguments we make in support of our position on the ordination of women have nothing to do with the “broad stroke” arguments others have made in favor of equality, liberation, and the like.

So, because Scripture always and specifically condemns homosexual practice as immoral, the mission-oriented approach would never allow for the ordination of practicing homosexuals or for the Church’s endorsement and blessing of same sex marriages.

As discussed above, Scripture’s detailed teachings on women in ministry are more complex and do require a much more elaborate examination by the Church as a whole. Our position on women in ministry reflects our best attempt to be faithful both to the express teachings in Scripture on

women in ministry and to the scripturally mandated mission-oriented approach to what we teach and practice.

Question 3: Isn't it significant that Jesus appointed 12 men as his apostles and that the apostles only appointed men to ordained ministry?

Answer: Determining someone's intentions or beliefs based solely on his actions can often be problematic, as is the case here. Isn't it just as likely that Jesus and the apostles were merely attempting to accommodate the message of the gospel to their own, patriarchal culture as much as possible in order not to avoid unnecessary barriers to acceptance of the gospel (i.e., taking the mission-oriented approach we have taken)? Given that Paul expressly teaches the mission-oriented approach in 1 Corinthians 9:22 and 10:23, it seems that a desire to avoid unnecessary barriers to the gospel may be even *more* likely the intention of Jesus and the apostles in ordaining only men. In any event, citing the actions of Jesus and the apostles to ordain only men without citing any teaching by Jesus or the apostles explaining why they did not ordain women does not really add anything to the debate.

We hold that the best way to understand Christ's will with respect to His actions and example is to carefully study what the apostles *taught* as contained in Scripture since the apostles would not have taught anything contrary to what Jesus intended. To rely on speculation about what Christ's actions *must* have revealed about his thoughts, without attempting to coordinate that speculation with, and subject it to, the scriptural teachings of the apostles, is effectively to make the mistake of giving more weight to tradition than to Scripture. And, even worse, it allows our biases (including those inherited through tradition) to color how we see and understand Christ's actions. So, those who simply recoil at the idea of women in ordained ministry may be attracted to an argument allegedly based solely on tradition, though it may simply be their biases in action. The better course is to carefully subject our speculations and traditions about Christ's example to the teachings contained in Scripture, which alone is trustworthy and free from error.

Question 4: If for almost 2,000 years the Church has held to the view that only men can be ordained to ministry, who are we to think we can change this?

Answer: The continued practice of the Church over the centuries of only ordaining men says very little about what those early Church leaders would do if faced with the task of proclaiming

the gospel in North America today. Since our American culture (and indeed many Western cultures) over the last forty years has, for the first time in all of history, held such a great concern for women's equality, we simply do not have a clear precedent in Church history dealing with how we ought to think about women's ordination. Simply repeating the practice of ordaining only men may be misguided and out of step with the long-standing approach to proclaiming the gospel to be found in Paul, among missionaries, and in our Anglican tradition.

The mission-oriented approach tells us that, confronted by such a culture as ours, we should seek to ordain women as ministers in order to avoid unnecessarily offending those in our culture unless Scripture (not tradition) tells us otherwise. To see our stance as presumptuous is to miss entirely what we are attempting to do. We are not sitting in judgment over what our tradition has delivered to us, as if we know better than they do. Instead, we are simply recognizing that our mandate to proclaim the gospel, which our tradition has so faithfully handed down to us, requires us to reconsider the other practices and teachings (i.e., regarding women's ordination) that were also handed down to us by those same faithful Church leaders. We can only guess what those earlier Church leaders would do in our situation, but we have no doubt, based on their manifest faithfulness, that they would uphold the proclamation of the gospel as more important than a preservation of tradition for tradition's sake. Rather than presuming we are right and they are wrong, we are merely attempting to follow their good example as we seek to engage our own culture with the gospel.

Question 5: Isn't the priest considered to be an icon of Christ during the Eucharist, serving to represent Christ to the congregation (not just to represent the congregation before Christ)? As an icon of Christ, doesn't the priest have to be a man just as Christ was a man?

Answer: We certainly understand this view from sacramental theology, though we do not share it. Instead, we understand the priest to be a servant of Christ Who is Himself present as the Host at the Table. So, the priest does not represent Christ and does not offer the Eucharist; instead, the priest presides over the congregation's celebration of the Eucharist with Christ Himself being present. Therefore, because we do not believe that the priest is an icon of Christ, we also do not believe that this argument against women serving as priests carries much weight.

Even if we were to hold the traditional view that the priest is an icon of Christ during the Eucharist, it is not obvious that the priest would therefore have to be a man in order properly to represent Christ to the congregation. It is not Christ's *maleness* that matters to His work on the cross but rather his *humanity* that matters. Indeed, if it were His maleness that mattered, then his death on the cross could only be effective for men. Instead, the Christian faith holds that Christ can represent us before the Father precisely because he took on our *human* nature. Certainly, that Christ was male is not entirely irrelevant, but it is irrelevant as to the power of the cross. Christ's *humanity*, not his *maleness*, is what would be relevant during the Eucharist under the view the priest is the icon of Christ at that time. That being the case, a woman, as much as a man, is fully able to represent Christ's humanity. Indeed, many have argued that it would be preferable to have both men and women representing Christ's humanity during the Eucharist since that would more clearly represent Christ's humanity. What mattered on the cross is Christ's humanity, the one human nature common to men and women alike.

But, even if one holds the traditional view that the priest is an icon of Christ and yet rejects our notion that Christ's humanity (and not His maleness) is what is represented during the Eucharist, we still think this objection does not change our position. For, sacramental theology, though traceable to Scripture, is not expressly taught by Scripture and instead comes from a later development. Whatever truth we may claim in traditional teachings and practices, ultimately the express teachings of Scripture must outweigh our claims. Because Paul expressly and clearly teaches that we are to take a mission-oriented approach to our teachings and practices, even our long-held sacramental theology must be subject to reconsideration when it appears to support positions that would pose significant barriers to the gospel's reception in a culture.

Question 6: God has ordered all things in creation wisely and for our good, and part of that order is that man is to be the head of the family and men are to be elders (presbyters) or priests in the wider family of the Church. Wouldn't ordaining women as deacons and priests be a disruption of this order, even if male bishops are heads over them?

Answer: We most certainly affirm the idea that God has ordered all things in creation wisely and for our good and that to go against God's ordering is foolish, disobedient, and harmful to ourselves and to others. We also affirm the notion that man is to be head of the family, though

headship is not to be understood as domination or a position of power but rather as a source of spiritual leadership. Nevertheless, arguments based on the order of creation (i.e., based on the nature of things) can quite problematic for several reasons.

First, there is the problem of distinguishing between the *created* order of things and the *fallen* order of things. When looking at the way things are, we must remember that *everything* in the created order has been tainted by sin to some degree or another. Telling the difference between the created and the fallen aspects of nature can be quite difficult. That difficulty is made worse by the fact that we ourselves have been tainted by sin, and our ability to see things clearly is often dampened by that sin. So, if we are relying on our own experiences or our own reasoning to try and determine what constitutes the created order, we are working with a fallen nature that can negatively impact our experience and reasoning and seeking to apply it to a task that is already difficult in itself.

Furthermore, Scripture has been used to support arguments about women's ordination both as being consistent with the created order or a violation of it. Thus, some have argued that women were created as fully equal with men and only "subjugated" to their leadership as a consequence of the Fall. Others have argued that women were created as helpers of men who are, by God's design, supposed to lead them and that the Fall merely tainted that relationship by causing women to rebel against male leadership and men to abuse that leadership. Those who make these kinds of arguments from Scripture, whether for or against women's ordination, are attempting to discern from Scripture what is *implied* by it, not what is being *expressly* taught by it.

Yet, arguments made from what is *implied* in Scripture are generally very flimsy, particularly when so much is at stake as in the case of women's ordination. Such arguments are even less convincing when made in support of one's views about the created order given the problem of trying to distinguish between the created and the fallen order of things and the impact of sin on our ability to see things clearly.

Simply put arguments about what is *implied* in Scripture regarding the created order of things are among the weakest arguments that can be made, and perhaps the most dangers to the mission of the Church. We need not look any farther than our own American history to see how weak and how dangerous such arguments can be. Indeed, such arguments based on what is implied in

Scripture and on one's own experience and reasoning were used to justify American slavery, even though Christians universally reject the idea of slavery today:

“[Slavery] was established by decree of Almighty God...it is sanctioned in the Bible, in both Testaments, from Genesis to Revelation...it has existed in all ages, has been found among the people of the highest civilization, and in nations of the highest proficiency in the arts.” Jefferson Davis, President, Confederate States of America.

Arguments about the “order” intended by God and the “disorder” that results when we choose our own way should be limited to what Scripture *expressly* teaches. There is very little *expressly* taught in Scripture regarding the created order as it applies to the issue of women's ordination (indeed, we can only find such express teaching where Scripture talks about male “headship”). We will do best if we avoid other arguments based on the alleged created order of things.

Question 7: Doesn't a policy of ordaining women threaten the unity of the Church, both within Anglicanism itself and with other denominations?

Answer: The canons of ACNA have expressly allowed for differing groups to adopt differing policies with respect to women's ordination. We believe this allowance for differing views is not merely a practical stance aimed at preserving unity but rather is reflective of the process of reception of women's ordination within Anglicanism. We also believe it is compatible with the mission-oriented approach we are following because it allows local churches to adapt their teachings and practices in the manner they determine best suited to the proclamation of the gospel within the local culture, as long as those adaptations do not contradict the teachings of Scripture.

The approach taken by ACNA is therefore consistent with the principles of Anglicanism. So, if our policy of ordaining women threatens the unity of the Church, it only does so because Anglicanism itself does so. However, we believe that neither our policy on women's ordination nor the principles of Anglicanism on which it is based threaten the unity of the Church. Instead, the principles of Anglicanism are a great benefit to the unity of the Church since they promote and help enable a faithful, corporate, coordinated approach to preserving the Christian faith in every culture Christianity encounters.

We are keenly aware that the Roman Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodoxy hold women's ordination of any kind to be a threat to visible unity with those churches. While we do not take

their concerns or arguments lightly, our highest duty is to attempt faithfully to uphold the teachings of Scriptures even when other Christians might disagree with our conclusions. Indeed, this duty is not only to God but also to those other Christians with whom we disagree – we owe them our testimony regarding what we take to be the teachings of Scripture, even if they may disagree or may conclude that our position impairs their ability to be in unity with us. As we have argued, the mandate from Scripture to adapt our proclamation of the gospel to the cultures in which we exist compels us to reconsider the traditional teachings on women in ministry. Because of our duty to God and to our fellow Christians, we must take this course of action and can only trust that our fellow Christians will recognize our attempts to be faithful to God and to them.

VIII. For Further Reading

Listed below are resources that have been helpful in exploring this issue. Some support our position, some disagree, and some go further by opening up all orders to women. Yet all are examples of faithful Christians seeking to wrestle with Scripture to come to a conclusion regarding women's ordination.

Discovering Biblical Equality, ed. Ronald Pierce, Rebecca Groothuis, and Gordon Fee
Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth, Wayne Grudem

Finally Feminist, John G. Stackhouse, Jr.

Men and Women in the Church, Sarah Sumner

Paul, Women, and Wives, Craig Keener

Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals, William J. Webb

Two Views on Women in Ministry, ed. James Beck and Craig Blomberg

Women in the Church, Stanley Grenz

Women in the Church's Ministry, the Rev. R.T. France

Women Leaders in the Church, Linda Belleville

The Blue Parakeet, Scott McNight

A Report of the Study Concerning the Ordination of Women Undertaken by the Anglican Mission in America, ed. The Rt. Rev. John H. Rodgers, Chair of the Women's Ordination Study Team