

Christ's Male Sexuality and Acting *In Persona Christi*: A New Argument in Favor of the All-Male Priesthood

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“One must be allowed to think about and discuss the issues. . . . [And on the issue of women’s ordination] the discussion is still with us, it is still alive, and cannot be stifled [*ersticken*] by a paper [*ein Papier*].” So declares Archbishop Stefan Hesse of Hamburg, Germany, in the summer of 2020, where “a paper” refers to an apostolic letter, Pope St. John Paul II’s 1994 *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, which definitively rules out the admissibility of women to priestly ordination.¹ No doubt the archbishop was drawing inspiration from Cardinal Archbishop Reinhard Marx of Munich and Freising, who a month earlier had opined that arguments against women’s ordination were becoming increasingly “weaker” (*schwächer*).² In his capacity as president of the German bishops’ conference, Bishop Georg Bätzing

¹ As originally reported on the German website Domradio.de, August 20, 2020 (domradio.de/themen/reformen/2020-08-20/die-historische-perspektive-ist-nicht-alles-erzbischof-hesse-zur-debatte-ueber-frauenweihe), with English reporting by Colleen Dulle, “German Archbishop Calls for Open Debate about Women Priests in the Catholic Church,” *America Magazine*, August 20, 2020 (americamagazine.org/faith/2020/08/20/german-archbishop-debate-women-priests-deacons-catholic). As things would turn out, this same Archbishop Hesse offered his resignation less than a year later (in March of 2021) after a report faulted him for how he handled sexual abuse allegations when he was a high-ranking official in the archdiocese of Cologne. In response, Pope Francis granted Hesse a “time out” rather than accept his resignation. Unless otherwise noted, translations in the present article are my own.

² See the original reporting on the German website Domradio.de, July 10, 2020, domradio.de/themen/reformen/2020-07-10/kardinal-marx-zu-frauen-und-reformen.

of Limburg also pronounced on the issue in even more unabated terms; after insisting in June of the same year that Catholics can “continue to talk about the issue of women’s ordination,” he went further in an interview with the German magazine *Herder Korrespondenz* six months later: “There are well-developed arguments in theology in favor of opening up the sacramental ministry to women,” he asserted, after declaring his desire for “change” (*Veränderung*), a change that he opined could begin with ordaining women as deacons before ordaining them as priests and bishops.³ Two years later, Bätzing remained adamant, going so far as to declare to speak in the name of the faith of the entire Church on this issue: “The *sensus fidelium*, that is, the sense of the faithful,” he stated, “has moved on” (*geht weiter*).⁴ Since the deposit of faith, of which the *sensus fidelium* is expressive, does not and cannot “move on,” that is, change, Bätzing’s appeal to the *sensus fidelium* marks a curious—if also audacious—move, to say the least.

It appears we are destined ever “to think about and discuss” the issue of women’s ordination, no matter if the Holy Father himself, in the person of the John Paul II, should seek to quell this discussion in the strongest and most authoritative of terms: “In order that all doubt be removed regarding [this] matter,” writes the Polish Pontiff, “I declare that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church’s faithful” (*Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* §4).

As regards John Paul II’s assertion that his judgment is to be “definitively held” by all Catholics, it is worth recalling that, even if one high-ranking German churchman (Hesse) might esteem *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* as

³ See Stefan Orth and Volker Resing, “‘Ich will Veränderung’: Ein Gespräch mit dem DBK-Vorsitzenden Georg Bätzing,” *Herder Korrespondenz*, December 29, 2020 (herder.de/hk/hefte/archiv/2021/1-2021/ich-will-veraenderung-ein-gespraech-mit-dem-dbk-vorsitzenden-georg-baetzing/); for the English reporting on this, see Jack Jenkins, “Top German Catholic Bishop Urges Shift on Women’s Ordination, Homosexuality,” *Religion News Service*, December 29, 2020 (religionnews.com/2020/12/29/top-german-catholic-bishop-urges-shift-on-womens-ordination-homosexuality/). As for Bishop Bätzing’s remark earlier in June of the same year, see the reporting on this (in English) by Elise Ann Allen, “New Leader of German Bishops Signals No Retreat from Progressive Line,” *Crux*, June 16, 2020 (cruxnow.com/church-in-europe/2020/06/new-leader-of-german-bishops-signals-no-retreat-from-progressive-line/).

⁴ See Christiane Florin, “Ich gebe zu, ja, der Papst enttäuscht mich auch,” *CNA Deutsch*, May 22, 2022 (deutschlandfunk.de/interview-der-woche-georg-baetzing-bischof-limburg-kirche-papst-vatikan-synodaler-weg-100.html); for the English reporting on this, see “German Bishops’ Leader Expresses Disappointment in Pope Francis,” *Catholic News Agency*, May 24, 2022, catholicnewsagency.com/news/251345/german-catholic-bishops-leader-expresses-disappointment-in-pope-francis.

tantamount to *ein Papier das erstickt*, “a paper that stifles,” another, Joseph Ratzinger (in his role as cardinal prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith [CDF], before becoming Pope Benedict XVI), holds up John Paul II’s apostolic letter as expressive of the infallible teaching of the Church’s ordinary magisterium and as “belonging to the deposit of faith.” As such, the letter requires all Catholics, asserts Ratzinger, to offer their “definitive assent” to the Holy Father’s pronouncement.⁵

John Paul II and Ratzinger may as well have been talking to the wind. If Archbishop Hesse and his disparaging attitude—dismissing a papal apostolic letter as a paper that “stifles”—serves to indicate what “definitive assent” looks like, and if Bishop Bätzing can find that the deposit of faith (represented by the *sensus fidelium*), particularly as it concerns women’s ordination, is able to “move on,” it is no wonder that we find the issue “still alive.” And recall Hesse and Bätzing hardly stand alone among German prelates in their willingness to ignore *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, as Cardinal Marx and the much touted German “synodal way” show (the archbishop of Luxembourg, Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, could also be added to the list).⁶ Further, when Hesse asserts, “one must be allowed to think about and discuss [women’s ordination],” there is little doubt that, for him and those who share his view, such thought and discussion go in one direction, especially when coupled with Marx’s contention that merely “weak” arguments support the ban and with Bätzing’s claim that “well-developed arguments in theology” favor women’s ordination. To oppose women’s ordination is, quite plainly, to oppose proper theological reflection. Indeed, for Bätzing, it is to oppose the *sensus fidelium*. “Thinking about and discussing” the possibility of women’s ordination will end, it would seem, only when women at last receive the laying on of hands.

With the foregoing in mind and complementing the excellent work on this topic by the theologian Sara Butler, I propose in this essay to put to the test the two claims that merely “weak” arguments stand in the way of women’s

⁵ “This teaching [expressed in *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*] requires definitive assent, since . . . it has been set forth infallibly by the ordinary and universal Magisterium, . . . [and thus as] belonging to the deposit of faith” (Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “*Responsum ad Propositum Dubium Concerning the Teaching Contained in Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*,” October 28, 1995).

⁶ Cardinal Hollerich, who is also president of the Commission of the Episcopal Conferences of the European Union (COMECE), declared in the same summer of 2020 that he was “open” (*offen*) to the idea of women’s ordination; see the September 13, 2020 interview with him on the German website Domradio.de, domradio.de/themen/papst-franziskus/2020-09-13/papst-franziskus-ist-nicht-frustriert-kardinal-hollerich-ueber-papst-migration-und-den-synodalen-weg.

ordination and that “well-developed arguments in theology” favor the opening of holy orders to women.⁷ It is the contention of this essay that sound theological argument falls instead on the side of the all-male priesthood, thereby bolstering what John Paul II maintains in *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*. Turning to the topic of Christ’s male sexuality, I argue specifically that, when acting *in persona Christi* at the time he confects the Eucharist, the priest identifies himself essentially, albeit implicitly, with Christ’s maleness. Maleness is of absolute or essential necessity for the ministerial priesthood by the wise institution of Christ, so that the minister may fitly or suitably (*convenienter*) represent Christ. This suitability is linked to the Incarnation itself, so that to affirm the all-male priesthood is at bottom to affirm the Incarnation in its full concrete reality.

It must be stressed at the outset: upholding the all-male priesthood is to affirm nothing negative, inferior, or denigrating about women.⁸ It is merely to aver that Christ became a man and not a woman, since to be human one must be one or the other, and that his male-structured sexuality remains integral to his full humanity—and by extension integral to the ministerial priesthood. In the final analysis, then, to favor women’s ordination is to fall prey, at least implicitly, to a docetic-leaning Christological error, one that favors an undifferentiated humanity in Christ.

My argument proceeds in three steps. First, since discussion of the all-male priesthood faces—nearly without fail—the objection that, by excluding women from the circle of the Twelve (and thereby from the ministerial priesthood), Jesus was merely acting in accord with the customs and patriarchal fetters of first-century Judaism, I give a succinct overview of the textual evidence by way of counterargument to this objection. As I attempt to show, the cultural argument—that Jesus was simply conforming to the cultural mentality of his day in choosing only male apostles—proves facile and unsatisfactory, unfounded even, begging for a deeper theological reason for Jesus’s exclusion of women from the Twelve. Second, I move towards this deeper theological account by examining, in a compendious manner, what I suggest provides the theological foundation for the all-male priesthood:

⁷ Sara Butler treats the topic more comprehensively in *The Catholic Priesthood and Women: A Guide to the Teaching of the Church* (Chicago: Hillenbrand, 2007); for a more abbreviated treatment, see her “Embodied Ecclesiology: Church Teaching on the Priesthood,” in *Women, Sex, and the Church: A Case for Catholic Teaching*, ed. Erika Bachiocchi (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2010), 143–59. See also Guy Mansini, “On Affirming Dominican Intention of a Male Priesthood,” *The Thomist* 61, no. 2 (1997): 301–16.

⁸ For extensive treatment of this side of the issue, see Butler, *Catholic Priesthood*, 44–47.

Jesus's maleness and the essential role it plays in his full humanity. In a third speculative move, I show how Jesus's maleness bears on the ministerial priesthood, particularly as regards its defining action, that of acting *in persona Christi* when confecting the Eucharist, and that this necessitates an all-male priesthood. Throughout this essay I draw upon the principles and thought of St. Thomas Aquinas, even if the Common Doctor nowhere makes the argument presented here.

Jesus's Counter-Cultural Treatment of Women as Equal in Dignity to Men

In calling only men as his Apostles, Christ acted in a completely free and sovereign manner. In doing so, he exercised the same freedom with which, in all his behavior, he emphasized the dignity and the vocation of women, without conforming to the prevailing customs and to the traditions sanctioned by the legislation of the time. Consequently, the assumption that he called men to be apostles in order to conform with the widespread mentality of his times, does not at all correspond to Christ's way of acting.

Thus asserts John Paul II in §26 of his 1988 *Mulieris Dignitatem*, Apostolic Letter on the Dignity and Vocation of Women, and reiterates six years later by citing that passage in §2 of his *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*.⁹ The textual evidence unambiguously bears out the Polish Pontiff's claim. To show this, we need first to consider the customs and the legislative traditions—or at least some of them, and that by way of rapid overview—to which John Paul alludes. Many of these are well known.

"Who Has Not Created Me a Woman"

Epitomizing the regard for women in the Judaism of Jesus's time is the prayer that Jewish men would commonly recite at the beginning of the day, and which we find recorded in the Talmud (the set of rabbinic teachings and commentaries on the Torah, much of which goes back to the second century AD and which forms the basis of Jewish law): "Blessed are you, Lord, our

⁹ Here the Polish Pontiff reiterates the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's 1976 *Inter Insignores*, Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood, §2: "If [Jesus] acted in this way [by choosing only male apostles], it was not in order to conform to the customs of his time, for his attitude towards women was quite different from that of his milieu, and he deliberately and courageously broke with it."

God, ruler of the universe, who has not created me a woman.”¹⁰ Consistent with this prayer, the Talmud also instructs Jewish men to pray for a male child upon learning that their wives are pregnant.¹¹

In the matter of intellectual aptitude, particularly in view of rabbinical instruction, women were deemed unfit for this: “women are of light mind,” asserts the Talmud.¹² To be fair, the Talmud does praise the intellectual talents of a certain Beruriah, a rabbi’s wife who, as the Talmud puts it, “was so sharp and had such a good memory that she learned three hundred *halakhot* [laws] in one day from three hundred Sages.”¹³ Yet Beruriah seems clearly to have marked the exception rather than the rule, since women were otherwise prohibited from becoming disciples of Jewish rabbis and were excluded from learning the Torah: “You shall teach Torah . . . to your sons, but not your daughters,” the Talmud instructs.¹⁴ Not to study under the rabbis themselves, women should instead support their *husbands’* rabbinical education, as the Talmud details when it enumerates how women bring honor upon themselves:

Women merit [their reward] . . . for bringing their children to read the Torah in the synagogue, and for sending their husbands to study mishna in the study hall [i.e., to study in the schools of the rabbis], and for waiting for their husbands until they return from the study hall.¹⁵

Consistent with the Talmud’s insistence that the female sex occupies a separate human category altogether (“women are a people unto themselves”), women were confined to their own court outside the ancient Temple in

¹⁰ The prayer, the full version of which expresses gratitude to God for not being made a gentile, a woman, or a slave/ignoramus, is found in b. Menachot 43b (“b.” designates the Babylonian Talmud, as opposed to the Jerusalem Talmud [“y.”], and 43b specifies the folio page number and side within the tractate call Menachot in b.); available online at Sefaria, sefaria.org/Menachot.43b. For a tracing of the history of this (and other) Jewish prayers, see Yoel Kahn, *The Three Blessings: Boundaries, Censorship, and Identity in Jewish Liturgy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹¹ See b. Berakhot 60a: “From the third day [after sexual relations] until the fortieth, one should pray that it [the fetus] will be male” (sefaria.org/Berakhot.60a).

¹² The citation is from b. K/Qiddushin 80b (sefaria.org/Kiddushin.80b).

¹³ Quotation from b. Pesachim 62b (sefaria.org/Pesachim.62b).

¹⁴ Commenting on Deut 11:19 (“And you shall teach them [the ordinances and commandments of the Lord] to your children”), the Talmud clarifies in b. Kiddushin 30a that “your children” should be taken to mean “your sons, but not your daughters” (sefaria.org/Kiddushin.30a). The Mishnah makes this a disputed point, however; see, e.g., m. Sotah 3:4 for teaching Torah to daughters (sefaria.org/Mishnah_Sotah.3.4y).

¹⁵ This passage comes from b. Berakhot 17a (sefaria.org/Berakhot.17a).

Jerusalem, prohibited from entering the Inner Court (unless bringing a special sacrifice).¹⁶ This extended to the synagogue, where women were required to remain behind a rear barrier (*mehitzah*), principally to protect men from sexual distraction during prayer—"The voice of a woman is indecent," asserts the Talmud.¹⁷ To be sure, in general the Talmud, looking upon women as objects of sexual temptation, recommends that men have as little contact as possible with women to whom they are not married (as dictated by the laws of *negiah*, which are somewhat loosely based on Lev 18:6 and 19), even forbidding that they be alone in a room together (this latter would come to be termed the laws of *yichud*).¹⁸ In this connection, the Talmud also stipulates that women (especially married women) stay indoors as a general rule, that they cover themselves as much as possible, in particular their heads, as in accordance with Num 5:18 ("And the priest shall set the woman before the Lord, and unbind the hair of the woman's head"), and that they avoid speaking with men they encounter.¹⁹

As regards marriage, women were treated as the property of their husbands, enjoying few conjugal rights (Num 5:20 reminds women, "you are under your husband's authority"). Hence, the Mosaic permission for divorce was in practice a unilateral male privilege, since, generally speaking, the right to divorce was reserved to Jewish men alone. Basing itself on Deut 24:1–2, the Talmud, for instance, states that only the husband can initiate a divorce, and that this can be for any reason, including the spoiling of his dinner, or for practically no reason—an ancient form of "no-fault" divorce.²⁰

The Talmud goes further. Responding to the view, voiced by one rabbi's

¹⁶ "Women are a people unto themselves" is found in b. Shabbat 62a:11 (sefaria.org/Shabbat.62a). The ancient Temple layout is detailed in the Mishnah in m. Middot 2:5–6 (sefaria.org/Mishnah_Middot.2.5).

¹⁷ See b. Berakhot 24a (sefaria.org/Berakhot.24a).

¹⁸ See, for instance, b. Shabbat 13a–b (sefaria.org/Shabbat.13a), and b. K/Qiddushin 80b (sefaria.org/Kiddushin.80b). For more on this in the Talmud, see Rabbi Nisan Dovid Dubov, *The Laws of Yichud: Permissibility and Prohibition Regarding the Seclusion of a Man and Woman* (Brooklyn, NY: Sichos In English, 2006).

¹⁹ Thus, b. Ketubot 72a: "And who is considered a woman who violates the precepts of Jewish women? One who, for example, goes out of her house, and her head, i.e., her hair, is uncovered; or she spins wool in the public marketplace; or she speaks with every man she encounters. . . . The prohibition against a woman going out with her head uncovered is not merely a custom of Jewish women. Rather, it is by Torah law, as it is written [in Numbers 5:18]" (sefaria.org/Ketubot.72a).

²⁰ In the Mishnah, the School of Hillel states that a man may divorce his wife "even due to a minor issue, e.g., because she burned or over-salted his dish, as it is stated: 'Because he has found some unseemly matter in her' [Deut 24:1]," while Rabbi Akiva adds in the Talmud, "He may divorce her even if he found another woman who is better looking

son, that “a slave is the same as a woman,” the Talmud seeks to temper this position, but only so much. It maintains instead that “a slave is more lowly than a woman,” as Rabbi Aha bar Jacob puts it.²¹ Though in one respect this Talmudic move marks an effort to lift up women, the fact remains that it assigns women to a second-tier social status. Indeed, that the Talmud reports the opinion that women are no different from slaves indicates how the culture of ancient Judaism could easily breed such an attitude, erroneous though it be.

Gospel Innovation: Jesus Breaks with This Cultural Tradition

It is a remarkable feature of the Gospel accounts: in his interaction with and treatment of women, Jesus broke, in nearly every instance, with these customs and legislative traditions, elevating women to a status of equal dignity with men in the process. All four Gospels, especially Luke, offer uniform witness of Jesus’s persistent efforts to push social boundaries and legal restrictions, even to the point of risking offense or scandal, as they impinge upon the social status and dignity of women.²² John Paul II holds that this witness constitutes nothing short of “innovation” particular to the Gospel: “In all of Jesus’ teaching, as well as in his behavior, one can find nothing which reflects the discrimination against women prevalent in his day. On the contrary, *his words and works always express the respect and honor due to women*” (*Mulieris Dignitatem* §13; emphasis original). We can summarize these words and work, which undoubtedly “preserves [an] essential feature of the original figure of Jesus,” to quote Benedict XVI, as follows.²³

than her and wishes to marry her, as it is stated in that verse: ‘And if it comes to pass, if she finds no favor in his eyes’ [Deut 24:1]” (b. Gittin 90a; sefaria.org/Gittin.90a).

²¹ This comes from b. Menachot 43b–44a (sefaria.org/Menachot.43b). It is Rabbi Jacob’s own son who identifies women with slaves, for which reason the son finds it redundant to express gratitude to God for not being made a slave after having voiced gratitude for not being made a woman.

²² Thus, *Inter Insignores* §4: “An examination of the Gospels shows . . . that Jesus broke with the prejudices of his time, by widely contravening the discriminations practiced with regard to women.”

²³ Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, vol. 1, *From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (New York: Image, 2007), 183. John Paul II compiles these words and works nearly exhaustively in part V of *Mulieris Dignitatem* (§§12–16). One also finds a quite cursory sketch of them in Butler, “Embodied Ecclesiology,” 148.

Conspicuous Encounters with Women

Though women were required to avoid contact with men, or, short of that, conversations with men that they encountered, Jesus for his part did not hesitate to initiate such conversations. More than that, he was willing to initiate these conversations even when alone with women—a taboo practice—as with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well in John 4:7–26. That the Samaritan woman herself owned a highly checkered moral past (married five times, and at the time living with another man) only underscores how such an occurrence would have raised eyebrows, to put it mildly. Little wonder that the disciples, upon rejoining Jesus at the well, “marveled that he was talking [alone] with a woman,” though none dared to ask the obvious question: “Why are you talking with her?” (John 4:27). An obvious question for a Jewish rabbi speaking alone with a woman with a checkered moral past, indeed.

For another example of a startling encounter with a woman that Jesus initiated, we can turn to the incident with the crippled woman in the synagogue that Luke 13:10–17 recounts. Standing presumably behind the *mehitzah* (rear barrier) of the synagogue, the woman seems otherwise to have been making no effort to attract Jesus's attention. All the same, Jesus notices the woman “bent over and hardly [able to] straighten herself” (v. 11). This leads him, evidently in a kind of outreach of affection and compassion, to call out to her: “When Jesus saw her, he called her and said to her, ‘Woman, you are freed from your infirmity’” (v. 12). That Jesus notices the woman and does not ignore her, and that, moved it would appear by compassion, he *calls out to her* and then goes over to her behind the *mehitzah* so that he can “lay hands upon her” (v. 13)—and this no matter the cultural strictures severely limiting contact between men and women in public, let alone in synagogue—almost certainly raised eyebrows and generated scandal. This would seem confirmed by the reaction of the ruler of the synagogue, who grew “indignant” with Jesus (v. 14). Though the ruler offers the pretext that Jesus healed (i.e., “worked”) on the Sabbath as the reason for his indignation, he no doubt also took offense at Jesus's calling out to a woman in synagogue, to say nothing of his touching her.

Perhaps the best-known example of Jesus's willingness to treat women with tender compassion, dignity, and respect, no matter how socially improper or checkered a woman's moral past, comes in his encounter with the sinful woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee, recounted in Luke 7:36–50. That the uninvited woman kisses Jesus's feet and dries them with her hair—her uncovered hair—was an obvious cause of scandal, compounded by Jesus's refusal to rebuff her. Reacting with indignation, Simon seems willing to

use the expected male Jewish reaction as a litmus test for determining the authenticity of Jesus's ministry: "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner" (v. 39). Undeterred, Jesus audaciously upends the social convention by contrasting Simon's example with the woman's: "You gave me no kiss [Simon], but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet" (v. 45).

We should also call attention to the fact that Jesus exhibited special affection for certain women, particularly Mary and Martha, sisters of Lazarus: "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus" (John 11:5). Though on its face this comment strikes as unremarkable, it stands out in sharp relief if we read it against the backdrop of first-century Jewish culture. It would be difficult to imagine a parallel first-century Jewish account of the ministry of a certain unmarried itinerant rabbi making mention, somewhat gratuitously, of the fact that this rabbi "loved" various particular women. One finds no such similar observation in the Talmud, for instance, despite its many narrative accounts about numerous rabbis.

Equality in Marriage

When it comes to marriage, and in particular the Mosaic permission for divorce, here too Jesus boldly upends social convention in his effort at lifting up women, part and parcel of his determination to affirm the true meaning of marriage: "For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so" (Matt 19:8). Recall that Jewish law relegated women to the property of their husbands—indeed, to a status just above slaves, as per the Talmud—with few conjugal rights. The right to divorce accordingly belonged to men alone. By rescinding the (male) permission for divorce, then, Jesus was affirming, among other things, the fundamental equality of husband and wife in the marriage covenant, with his express appeal to Gen 2:24 ("And the two shall become one flesh") in Matt 19:5 making this unambiguous.²⁴

Not at the disposal of their husbands' mere whim or wish (recall that husbands could initiate a divorce for any trivial reason, or for "any cause," as the Pharisee puts it in Matthew 19:3, and thus practically for no reason), women enjoy, on Jesus's account, the security of full rights and responsibilities that come with any true partnership. Jesus signals that women are not

²⁴ Thus, *Inter Insignores* §2: "[Jesus] does not hesitate to depart from the Mosaic Law in order to affirm the equality of the rights and duties of men and women with regard to the marriage bond."

be regarded or treated as chattel, no matter if Jewish law suggests otherwise. Husbands and wives enjoy by God's design and Jesus's witness a "friendship of equality" (*aequalis amicitia*), as Aquinas terms it, since, indeed, friendship always presupposes equality (as the pagan philosopher Aristotle observes).²⁵

Female Disciples and Traveling Companions

Perhaps the most striking feature of Jesus's treatment of women is that, though they were otherwise prohibited from being disciples of rabbis and learning under them, Jesus freely accepted female disciples and instructed them alongside his male disciples. (He would also hold women up as a model of discipleship, as in Luke 10:42, and feature them prominently in many of his parables, as in Luke 15:8–10.) What is more, Jesus allowed some, indeed, "many," of his female disciples to travel with him, and thus to belong to his "more intimate community of believers," as Benedict XVI puts it.²⁶ Luke 8:1–3 reports:

Jesus went on through cities and villages, preaching and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means.

To say that such practices by a first-century rabbi would have provoked scandal would be understating the issue. That Jesus flouts the laws of *negiah*—the laws and customs dictating strict avoidance of physical contact between men and women who are not married to each other—in such an overt manner would certainly have offended and dismayed first-century Jewish sensibilities.

A Riddle to Be Solved

Admittedly, this flouting can strike—still today—as somewhat puzzling, shocking even, and leave us with somewhat of a conundrum. On the one hand, the safeguarding of sexual propriety, accomplished through the imposition of strict boundaries between the sexes, marked the chief aim of the *negiah*. By disregarding the laws of *negiah*—most flagrantly by his allowing

²⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* [SCG] III, ch. 123; see Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 8.8.1159b.

²⁶ Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 1:183.

women to travel with him and his “intimate community” of male disciples—Jesus, it would appear, was throwing strict sexual propriety to the wind.

On the other hand, countervailing evidence shows that Jesus hardly favored a lax approach to sexual morality. To be sure, Jesus sought to elevate and intensify the rigors of the Torah as they concern sexual morality, and this in rather pronounced terms. That he adverts to the arresting phrase “adultery of the heart” to condemn lustful desires in Matt 5:27–28 or that he revokes the Mosaic permission for divorce on the grounds that it marks a concession to sin in Mark 10:5 (“For your hardness of heart, he [Moses] wrote you this commandment”) amply confirms this.²⁷ Jesus thus insisted quite forcefully upon proper moral boundaries between the sexes—something the laws of *negiah* did as well. As we probe his attitude toward and treatment of women, what sense, then, are we to make of his casting aside the laws of *negiah*?

A Moral Standard that Directs Internal Acts

The answer emerges when we recognize that, relative to the laws of *negiah*, what Jesus prefers—and introduces—is a new and more perfect standard of sexual propriety. By enjoining his disciples to discipline their interior sexual urges and to cease looking upon persons as objects of sexual self-gratification, which his arresting language of “adultery of the heart” underscores, Jesus promotes a moral standard that imposes not stringent external constraint, but strict *internal* self-governance—a self-governance that the virtue-ethics tradition terms “chastity.” Evidently, Jesus views this standard as sufficient for establishing proper moral boundaries—the strictest of moral boundaries—between his male and female disciples, while at the same time allowing, contra the laws of *negiah*, for close personal interaction of the sexes.

Put slightly differently, the practice of the virtue of chastity implies self-mastery over one’s interior life (thoughts and desires), the source of outward action, whereas the laws of *negiah* place the focus on external action. Jesus prefers an integrated chastity, a self-governance that pervades or integrates our entire being, a self-governance that moves from the inside out, from internal thoughts and desires to external bodily action: “What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles a man,” he says in Matt 15:18.

In this connection, Scholastic theologians, Thomas Aquinas chief among them, hold up the regulation of internal acts as a defining feature of New Testament morality: “The New Law [of the Gospel] surpasses the Old

²⁷ For much more on all this, see my essay, “Jesus and Paul on the Meaning and Purpose of Human Sexuality,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 18, no. 2 (2020): 461–503, at 464–75.

[Mosaic] Law,” Aquinas writes, “since the New Law directs our internal acts. . . . Hence the saying [by Peter Lombard] that ‘the Old Law curbs the hand, but the New Law curbs the soul [*anima*].’”²⁸ Merely dwelling on external action (“curb the hand”), the laws of *negiah* fail to target the proper source of outward action (“curb the soul”), and thereby prove insufficient. That the laws of *negiah*, predicated on the view that women are a sexual temptation (recall from the Talmud that “the voice of a woman is indecent”), do this in an excessively restrictive and rigid fashion explains why Jesus prefers to break with them.

Removing the Sexual Stigma from Women

It bears insisting that, by regarding women as a sexual temptation, ancient Judaism both helped exculpate men as regards their own struggles with lust and encouraged men to objectify women and to look upon them with negative suspicion. Hence, the greater strictures that the *negiah* laws placed on women that were noted above: women were to stay out of public view as much as possible so as to avoid contact with men; they should avoid speaking with men; they should thoroughly cover themselves, especially their heads; they should remain behind the barrier in synagogue and remain confined to the Women's Outer Court at the Temple in Jerusalem; and the list goes on.

Jesus will have none of this. By insisting upon interior self-mastery, which shifts moral responsibility from without—from an external object or person—to within, he accomplishes two things, both of which render the burdensome strictures of *negiah* laws defunct. First, in a culture such as that of first-century Judaism, he demands respect for women, since he enjoins men to cease objectifying women and looking upon them with negative suspicion. Jesus removes the sexual stigma from women, and thereby promotes their dignity as persons and elevates them to a status of equality with men.

Second, and in a more general sense, Jesus demands that men (and women) take moral ownership of their actions, denying both sexes, but especially men, the excuse to blame their struggles with lust on someone else. Why this concerns men especially shall be addressed shortly below, but for the moment, it is not by accident, I think, that Jesus appears to direct his injunction against lustful desires primarily at men, given his express naming of women (*gynaikes*) as the object of said desire: “Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt 5:28).

²⁸ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [ST] I-II, q. 91, a. 5; see also I-II, q. 107, a. 2; q. 108, a. 3. Translations of the ST (with adaptations) are from the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger, 1947–1948). For Peter Lombard, see *Sentences* III, d. 40.

Jesus's attitude toward the *negiah* laws emerges as analogous, then, to his regard for the laws governing Sabbath observance (the laws surrounding the third commandment). Jesus will be a slave to the strict letter of neither the *negiah* laws nor those governing Sabbath observance: "The *negiah* laws were made for man, not man for the laws of *negiah*," one might say. Yet, at the same time, hardly does Jesus disregard the "spirit" of these two sets of laws either. As a religious man, he continues to observe the Sabbath and to respect the third commandment as expressive of a foundational normative good, namely, the proper worship of God. As a moral man, indeed, as a man of consummate virtue, Jesus continues to observe the "spirit" of the laws of *negiah*, honoring the moral good that they seek to bring about, albeit along the superior lines of an integrated chastity.

Jesus as Exemplum Castitatis

That Jesus imbibed in his own person consummate moral virtue merits further remark. "The virtues were in their highest degree in Christ," writes Thomas Aquinas, for which reason the Dominican master designates him the *exemplum virtutis*, the supreme model of virtue.²⁹ This means that, when he enjoins his disciples to strive for moral perfection in Matt 5:48, Jesus knows that he models this in his own person. He models the way of self-control of one's sexual appetites, that is, the way of integrated chastity. His sex drive was not cut off from his moral agency as an acting person but integrated into it.

Because he was sinless, Jesus was not subject to the internal disorder of the struggle of the spirit against the flesh. Introduced into the human condition by original sin, this struggle, which the theological tradition denotes by the terms "concupiscence" and *fomes peccati* (the affective "spark" to sin), results from the disharmony that exists between the higher rational powers and the lower, animal-like inclination to bodily goods, inclusive of movements of passion or emotion. Spared this disorder, Christ enjoyed perfect interior rectitude and self-mastery, similar to Adam before the Fall: "[Christ was] not troubled by the passions of the soul nor the desires of the flesh," professes the Second Council of Constantinople (553)—though he certainly experienced passions of the soul.³⁰

This would include passions and desires of a sexual nature. Jesus

²⁹ ST III, q. 15, aa. 1 and 2.

³⁰ Constantinople II, anathema 12 (*Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 vols., ed. Norman P. Tanner [Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990], 1:119). For more on this, see my *The Passions of Christ's Soul in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2002; repr. Providence, RI: Cluny Media, 2018), 340–49.

experienced no disordered sex drive; in no way can we attribute lust in any form to him. On the contrary, he enjoyed unmitigated command of his sexual impulses. As *exemplum virtutis*, he was by that fact also *exemplum castitatis*, supreme model of the virtue of chastity, or even more specifically, highest model of the virtue of virginity (*exemplum virginitatis*), the virtue that regulates the perpetual renunciation of all sexual pleasure. Jesus looked upon women with eyes of purity and enjoyed healthy affective relationships with them. The perfect model of being human, he evinces the fullness of human development and affective maturity, where the emotional dimension of human life, especially in the area of sexuality, is properly integrated with the rational and spiritual dimension of the acting person. Chastity emerges as the most basic measure of affective maturity and of the capacity for delayed bodily gratification, key to men regarding women as intellectual and moral equals (and vice versa). All this Jesus exemplifies to the highest degree.

Jesus as the "Reset" for Male Sexual Self-Governance

That Jesus enjoyed perfect command of his sexual impulses bears special significance for men, as lust marks an especially male problem. Recent scientific findings have established a neurobiological foundation for the male struggle with lust. These findings show that the structuring of the male brain orients the male sex drive to physical attraction (or to what researchers term "objectification") and to physical pleasure—whereas the female brain owns a different type of structuring, one that orients the female sex drive more particularly to relationships.³¹ No doubt, the disordering effects of original

³¹ For an overview of these findings, see my "Thomas Aquinas on Sexual Difference: The Metaphysical Biology and Moral Significance of Human Sexuality," *Pro Ecclesia* 30, no. 3 (2021): 177–215. I also cover the neurobiological differences between the sexes in my essay, "Aquinas on Christ's Male Sexuality as Integral to His Full Humanity: Anti-Docetism in the Common Doctor," in *Thomas Aquinas and the Crisis of Christology*, ed. Michael Dauphinais, Andrew Hofer, O.P., and Roger Nutt (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2021), 195–232, at 211–14. In brief, the male brain owns more extensive testosterone circuits, the hormone that mediates male aggression and the male sexual drive, whereas the female brain engages more the cerebral cortex and has more extensive oxytocin circuits, the so-called bonding hormone, hardwiring women neurobiologically in a particular way for relationships. As a result, women experience optimal sexual pleasure within the context of a committed relationship, more so than for men, given the orientation of the male sex drive to physical attraction and pleasure. The physician and psychologist Leonard Sax puts it this way: "Women's sexual experience is 'happening' more in the cerebral cortex and is therefore more connected with the rest of what's going on in their mind. The sexual experience in men is less connected with the cortex, less connected with the outside world. . . . 'For women, an important goal of sex is intimacy; the best context for pleasurable sex is a committed relationship. This is less

sin have compounded this male-specific neurobiological predisposition to physical attraction and to seeking sexual pleasure.

Indeed, I think that, beyond the more general *fomes peccati*, the affective “spark” to sin that both sexes inherit from original sin, one can affirm in men a veritable *fomes luxuriae*, an affective spark to lust characteristic of the male fallen condition. The male neurobiological predisposition to physical attraction (i.e., to objectification) and to seeking sexual pleasure becomes, as a consequence of original sin, a condition of “lying in wait”—thus, a “spark” (*fomes*) to lust that stokes or rouses and thereby exacerbates this male neurobiological predisposition. Recent psychological research would seem to bear this out, as studies indicate that men exhibit a greater willingness to pursue sexual opportunities and to engage in casual sex.³² Studies also show a much greater occurrence of sexual pathologies and sexually deviant behavior in men as opposed to women.³³

true for men” (*Why Gender Matters: What Parents and Teachers Need to Know about the Emerging Science of Sex Differences*, 2nd ed. [New York: Harmony, 2017], 122–23 [see also 228–29]; quoting psychologist Letitia Anne Peplau, “Human Sexuality: How Do Men and Women Differ?,” *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 12 [2003]: 37–44).

³² For men showing greater propensity to engage in casual sex, see the classic study by Russell D. Clark and Elaine Hatfield, “Gender Differences in Receptivity to Sexual Offers,” *Journal of Psychology and Human Sexuality* 2, no. 1 (1989): 39–55, with the opening abstract stating: “In [our] experiments, . . . male and female confederates of average attractiveness approached potential partners with one of three requests: ‘Would you go out tonight?’ ‘Will you come over to my apartment?’ or ‘Would you go to bed with me?’ The great majority of men were willing to have a sexual liaison with the women who approached them. Women were not. Not one woman agreed to a sexual liaison.” This study, with some modifications, was repeated several years later, with similar results; see Mercedes Tappé, Lisamarie Bensman, Kentaro Hayashi, and Elaine Hatfield, “Gender Differences in Receptivity to Sexual Offers: A New Research Prototype,” *Interpersona: An International Journal on Personal Relationships* 7, no. 2 (2013), interpersona.psychopen.eu/article/view/121/html. See also R. F. Baumeister, K. R. Catanese, and K. D. Vohs, “Is There a Gender Difference in Sex Drive? Theoretical Views, Conceptual Distinctions, and a Review of Relevant Evidence,” *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 5 (2001): 242–73.

³³ This is according to the psychologist Paul Vitz in his paper, “Men and Women: The Psychology of Their Differences and Their Complementarity,” delivered at the annual symposium of the Catholic Women’s Forum of the Ethics and Public Policy Center, Washington, DC, June 26, 2019. See also Samantha J. Dawson, Brittany A. Bannerman, and Martin Lalumière, “Paraphilic Interests: An Examination of Sex Differences in a Nonclinical Sample,” *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment* 28, no. 1 (2016), 20–45, particularly its conclusion: “Our results suggest a reliable and substantial sex difference in paraphilic [i.e., sexually deviant] interests, such that men report less repulsion to a variety of paraphilic acts than do women, and more men

To be clear, it is paramount that we distinguish original sin's wounding of the male sex drive from the natural wiring of the male brain that is expressive of God's creative design. Morally speaking, this latter in itself is neither good nor bad. It forms part of the metaphysical biological makeup of the male human being. And since, as Aquinas puts it, "sin does not belong to human nature, a nature that has God for its cause," with the result that "what is natural to man was neither acquired nor forfeited by sin," it would be deeply erroneous, heretical even, to deem that men are inclined by design to sin (lust) on account of the wiring of their brain for physical attraction and pleasure.³⁴ As with all biological or animal-like features of human life (such as the passions or emotions), the male neurobiological propensity for physical attraction and pleasure becomes moral only when acted upon by reason and will, that is, only in the measure that reason and will finalize and integrate it into a life of proper human flourishing.³⁵ Following Aristotle, Aquinas insists that moral virtue accomplishes this task—chastity in the case of neurobiological design ordering to sexual desire and pleasure.³⁶

As we shall see in the next section, Jesus, like any man, owned a male-structured brain, part and parcel of his male-structured body. Even if we can attribute no form of lust to Jesus, we must still affirm in him the typical male neurobiological predisposition to physical attraction and to

than women report being actually aroused by particular paraphilic activities" (37). The study also observes: "Sex drive appears to provide the best explanation for the sex difference in paraphilic interests. . . . Sex drive, comprised of measures assessing sexual compulsivity and hypersexuality, was found to significantly and fully mediate the sex difference in overall paraphilic scores" (34–35), journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1079063214525645.

³⁴ For the citations from Aquinas, see *ST* I, q. 98, a. 2; III, q. 15, a. 1.

³⁵ For Aquinas on the passions or emotions being morally neutral in themselves, see *ST* I-II, q. 24, aa. 1–2; q. 59, a. 5, ad 2; *In II eth.*, lec. 3. See also Mark Jordan, "Aquinas's Construction of a Moral Account of the Passions," *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 33 (1986): 71–97.

³⁶ "Moral virtue perfects the appetitive part of the soul by directing [the passions or emotions] to the good defined by reason," writes Thomas, as, indeed, passion or emotion constitutes the "proper matter" of the moral virtues (*ST* I-II, q. 59, aa. 4–5). See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 2.6.1106b15–16. For much more on this, see my own "The Passions and the Moral Life: Appreciating the Originality of Aquinas," *The Thomist* 71 (2007): 419–50. As for chastity, the moral theologian Servais Pinckaers observes that sexuality "is realized in man in a different and far richer way than in animals," since it gets "integrated in the totality of human nature" through the virtue of chastity (*The Sources of Christian Ethics*, trans. Mary Thomas Noble [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995], 438). For how a much deeper examination of how this traces out, see my "Thomas Aquinas on Sexual Difference," section III.

pleasure. Natural biological design, essential to human nature, demands as much. At the same time, since Jesus did not contract original sin, he was spared the *fomes luxuriae*, the disordered affective condition characteristic of men. His neurobiological predisposition to physical attraction and pleasure remained nothing more than a predisposition.

Manly Imitatio Christi

The moral lesson here is paramount: by his own example Jesus provides the proper “reset” for how men should master their sex drive, and thereby neutralize the *fomes luxuriae*—and, by extension, for how men should look upon and treat women. True, Jesus serves as a model of chastity for both sexes. All the same, he serves as a more particular model of “manly” chastity for those who share a male structuring with him—just as the Virgin Mary serves as a particular model of virtue for women. The theme of *imitatio Christi*, revered throughout Christian tradition and enjoying pride of place in the writings of Aquinas, bears particular relevance for men, it must be said.³⁷ Enjoying unmitigated interior mastery of his sexuality, Jesus exemplifies an integrated chastity in a male-specific or male-appropriate manner. Though men in their fallen condition might commonly struggle to varying degrees with a disordered sex drive, they can, by practicing a manly *imitatio Christi*, find their proper “reset” in the Jesus who at all points mastered this drive. While St. Paul exhorts all Christians to “put on” Christ (Rom 13:14), men in a particular way are called to put on the masculine Christ, the manly Christ.

Relating this expressly to the female sex, Jesus, as just mentioned, provides the proper reset for how men should regard and treat women. Jesus’s example makes quite plain that proper respect for women and affirmation of their dignity as equal persons begins with interior control of the male sex drive. Where a man has little or no self-governance of his sexual appetites, where he lacks affective maturity and the capacity for delayed gratification, he cannot properly respect women; he will instead necessarily objectify them. John Paul II observes in his apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* that “the first victims of this mentality [whereby a human being is looked upon ‘not as a person but as a thing, as an object of trade, at the service of selfish

³⁷ The expression “Christ’s action is our instruction” occurs seventeen times in Aquinas’s works (see, e.g., *ST* III, q. 40, a. 1, ad 3). For more on this, see Richard Schenk, “*Omnis Christi actio nostra est instructio*: The Deeds and Sayings of Jesus as Revelation in the View of Thomas Aquinas,” in *La doctrine de la révélation divine de saint Thomas d’Aquin*, ed. L. Elders (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1990), 103–31.

interest and mere pleasure'] are women."³⁸ In Jesus, we see that not only does an integrated chastity go hand-in-hand with respect for women, but the two are inextricably causally linked. Proper respect for women can occur only within the framework of virtue, headed most obviously by chastity (or virginity for those vowed to celibacy), but also involving prudence, justice (rendering to women what is their due on account of their equal dignity), charity, and the other virtues.

How the First "Priests of the New Covenant" (the Apostles) Responded

Before leaving the topic of Jesus's treatment of women and his flouting the laws of *negiah*, we might wonder what his male traveling companions, the twelve apostles, made of this conduct—the first "priests of the new covenant," to quote the Council of Trent.³⁹ How did these first priests of Jesus Christ, who "were believing and observant Jews" (as Benedict puts it), find Jesus's attitude toward women, inclusive of his open disregard for the *negiah* laws?⁴⁰

Evidently, they acceded and adapted to it. If at first they understandably reacted with surprise and dismay, as seems to have happened when they found Jesus speaking alone with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (see John 4:27), they appear to have quickly learned to follow Jesus's lead, no matter how perplexing they found this "mysterious new way," as Benedict terms it.⁴¹ Given that the testimony of the apostles marks the primary source of the Gospel witness, it speaks volumes, I think, that all four Gospels offer detailed accounts of Jesus's conduct toward women and do not attempt to cover over such a controversial feature of his ministry. Among other things, this indicates that, on the issue of sexual propriety, the apostles in time came to grasp the new standard of purity set by Jesus and that this standard was meant to be part and parcel of the "mysterious new way" of Christian discipleship—with these first "priests of the new covenant" charting the path. The apostles were the first to practice a manly *imitatio Christi* by exercising an integrated chastity in their own persons, freeing them to enjoy healthy affective relationships with women. Their successors in the priesthood would do well to heed their example.

³⁸ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, Apostolic Exhortation on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World (1981), §24.

³⁹ Council of Trent, session 22, on the holy sacrifice of the Mass, ch. 1, affirms that the apostles' priestly "ordination" occurred during the Last Supper.

⁴⁰ Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 1:178.

⁴¹ Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 1:178.

Affirming the Equality of the Sexes from the Cross

Finally, that Jesus's female disciples, in contrast to the apostles, remained faithful to Jesus to the very end—faithful, that is, by being present at the foot of the Cross (John was the sole male disciple present)—speaks volumes of their intimate bond with Jesus and of their indispensable place among his group of disciples. And no one more so than Mary of Nazareth, Jesus's mother, the most important woman of the entire biblical witness, who stands at the center of salvation history.

If his earlier interactions with his mother hold up Mary as the “model believer” (see, for instance, Luke 2:51 and John 2:5), to quote Benedict, Jesus greatly intensifies and elevates her status when she is present at the foot of the Cross.⁴² There, as John's Gospel records, Jesus uses his final words to his mother to hold her up as the “new Eve” (with Jesus himself as the new Adam). He signals this by addressing Mary as “woman” (John 19:26; see also 2:4), an unmistakable echo of Gen 2:23 (“she shall be called Woman”).⁴³ That Jesus's side is opened by the soldier's lance after he had fallen into the sleep of death (see John 19:34) further amplifies this identification of Mary as the new Eve, given that the first woman was created from Adam's side while he slept (see Gen 2:21–22). Christ's opened side also points to the equal dignity of women, as Eve's formation from Adam's side intimates the fundamental equality between man and woman, on the reading of Thomas Aquinas and St. Bonaventure.⁴⁴ Jesus's effort to affirm the equal dignity of women thus reaches even to his death on the Cross, and indeed to the resurrection itself, since in his risen state he chooses to appear first to a female disciple, Mary Magdalene, whom he also addresses—in a garden—as “woman” (see John 20:15).

⁴² Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, vol. 3, *The Infancy Narratives*, trans. Philip J. Whitmore (New York: Image, 2012), 125.

⁴³ See Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, vol. 2, *Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, trans. Philip J. Whitmore (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011), 221–22. The Second Vatican Council, citing various Fathers of the Church, offers a rich reflection on Mary as the new Eve, in its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, §56. For more on how Christ on the Cross reveals Mary as the new Eve, see Michele Schumacher, “Revelation and Human Sexuality,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Divine Revelation*, ed. Balázs M. Mezei, Francesca Aran Murphy, and Kenneth Oakes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 571–86, at 577–82.

⁴⁴ Aquinas, *Super 1 Cor 7*, lec. 1 (trans. F. R. Larcher [Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012], 122); Bonaventure, *In II sent.*, d. 18, a. 1, q. 1. For more on Bonaventure concerning this exegesis, see Emma Thérèse Healy, *Woman according to Saint Bonaventure* (Erie, PA: Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Joseph, 1956), 24–45.

Equality, Not Sameness: Jesus Favors the Model of Male Headship

Jesus dignifies women and stands up for them persistently and courageously. He defends them, builds them up—truly remarkable for a culture that ranks women just above slaves. In brief, Jesus was undaunted by the cultural roadblocks he faced in seeking to lift up women in their social status and dignity. He was determined, it would seem, to level these roadblocks by affirming that women stand before God as equal to men in personal dignity and social status.

Such a pattern would seem strongly to suggest, therefore, that Jesus should have included at least one woman among the Twelve, the group chosen by him to exercise headship in the Church. He opted not to do this, however—clearly an intentional decision on his part: “We have here a number of convergent indications that make it all the more remarkable that Jesus did not entrust the apostolic charge to women,” to quote §2 of *Inter Insignores*, the Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood, issued by the CDF in 1976, and where “convergent indications” refer to what this essay has summarized above. For his part, Benedict writes: “The difference between the discipleship of the Twelve and the discipleship of the women is obvious; the tasks assigned to each group are quite different.”⁴⁵

It would thus appear that Jesus espouses the view that equality does not equate with sameness or interchangeability, particularly with regard to social roles and function (the Church, after all, constitutes a society).⁴⁶ Bypassing the effort to see his lifting up of women to its logical end, Jesus instead, by accepting only men as apostles, chose to favor the model of male headship. Honest with the biblical evidence, the New Testament scholar Ben Witherington III notes the significance of this, no matter Jesus’s “revolutionary” treatment of women:

Jesus broke with Jewish tradition in having women disciples and travelling companions, and there is no reason why He could not have continued this revolutionary trend by choosing some women to be among the Twelve. It appears then that male headship as a pattern

⁴⁵ Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 1:181.

⁴⁶ The philosopher Laura L. Garcia writes: “Recognizing the equal dignity of women and men, grounded in their shared nature as human beings, does not require that women and men be treated as interchangeable in all of their social roles” (“Authentic Freedom and Equality in Difference,” in Bachiochi, *Women, Sex, and the Church*, 15–33, at 20).

of leadership, if refined and redefined according to the dictates of discipleship and Jesus' example, was acceptable to him.⁴⁷

On its surface, this decision, because stopping short of the path that Jesus readily left open for himself, remains somewhat enigmatic. The patriarchal-cultural argument may provide a quick explanation for Jesus's decision to exclude women from the Twelve, but it remains facile and inadequate, countering as it does the overwhelming countervailing evidence. Hence, John Paul II's assertion in *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* §2 that Jesus's exclusion of women from the Twelve "did not proceed from sociological or cultural motives peculiar to his time." Given this, Jesus's choice "cannot be dismissed as a historically conditioned decision open to subsequent development," writes Butler, with the result that "'a purely historical exegesis of the [Gospel] texts cannot suffice' to establish Christ's will on this matter."⁴⁸ We must look deeper for another possible and more satisfactory theological explanation. Jesus's maleness, I submit, provides the foundation for such an explanation. To that notion, then, we turn.

Truly Human, Fully Male: The Doctrine of the Incarnation and Christ's Male Sexuality

As I have written elsewhere and at further length on Christ's male sexuality, here I simply recapitulate certain elements of these studies as they bear on the issue at hand.⁴⁹

It is a defined truth of the faith: God became fully and truly human in the person of Christ (Christ's humanity is the ground, of course, of his male sexuality). Against the ever-present threat of docetism, the heretical

⁴⁷ Ben Witherington III, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus: A Study of Jesus' Attitudes to Women and Their Roles as Reflected in His Earthly Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 195n233.

⁴⁸ Butler, *Catholic Priesthood*, 13, 69.

⁴⁹ Paul Gondreau, "It Was Proper for Christ to Assume a Particular Sex': Thomas Aquinas on the Maleness of Christ," in *Une théologie à l'école de saint Thomas d'Aquin: Hommage au prof. Gilles Emery op à l'occasion de ses 60 ans*, ed. Nicole Awais, Benoît-Dominique de la Soujeole, Doris Rey-Meier (Paris: Cerf, 2022), 455–90; an earlier and slightly different version of this essay first appeared as "Aquinas on Christ's Male Sexuality as Integral to His Full Humanity: Anti-Docetism in the Common Doctor," in *Thomas Aquinas and the Crisis of Christology*, ed. Michael Dauphinais, Andrew Hofer, Roger Nutt (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2021), 195–232. See also my "The Maleness of Christ," in *The Clerical Sex Abuse Scandal: An Interdisciplinary Analysis*, ed. Jane F. Adolphe and Ronald J. Rychlak (Providence, RI: Cluny Media, 2020), 347–63.

tendency to deny or downplay Christ's full humanity, the Church, especially in its conciliar decrees, has consistently affirmed that God became man: that God substantially and not merely accidentally or temporarily took on a "true human body" and a "rational soul," to advert to the language of Aquinas, and thus an integral human nature.⁵⁰

Christ's Full Human Consubstantiality in the Conciliar Tradition

The earliest conciliar profession clearly attesting to Christ's full humanity came at Constantinople I (381), specifically with its key term *enanthrôpeō*, "to become man."⁵¹ (The singular importance of this term is highlighted liturgically by the gesture of bowing when it is pronounced during the recitation of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed at Mass.) Crucial in the lead-up to this Council, whose principal aim was to respond to the heresy of Apollinarianism (which denied a rational soul in Christ, holding instead that the Word, *Logos*, took the place of Christ's human mind, or *nous*), was the use by multiple Church Fathers of the celebrated soteriological principle. Predicated on the understanding that the very purpose of God's becoming man was for the sake of human salvation, the principle asserts in its classic formulation that what was not assumed was not healed or saved. As the early patristic author Origen puts it, man would not have been saved entirely if Christ had not clothed himself in man entirely.⁵²

The other Church council that proved crucial in the effort at affirming Christ's humanity was Chalcedon (451), which indeed marks the high point of the ancient Church's determination to proclaim the full truth of Christ's humanity (and divinity). Chalcedon responded to the heresy of monophysitism (or Eutychianism), which compromised Christ's full humanity by positing in him not two natures, a human nature and a divine nature, but one blended or mixed nature. This heresy turned Christ into a kind of theandric mutant. To counter this, Chalcedon appropriated the celebrated term of

⁵⁰ See *ST* III, q. 5, aa. 1–4, where Aquinas argues that Christ's assumption of a true human body (*verum corpus humanum*) and a rational soul (*animam rationalem*) is established both by the principle of hylemorphism (matter–form composition) and by the witness of the New Testament. As for docetism (from the Greek *dokeō*, "to seem," and traceable to apostolic times; see 2 John 7: "Many deceivers . . . will not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh"), this heresy alleges that Christ only *appeared* to have come in the flesh. For more on docetism, see Fernando Ocariz, Lucas F. Mateo-Seco, and José Antonio Riestra, *The Mystery of Jesus Christ: A Christology and Soteriology Textbook*, trans. Michael Adams and James Gavignon (Portland, OR: Four Courts, 2011), 55–58.

⁵¹ See Tanner, *Decrees*, 1:24.

⁵² Origen, *Discussion with Heraclitus* 7.

Nicaea I, *homoousios* ("consubstantial"), used to affirm Christ's divinity in the earlier Council, and applied it to Christ's humanity: "Christ is consubstantial [*homoousios*] with the Father as regards his divinity," Chalcedon professes, "and consubstantial [*homoousios*] with us as regards his humanity."⁵³ Christ shares in our human nature fully, not partially.

Chalcedon did not stop there. Continuing to hold monophysitism (as well as Nestorianism) squarely in its scope, the Council's profession of faith employed another, even more crucial turn of phrase (its celebrated phrase): "One and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, acknowledged in two natures which undergo no confusion [*asugchytōs*], no change [*atreptōs*], no division [*adiairetōs*], no separation [*achōristōs*]."⁵⁴ Christ's human nature was not compromised or diluted by its being joined to the divine nature, his humanity was not swallowed up by his divinity, since, still quoting the Council, "the property of both natures is preserved, [while] com[ing] together into a single person and a single hypostasis."⁵⁵ The integrity and distinct identity of Christ's human nature were preserved.

"It Was Proper for Christ to Assume a Particular Sex"

Thomas Aquinas supplies the crucial next step relative to Christ's maleness. Drawing out the implications of Christ's full human consubstantiality, Aquinas stakes a position on Christ's sexuality that, to my knowledge, marks a historical first. It comes in a query in a little-known passage from his early commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* on whether Christ had to assume any particular sex at all. Here Aquinas writes:

Christ had to be like his brethren in all things natural, as Heb 2:17 says. *Yet sex is natural to man* [*sexus est de naturalibus hominis*]. Therefore, he had to assume a sex. . . . [Further] Christ came to restore [or redeem] human nature by his very assumption; and for this reason it was necessary that he assume everything following upon human nature, namely, all the properties and parts of human nature, among which is sex; and therefore it was proper for him to assume a particular sex. . . . He assumed a sex not in order to use it but for the perfection of nature.⁵⁶

⁵³ Tanner, *Decrees*, 1:86.

⁵⁴ Tanner, *Decrees*, 1:86.

⁵⁵ Tanner, *Decrees*, 1:86.

⁵⁶ *In III sent.*, d. 12, q. 3, a. 1, qa. 1, sol. 1, corp. and ad 2 (emphasis added). This query is appended to an Augustinian-sparked consideration of whether Christ assumed the "more honorable sex" (*sexus honorabilior*), which Augustine answers affirmatively;

That Aquinas, ever the biblical theologian, opens with a citation of Heb 2:17 is instructive. Undoubtedly, it is this passage's appeal to human nature ("like his brethren in all things natural") that draws Thomas to it. Such an appeal readily lends itself to a robust philosophical exegesis and coherence, and Aquinas wastes little time in offering one.

"Sex Is Natural to Man": Metaphysical Christology

Thomas insists that sex belongs to human nature ("sex is natural to man"), and this on account of its belonging to the animal-like (and thus biological) structure of human nature, as he makes clear later in the *Summa theologiae*: "[Sexuality] is natural to man by reason of his animal life, . . . as our bodily organs clearly attest."⁵⁷ Note that, contrary to the tendency of modern thought, Aquinas does not look upon "animal nature" in reference to the human being, along with all things biological, as signifying the subhuman. Nor does Aquinas intend to reduce human sexuality entirely to our "animal life," since, as the Thomist moral theologian Servais Pinckaers observes, sex becomes "integrated in the totality of human nature."⁵⁸ All the same, sex begins with our biological, animal-like design.

Thomas offers a deeper metaphysical account of the same in another early work, the *De ente et essentia*. There the Dominican master assigns human sexuality to the category of an essential property of our animal nature. Eyeing the hylemorphic (matter-form) structure of the human person, he holds that there are certain essential features of human nature (he calls them "proper accidents") that, while not entering into the definition of the human being as a rational animal *per se*, nonetheless proceed immediately, and thus essentially, upon this definition. Certain essential attributes, or essential compositional accidents, thus follow immediately upon our animality (expressive of the body or of our matter) and upon our rationality (expressive of the soul or of our form). If risibility provides an example of an attribute following upon human rationality, then sexuality, or binary sexual

see *De diversis quaestionibus octaginta tribus* 11 (*Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* 44A:18). Peter Lombard took this issue up for discussion in *Sentences* III, d. 12, ch. 4, from which it passed to the thirteenth-century *Sentences* commentaries. In addition to his own *Sentences* commentary, Aquinas addresses this issue of the *sexus honorabilior* also in *ST* III, q. 31, a. 4, ad 1.

⁵⁷ *ST* I, q. 98, a. 2. In ad 1, Thomas affirms that the human being owns "an animal life in his body."

⁵⁸ Pinckaers, *Sources of Christian Ethics*, 438. Aquinas goes so far as to situate the mean of virtue, i.e., the good of reason, in the conjugal act itself, the act by which children are procreated (*In IV Sent.*, d. 26, q. 1, a. 3; trans. Beth Mortensen in *Commentary on the Sentences, Book IV*, 26–42 [Green Bay, WI: Aquinas Institute, 2018], 9).

dimorphism (maleness and femaleness), stands out as a compositional attribute that proceeds upon our animality, or upon our animal bodiliness: “The diversity of male and female among animals derives from matter,” Aquinas writes.⁵⁹ As risibility is to the rational soul, so is binary sexual difference to the animal body. Not a pure or contingent accident (like hair color), sex marks a proper or essential accident of the body.

Thus, when Thomas holds that Christ’s sexed nature owes to his having assumed “all the properties and parts of human nature,” the “property” of human nature that pertains to sex is that of a compositional attribute (or proper accident) of the body, while the “part” concerns the animal side of human nature. Later in the *Summa theologiae*, he makes Christ’s assumption of the animal part of human nature explicit: “Nothing implanted in our nature by God was lacking in the human nature assumed by the Word of God. . . . Hence the Son of God necessarily assumed together with his human nature whatever belongs to animal nature.”⁶⁰ Though this passage, where the specific concern centers on Christ’s possession of a sensitive appetite (the human animal-like ordering to bodily goods), fails to name Christ’s male sex as an example of that which belongs to his “animal nature,” the earlier passage from the *Sentences* commentary leaves little doubt.

Christ Had to Take on a Sex in order to Redeem Sexuality

The metaphysical thrust underpins the theological coherence. We see this when, after affirming the link between sex and human nature, in the same *Sentences* commentary passage quoted at length above, Thomas nods unmistakably to the soteriological principle: “Christ came to restore [or redeem] human nature by his very assumption.” For the whole of man to be saved, Christ had to take on the whole of man—he had to take on everything essential pertaining to human nature, and this includes sexuality. If the incarnate Word of God were not a biologically structured man (or woman), as owing to his assumed body’s animal-like structure, human sexuality would not have been redeemed.

This holds as well for the way the early Church defined genuine human consubstantiality.⁶¹ Human consubstantiality *must*, on Thomas’s reading,

⁵⁹ Aquinas, *De ente et essentia*, ch. 5.

⁶⁰ *ST* III, q. 9, a. 4; q. 18, a. 2.

⁶¹ Scholars have long documented Aquinas’s unparalleled thirteenth-century familiarity with the conciliar decrees of the early Church. Though he acquired this familiarity for the most part when serving at the papal court in Orvieto from 1261–1265, that is, after he had written the commentary on the *Sentences*, it remains open to speculation if nonetheless the *Sentences* commentary passage does indeed echo the conciliar teaching.

mean the Word's assumption of a sexed nature: "[Christ] assumed a sex not in order to use it [given his virginal chastity] but for the perfection of nature," he asserts in the last line of the above-cited passage.

Christ Was Human in the Measure That He Was a Male Individual

To be human, that is, to be a concrete existing human individual—one with "individualized signate matter," as Aquinas puts it, meaning an individual with a particular body (and soul)—one must be a man or a woman.⁶² A human individual is differentiated by sex, and sex is binary: "The Creator's decision [was] that the human being *should always and only exist* as a woman or a man," observes John Paul II in his commentary on Gen 1:27 ("male and female he created them") in *Mulieris Dignitatem* §1 (emphasis added).

It holds the same for the God-man. In order to "become flesh" (John 1:14), God must assume a differentiated body—a body differentiated by sex—with either the XY (male) or XX (female) genetic karyotype. It is a truth of the faith because a truth of history that God became a man, a male individual, rather than a woman: "Behold [Mary], you shall conceive in your womb and bear a son," says the angel Gabriel in Luke 1:31, where "son" means biological male, as the circumcision of this same son, recounted in Luke 2:21, manifestly confirms. *Inter Insigniores* §5, expresses it thus: "The incarnation of the Word took place according to the male sex: this is indeed a question of fact, and this fact . . . cannot be disassociated from the economy of salvation."

Christ was human, then, in the very measure that he was a man, a male individual (just as the Virgin Mary was human in the measure that she was a woman). Christ is fully (and truly) human because fully male. Like any human being, Jesus is no generality; he is not "humanity." We humans possess bodies of differentiated biological design, and our bodies (along with our souls) are a constitutive part of our human identity, including Jesus's. This means that it is impossible to dissociate Jesus's sexual differentiation—his maleness—from the embodied, animal-like (and thus biological) structure

For Aquinas's familiarity with the conciliar decrees, see, e.g., C. G. Geenen, "The Council of Chalcedon in the Theology of St. Thomas," in *From an Abundant Spring: The Walter Farrell Memorial Volume of The Thomist*, ed. staff of *The Thomist* (New York: P. J. Kennedy, 1952), 172–217, and Martin Morard, "Thomas d'Aquin lecteur des conciles," *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 98 (2005): 211–365 (particularly the chart on 246 that chronicles Thomas's exposure to the conciliar texts).

⁶² *STI*, q. 119, a. 1. Here Thomas distinguishes between human nature "in general" and "in the individual," with the latter signifying "individualized signate matter [i.e., a particular body], and the form [i.e., the soul] individualized by that matter. . . . Thus to the true human nature of Peter and Martin belongs *this* soul and *this* body" (emphasis added).

of his human nature.⁶³ Possessing a male-structured body, Christ owned the XY genetic karyotype and all that this gives rise to, including male genitals, the bone and muscle structure proper to men, and a male-structured brain designed to send male-specific neurotransmitters and to release male-specific biochemicals and hormones that largely determine male-specific behavior.

The Feminist Emasculation of Christ

Hence, the unwarranted and unfounded claim by which certain feminist voices assert that giving weight to the particularity of Jesus's maleness propounds a "naïve physicalism" (or "naïve biology," we might say) and succumbs to "collaps[ing] the totality of Christ into the human man Jesus," as Elizabeth A. Johnson puts it.⁶⁴ Another, Rosemary Radford Ruether, asking whether a male savior "can save women" and laying narrow hold of the claim of Gal 3:28 ("there is neither male nor female in Christ Jesus"), concludes remarkably: "The maleness of Jesus has no theological significance."⁶⁵ For these feminists, the undifferentiated, ahistorical humanity of Christ takes precedence over "the encapsulated 'once-for-all' historical Jesus," as Radford Ruether states it.⁶⁶

Given what has just been outlined, the problem inherent in such a position is only too apparent. Predicated on a view of human nature as undifferentiated by sex, or at least where sex plays no integral role in a human

⁶³ For much more on this, see my "Thomas Aquinas on Sexual Difference," 177–215. For how sexual difference and its meaning is determined by the "divine art" of the Creator," see Michele Schumacher, "The Natural and Sacramental Significance of Human Sexuality and the Question of Admitting Women to the Ordained Diaconate," *The Thomist* 85 (2021): 581–624.

⁶⁴ Elizabeth A. Johnson, "The Maleness of Christ," in *The Special Nature of Women?*, ed. Anne Carr and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Concilium 6 (London: SCM, 1991), 108–16, at 113 and 115; see also Johnson, "Redeeming the Names of Christ," in *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, ed. Catherine Mowry LaCugna (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), 115–37, and Anne Carr, "Feminist Views of Christology," *Chicago Studies* 35, no. 2 (1996): 128–40.

⁶⁵ Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Christology: Can a Male Savior Save Women?," in *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon, 1983), 116–38, at 137. For a general overview of feminist Christology, see Michele Schumacher, "Feminist Christologies," in *The Oxford Handbook of Christology*, ed. Francesca Murphy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 408–24.

⁶⁶ See Radford Ruether, "Christology," 138: "Christ is not necessarily male, nor is the redeemed community only women, but a new humanity, female and male." Radford Ruether expressly favors a Christ abstracted from his historical existence: "Christ, as redemptive person and Word of God, is not to be encapsulated 'once-for-all' in the historical Jesus" (138).

individual's proper identity, this feminist position is marred from its inception by a deficient anthropology—and, by extension, a deficient Christology. To emasculate Christ, to abstract his maleness from his humanity, as if the human nature he assumes were somehow undifferentiated by sex or as if his maleness were nothing more than an accessory “add-on” playing no integral role in his otherwise “human” actions, is to fall prey to the trap of docetism. It is purely and simply to surrender Christ's real and full humanity.

Correspondingly, the soteriological consequences of such a semi-docetic emasculation of Christ are no less dire. To insist that Jesus's maleness has no theological significance is at bottom to say that his humanity has no theological significance—which is to annul human salvation. Human salvation was accomplished in all that Christ did and suffered in the flesh, to paraphrase Aquinas, and Christ's flesh was male flesh.⁶⁷ Like odd and even, where each shares fully in the essence of number, while at the same time carrying numerical signification that the other does not, so men and women belong to the same human species, while marking two distinct “modes” of being human (note: two distinct modes, not two dualistic modes, as some feminists allege).⁶⁸ Because men and women belong to the same species, the salvation that Christ accomplished in his male flesh extends to all, men and women alike. The feminist objection to Jesus's maleness is wholly without theological or anthropological merit.

The Risen Christ Retains His Male-Structured Body

We should note that maleness belongs not merely to Jesus's earthly existence, but to his glorified resurrected state as well—important for the issue at hand, since, in acting *in persona Christi*, the ordained priest acts more specifically in the person of the risen and glorified Christ. Against an Eastern patristic tradition, represented principally by the Cappadocian Fathers (Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa), that asserted the dissolution of sexual difference in the resurrection (on

⁶⁷ “Christ gives life to the world through the mysteries that he accomplished in his flesh.” Aquinas, *Super Ioan* 6, lec. 4 (Marietti no. 914); see also *Super Ioan* 5, lec. 5 (Marietti no. 791).

⁶⁸ The comparison of male and female to odd and even comes from Thomas himself, drawing upon Aristotle (see *In X metaphys.*, lec. 11, no. 2128), as noted by John Finley, “The Metaphysics of Gender: A Thomistic Approach,” *The Thomist* 79 (2015): 585–614, at 607. For the feminist view, see Elizabeth A. Johnson, “Imaging God, Embodying Christ: Women as a Sign of the Times,” in *The Church Women Want*, ed. Elizabeth A. Johnson (New York: Crossroad, 2002), 45–59, at 52. Johnson's point is that denying women access to the priesthood is to favor a faulty, dualistic anthropology. Butler addresses this objection at length in *Catholic Priesthood*, 44–47.

account both of a Platonic-inspired disregard for the body and of the fact that in Christ “there is neither male nor female” [Gal 3:28]), Aquinas unhesitatingly affirms the opposite: sexual difference shall remain in our risen bodies.⁶⁹ Thomas writes:

The diversity [of sex] befits the perfection of [our] species. . . . And therefore just as humans will rise again in diverse statures, so too, in diverse sexes. . . . The difference between the sexes and [genital] members will be for restoring the perfection of human nature [*ad naturae humanae perfectionem reintegrandam*] both in the species and in the individual.⁷⁰

Though Aquinas does not affirm this explicitly of the risen Christ, the truth of the humanity that the Word assumed demands nothing less. The risen Christ retains his male structuring in view of “the perfection of [his] human nature”; it “serves to restore the integrity of [his] human body,” to cite Thomas from another passage addressing the same.⁷¹ Indeed, if the Christ who rose from the tomb was not the male Jesus whose body was put to death by crucifixion, it was not the same body with its punctured wounds that was nailed to the Cross—a denial of the reality of the resurrection and the plain witness of the Gospels, where Christ says: “Put your finger here [Thomas],

⁶⁹ See the important essay by Verna Harrison, “Male and Female in Cappadocian Theology,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 41, no. 2 (1990): 441–71. Basil, for instance, asserts: “For there is no male or female in the resurrection, but there is one certain life and it is of one kind, since those dwelling in the land of the living are well pleasing to their Master” (*Homily on Psalm 114* [PG 29: 492C]; cited in Harrison, 451). Gregory of Nazianzus writes: “This is the great mystery planned for us by God, who for us was made human and became poor, to resurrect the flesh and recover his image and refashion the human, that we might all become one in Christ, . . . that we might no longer be male and female” (*Oratione* 7.23 [PG 35: 785C]; cited in Harrison, 459). Gregory of Nyssa affirms the same even more stridently; see his *On Those Who Have Fallen Asleep* (*Gregorii Nysseni Opera* 9.63; cited in Harrison, 469). As for these Cappadocians’ Platonist-inspired regard for the body as alien to our human makeup, Harrison concludes that this “is probably why his [Christ’s] maleness never became an issue in Greek patristic Christology” (458).

⁷⁰ *In IV sent.*, d. 44, q. 1, a. 3, qa. 3, and qa. 4, ad 2 (trans. Beth Mortensen, Peter Kwasniewski, and Dylan Schrader, in *Commentary on the Sentences, Book IV*, 43–50 [Green Bay, WI: Aquinas Institute, 2018], 74–75; with adaptations).

⁷¹ SCG IV, ch. 88: “None of those members [i.e., sexual members] will be lacking [in the bodies of those who rise again], although they will not have their use; yet not without purpose, since they will serve to restore the integrity of the human body [*ad integritatem naturalis corporis restituendam*]” (trans. Laurence Shapcote [Green Bay, WI: Aquinas Institute, 2018], 541).

and see my hands [with their nail prints]; and put out your hand, and place it in my side" (John 20:27). The risen Jesus who "showed his hands and his feet" to his apostles (Luke 24:40) was not an androgynous or epicene, undifferentiated individual; he was, and remains, a man, a male individual with all the biological structuring, all the bodily integrity, that this entails, albeit in a glorified mode. From his conception to his everlasting glorification, Christ's male-structured body remains a constitutive part of his human identity (just as the Virgin Mary's female-structured body remains a constitutive part of her human identity after her assumption "body and soul" into heaven). "Christ himself was and remains a man," asserts *Inter Insigniores* §5.

Acting In Persona Christi: Conformity to Christ's Maleness

"Whom at that point [of the Last Supper] he [Jesus] was making priests of the new covenant." So asserts the Council of Trent in addressing the moment when the apostles were consecrated by Jesus for priestly ministry.⁷² More to the point of this essay, the priestly ministry for which the apostles were consecrated—a ministry passed on through the laying on of hands in the sacrament of holy orders—is grounded fundamentally in Christ's own priesthood, which the venerable phrase *in persona Christi* (to act in the very name and person of Christ, ultimately on account of the character received

⁷² Tanner, *Decrees*, 2:733. See also canon 2 of the same decree: "If anyone says that by the words, *Do this in remembrance of me*, Christ did not make the apostles priests, . . . let him be anathema" (2:735). Even before the Last Supper, Benedict XVI observes how the language of the New Testament shows that the apostolic office was marked from its inception for priestly ministry: "These words of the Evangelist [in Mark 3:14, literally 'he made twelve,' though commonly translated as 'he appointed twelve'] take up the Old Testament terminology for appointment to the priesthood (cf. 1 Kings 12:31; 13:33) and thus characterize the apostolic office as a priestly ministry" (*Jesus of Nazareth*, 1:171; see 2:89–90 for more on the apostles' consecration for priestly ministry at the Last Supper). In this vein, Thomas J. Lane observes: "Christ never used the words 'priest' of the apostles, because, before the consciousness of the apostles' sharing in the priesthood of Christ could arise, it was necessary for the early Christians to understand that Jesus himself was a priest and that his death was his self-sacrificial priestly offering. It would be some time after Jesus' death before Christians would think of the ministers of the New Covenant, the apostles and their co-workers, in priestly terms" (*The Catholic Priesthood: Biblical Foundations* [Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road, 2016], 122–23; see 107–15 for a thorough treatment of the apostles' consecration for priestly ministry at the Last Supper, with particular focus on John's Gospel).

in holy orders) seeks to signify.⁷³ Summarizing the ordained priest's participation in Christ's priesthood, St. John Henry Newman writes:

Christ's priests have no priesthood but His. They are merely His shadows and organs, they are His outward signs; and what they do, He does; when they baptize, He is baptizing; when they bless, He is blessing.⁷⁴

In Persona Christi during the Eucharistic Consecration

If we turn to the Eucharistic celebration, the words of consecration emerge as the precise moment in which the priest acts *in persona Christi*—an act that, of import for the topic of this essay, defines the ordained priesthood and marks its principal purpose: “The sacrament of orders is ordained to the consecration of the Eucharist,” is how Aquinas expresses it.⁷⁵ St. Thomas, in fact, adverts to the phrase *in persona Christi* only in reference to the consecration of the Eucharist; he employs the phrase *per virtutem Christi*, “by the power of Christ,” for the other sacraments (such as baptism): “Such is the dignity of this sacrament [of the Eucharist],” he writes, “that it is performed only in the Person of Christ [*nisi in persona Christi*].”⁷⁶ Though

⁷³ Butler observes that the notion of the ordained minister acting *in persona Christi* originates with 2 Cor 2:10, as per Jerome's Vulgate translation, and was affirmed in the third century by St. Cyprian of Carthage (*Catholic Priesthood*, 79). The character received in holy orders signifies an indelible mark on the soul, an ontological conformity to Christ, thereby deputing the ordained man to act in Christ's person, as his instrument, in those acts unique to the ordained. See Guy Mansini, “Episcopal *Munera* and the Character of Episcopal Order,” *The Thomist* 66 (2002): 369–94.

⁷⁴ John Henry Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, 8 vols. (London: Rivingtons, 1868), 6:242; cited in Lane, *Catholic Priesthood*, 180.

⁷⁵ *ST* III, q. 65, a. 3. Later, Aquinas is even more explicit: “Priests are consecrated for the purpose of celebrating the sacrament of Christ's Body. . . . It belongs to a priest to consecrate the Eucharist, which is the principal purpose of the priesthood” (q. 67, a. 2). Relatedly, Aquinas elsewhere affirms: “The power of consecrating this sacrament [of the Eucharist] on Christ's behalf is bestowed upon the priest at his ordination; for thereby he is put on a level with them to whom the Lord said, ‘Do this in memory of me’” (q. 82, a. 1). Then, in q. 82, a. 7, ad 3, he affirms the same with reference to the formula *in persona Christi*: “The priest, in consecrating the sacrament, speaks as in the Person of Christ [*in persona Christi*], whose place he holds by the power of his Orders.” See Bernard Marliangeas, *Clés pour une théologie du ministère* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1978), 97.

⁷⁶ *ST* III, q. 82, a. 1; see also q. 78, a. 4: “These words [of consecration] are uttered in the person of Christ”—though here the phrase is *ex persona Christi*. For the other sacraments, see, e.g., Aquinas's treatment of baptism, wherein he speaks of the minister

subtle, Aquinas's use of *in persona Christi* only in reference to the Eucharist affirms a qualitative difference between the minister's instrumental role in the Eucharistic celebration and that in the other sacraments. This stands in line with Thomas's assertion that the Eucharist "is of greater worth than the other sacraments."⁷⁷ Hence, the observation by the theologian Bernard Marliangeas that the Eucharistic consecration, on Aquinas's account, offers "the purest case" of the priest's power to act *in persona Christi*.⁷⁸ *Inter Insigniores*, for its part, affirms that, indeed, the power of acting *in persona Christi* reaches its "supreme expression" in the celebration of the Eucharist (§5).

Reinforcing this qualitative difference, Aquinas highlights another singular feature of the Eucharist relative to the other sacraments, still concerning the words pronounced during the consecration: "[Whereas] the forms [i.e., the words] of the other sacraments are pronounced in the person of the minister [e.g., 'I baptize you'], . . . the form of this sacrament is pronounced as if Christ were speaking in person ['This is my body' and 'This is the chalice of my blood']".⁷⁹ When considering the all-male priesthood, this reciting

acting "instrumentally [*instrumentaliter*] by the power [*tantum per virtute*] of Christ" (q. 67, a. 4). We should note that he does combine both phrases in q. 83, a. 1, ad 3: "The priest also bears Christ's image [*imaginem Christi*], in whose Person and by whose power [*in cuius persona et virtute*] he pronounces the words of consecration." Also, in his discussion of Christ's priesthood in q. 22, a. 4, Thomas, without mentioning the Eucharistic celebration, observes that "the priest of the New Law works in [Christ's] person [*in persona ipsius*]."

⁷⁷ ST III, q. 78, a. 4.

⁷⁸ Marliangeas, *Clés pour une théologie*, 99. Vatican Council II would extend the formula *in persona Christi* to the whole ministry of the ordained priesthood, as noted by Samuel J. Aquila, "The Teaching of Vatican II on *In Persona Christi* and *In Nomine Ecclesiae* in Relation to the Ministerial Priesthood in Light of the Historical Development of the Formulae" (STL thesis, Pontifical Atheneum of St. Anselm, 1990), 56; see, e.g., Vatican II's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, §§7 and 33, its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, §§10 and 28, and its Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, §§2 and 13.

⁷⁹ ST III, q. 78, a. 1. A bit later in article five, he similarly writes: "The priest pronounces [the words of consecration] by way of recital [*recitative*], as though they were spoken by Christ." Aquila (current archbishop of Denver) notes that the "strong sense" of the phrase *in persona Christi*, especially in reference to the Eucharist, developed in the Dominican school immediately preceding Aquinas; for instance, the Dominican Guerri de Saint-Quentin (†1245), in his work *De sacramento altaris*, appears to be the first to note the difference between the priest's words in the other sacraments and those in the Eucharist, qualifying the latter as being pronounced *in persona Christi* ("Teaching of Vatican II," 20–21); see also Marliangeas, *Clés pour une théologie du ministère*, 68. Albert the Great also employs the phrase *in persona Christi* only in reference to the Eucharistic consecration (see Aquila, 21, and Marliangeas, 70).

of Jesus's own words in the first person and in reference to his body proves decisive. Let us trace this out.

Bearing the Image of the Male Christ (Imago Christi Masculi)

As we have already seen, a human body (including Christ's) is by virtue of its biological structuring a sexed body, a body differentiated by the male or female sex. Accordingly, to say "my body" is necessarily to draw reference, whether explicitly or implicitly, to one's male or female sex. It is impossible, nonsensical even, to abstract the male or female sex, as with the entire biological structuring, from the particular body to which the words "my body" refer, as determined by the presence of either the XX (female) or XY (male) genetic karyotype in each cell of that body.

Whence the manifest conclusion: the pronouncement of "my body" at the time of the Eucharistic consecration refers to the particular, differentiated body of Jesus, the male-structured body that was present at the Last Supper, put to death on the Cross the following day, and risen from the tomb three days later—and now glorified in heaven. Note that the priest at this moment acts not *in nomine Ecclesiae*, as if the words "my body" refer to the Body of Christ the Church, composed of both men and women united as equals (whence Gal 3:28: "There is neither male nor female in Christ Jesus"). Rather, to act *in persona Christi* with express reference to Christ's differentiated, historical body necessarily implies the male sex of that body. To hold otherwise would be to espouse, however inadvertently, an undifferentiated humanity in Christ—a recycled semi-docetism.

As regards the sex of those ordained to the priesthood, the crucial step comes in the fact that the priest, standing in for the person of Christ, pronounces the words of consecration in the first person; he speaks as if he were Christ himself—and thereby "bears Christ's image" (to quote both Aquinas and *Inter Insignores*) in a unique way.⁸⁰ Because the priest speaks as if Christ's own body, a male body, were his (the priest's) own, this "icon" or *imago Christi* extends to Jesus's manhood/maleness. Reciting the words "my body," the priest conforms himself implicitly yet incontrovertibly to Christ's maleness (as well as to Christ's priesthood, since the words of consecration mark and re-present Christ's priestly offering of himself). The priest, in other words, makes Christ's body—a male body—his own, he identifies himself

⁸⁰ *ST* III, q. 83, a. 1, ad 3. See *Inter Insignores* §5, writes: "The priest . . . acts not only through the effective power conferred on him by Christ, but *in persona Christi*, taking the role of Christ, to the point of being his very image, when he pronounces the words of consecration."

with Christ's male body. He bears the *imago Christi masculi*, the image of the male Christ.

Women as the Imago Christi Masculi?

How this applies to the exclusion of women from the ministerial priesthood should appear obvious. Since the priest acts as the *imago Christi masculi* when pronouncing the words of consecration, it would be most unseemly, most unfitting, for a woman to bear this image, to make Christ's male body her own through the reciting of the words "This is my body."⁸¹ From the perspective of what Alasdair MacIntyre calls the metaphysical biology of Aquinas's thought, where biological structuring (inclusive of sexual design) is essential to one's human makeup as in accordance with our body-soul/matter-spirit composite nature, it would be metaphysically untenable and absurd—to say nothing, again, of most unfitting—for a woman to make Christ's male body her own.⁸² Hence, the wise institution of the all-male priesthood by the male Christ (who yet favored the equal dignity of women), so much so that maleness becomes, by Christ's design, essential (or of absolute necessity) to holding the office.

Fitting Sacramental Representation of Christ

Note that the priest makes Christ's male body his own not literally, but sacramentally, that is, symbolically or by way of sign (Aquinas observes that sign, *signum*, is defining of the sacraments in general): "The priest is a sign," affirms *Inter Insignores*.⁸³ And in Thomas's sacramental theology, the notion of fittingness (*conveniēns*) is closely associated with signs or symbols, since

⁸¹ Though arguing (correctly) that "a feminist theology of ordained ministry takes seriously human embodiment," the feminist theologian Susan S. Ross yet insists (erroneously) in the very same breath and seemingly without sensing the contradiction that sexual difference remains "irrelevant" to ordained ministry ("God's Embodiment and Women," in LaCugna, *Freeing Theology*, 185–209, at 203; cited in Schumacher, "Natural and Sacramental Significance," 585).

⁸² See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 148; see also the preface to his *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999). For more on Aquinas's holding tenaciously to the biological dimension of human sexuality on account of his primordial commitment to an underlying hylemorphic view of the human being, see my "Thomas Aquinas on Sexual Difference," 177–215.

⁸³ See *Inter Insignores* §5: "The Christian priesthood is of a sacramental nature: the priest is a sign, . . . The whole sacramental economy is in fact based upon natural signs." For the relationship between sacraments and signs in Aquinas, see *ST* III, q. 60, a. 1: "Sacraments imply the habitude of sign [*habitudinem signi*], and in this way a sacrament is a kind of sign." See also q. 78, a. 4 ad 3.

some signs or symbols prove better, or more suitable, than others, particularly when we recognize that “sacramental signs represent by natural resemblance [*ex naturali similitudine*].”⁸⁴ Hence, as regards the Eucharist, Thomas affirms that bread and wine are a more suitable sign, or more “fitting matter” (*materia conveniens*), since this sacrament is for “eating” (*manducatio*), while the words of consecration constitute the “fitting form” (*conveniens forma*), given that these words “signify the actual conversion of the bread into the body of Christ.”⁸⁵ So, in like manner, what I am arguing is that only a male priest acts as the “fitting minister” (*minister conveniens*) of the Eucharist, given that the priest bears the *imago Christi masculi* during the Eucharistic consecration. Only a male priest shares a “natural resemblance” with the male Christ, in whose male person he acts and as befits a sacramental sign.⁸⁶ Among the Scholastic masters, it is in fact Bonaventure, not Aquinas, who makes this argument:

In this sacrament the ordained person is the sign of Christ the Mediator; since the Mediator belongs only to the male sex, he can only be represented by the male sex; therefore, the capacity for receiving Orders belongs only to males who alone can represent him by nature and, having received the character [of Orders], can effectively bear the sign [of Christ].⁸⁷

As an “outward” sacramental sign of Christ’s maleness, the priest’s signifying of this maleness “should be self-evident” (given the principle of natural resemblance), as Butler writes, “not needing further interpretation.”⁸⁸ With consecration of the Eucharist defining the ordained priesthood and marking its principal purpose, the male sex emerges, then, as the *sexus conveniens*, the fitting (and necessary) sex, of the office of the priesthood itself.

⁸⁴ *In IV sent.*, d. 25, q. 2, a. 2, qa. 1, ad 4 (p. 653).

⁸⁵ *ST III*, q. 74, a. 1 (for the bread and wine); q. 78, a. 2 (for the words of consecration; see a. 3 for how the words “This is the chalice of my blood” are the proper form of the consecration of the wine).

⁸⁶ See *Inter Insigniores* §5: “When Christ’s role in the Eucharist is to be expressed sacramentally, there would not be this ‘natural resemblance’ which must exist between Christ and his minister if the role of Christ were not taken by a man: in such a case it would be difficult to see in the minister the image of Christ.”

⁸⁷ St. Bonaventure, *In IV Sent.*, d. 25, a. 2, q. 1 (cited and translated in Butler, *Catholic Priesthood*, 82). In this regard, it should be pointed out that, relative to the time period, Bonaventure had an uncharacteristically favorable view of women; for more on this, see the important work by Healy, *Woman according to Saint Bonaventure*.

⁸⁸ Butler, *Catholic Priesthood*, 82.

The All-Male Priesthood: A Fitting (and Absolute) Necessity

We can state the case more strongly. On Aquinas's account, Christological and sacramental fittingness operate in view a kind of necessity, what we can call a conditional or fitting necessity. Thomas defines this type of necessity as "when the end [*finis*] is attained better [*melius*] and more suitably [*convenientius*], like when a horse [or a vehicle, we would say today] is necessary for a journey."⁸⁹ He distinguishes conditional or fitting necessity from absolute necessity, "when the end cannot be without it, as food is necessary for the preservation of human life."⁹⁰ Sometimes one finds both types of necessity linked together, though in different respects, as in the case of the all-male priesthood, as we shall now see.

In Aquinas's theological vision, conditional necessity (the necessity of the end being better and more fittingly achieved), especially as it concerns the economy of salvation, carries enormous weight—the weight of God's providential will. This becomes readily apparent when we enumerate some Christological examples of conditional or fitting necessity that Aquinas offers, all of which track closely the Creed, and thus read like a highlights reel of the chief mysteries of human salvation. Though not absolutely necessary, it was nonetheless conditionally or fittingly necessary, Aquinas affirms: that God became incarnate in order to redeem the human race; that Christ took on bodily defects and certain defects of soul (like passibility); that he was circumcised, baptized, performed miracles, and led a life of austerity and poverty; that he suffered to redeem the human race, specifically through his Passion and death; that he descended into hell; that he rose from the dead; and the list goes on.⁹¹ In short, on Aquinas's account, the notion of necessary fittingness (*conveniens*) drives the entire God-made-man "event," from the Incarnation itself (*Deus factus est homo*) to the whole course of Christ's life and glorious exaltation (*acta et passa Iesu*).⁹² This extends to the sacraments, which, as dynamic actions of the person of Christ (the foundation of the

⁸⁹ *ST* III, q. 1, a. 2.

⁹⁰ *ST* III, q. 1, a. 2. Other passages in which Thomas addresses this distinction in relation to Christ include *ST* III, q. 46, aa. 1–3.

⁹¹ In the order of mentioned sequence: *ST* III, q. 1, a. 2; q. 14, a. 2; q. 15, a. 4; q. 37, a. 1; q. 39, a. 1; q. 43, a. 1; q. 40, aa. 2–3; q. 46, aa. 1 and 3–4; q. 50, a. 1; q. 52, a. 1; q. 53, a. 1.

⁹² The Christological section of the *ST* is famously divided between the study of *Deus factus est homo* (qq. 1–26) and that of the *acta et passa Iesu* (qq. 27–59); for more on this division, see my "The Theological Mysteries of Christ's Life in Aquinas' *Summa*," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Summa Theologiae*, ed. Philip McCosker and Denys Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 240–54, and Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Le Christ en ses mystères: la vie et l'œuvre de Jésus selon saint Thomas d'Aquin*, 2 vols. (Paris: Desclée, 1999).

priest's acting *in persona Christi*), continue his saving mission in time.⁹³ Little wonder that one scholar observes how a "torrent of suitabilities" (or of fittingnesses) engulfs the entire Christological and sacramental sections that make up the *tertia pars* of the *Summa theologiae*.⁹⁴

How this bears on the all-male priesthood should appear obvious. To say the male priest, because he bears the *imago Christi masculi*, is the "fitting minister" (*minister conveniens*) of the Eucharist is to affirm that it is conditionally or fittingly necessary (an iconic fittingness) in its strong Thomistic sense—just as, say, it was conditionally or fittingly necessary for God to become man in view of human salvation. And with consecration of the Eucharist defining the ordained priesthood and marking its principal purpose, the male sex emerges, to repeat but in even stronger terms, as the *sexus conveniens*, the necessary fitting sex, of the office of the entire ministerial priesthood. Hardly accessory to the ministerial priesthood, maleness is essential to it.⁹⁵

Maleness, in fact, is not simply fittingly necessary for the ordained priesthood; it is also absolutely necessary, that is, essential to it in the "hard" sense (cannot be otherwise). This follows upon Christ's institution of the office. Though Christ may have chosen maleness for the ordained priesthood for fitting reasons, once he has instituted the all-male priesthood, it cannot be otherwise, and thus cannot change. Maleness becomes, upon Christ's institution, a strictly requisite feature of the priesthood. Analogously, though God may have determined, for fitting reasons, to redeem the human race by the Incarnation of his Son, it is now absolutely necessary to be saved only

⁹³ In the prologue to the *tertia pars* of the *ST* (the Christological and sacramental part of the *ST*), Thomas writes: "We should consider the Savior of all and the benefits bestowed by him on the human race. To this end, we must consider the Savior himself and then the sacraments by which we attain to our salvation." For other passages affirming the sacraments as dynamic actions of the person of Christ, see: *ST* III, q. 60, prol.; q. 62, a. 5; q. 64, a. 3. For more on this, see Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Aquinas's Summa: Background, Structure, and Reception*, trans. Benedict M. Guevin (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 59.

⁹⁴ See Gilbert Narcisse, "Les enjeux épistémologiques de l'argument de convenance selon saint Thomas d'Aquin," in *Ordo sapientiae et amoris. Image et message de saint Thomas d'Aquin à travers les récentes études historiques, herméneutiques et doctrinales*, ed. C.-J. Pinto de Oliveira (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires, 1993), 143–67, at 146–47; see also Narcisse's larger work, *Les raisons de Dieu: Argument de convenance et esthétique théologique selon saint Thomas d'Aquin et Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires, 1997).

⁹⁵ For how an ontological (and not merely "functional") conformity to Christ's maleness belongs to all three degrees of ordination, and with particular focus on the diaconate, see Schumacher, "Natural and Sacramental Significance," 614–24.

through faith in Christ, "for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Similarly, that priests be male is fitting—this follows from the structure of the sacrament of the Eucharist and the way signs work in relation to it. But now, because of the wise decision of Christ, it is absolutely necessary that priests be male.

A More Robust Fittingness than Christ as Bridegroom of the Church

The other argument of fittingness for the all-male priesthood that theologians frequently offer is that of the male priest more fittingly representing Christ the Bridegroom and Head of the Church (also an iconic fittingness).⁹⁶ The argument presented here thus complements the Bridegroom argument. Between the two, however, the argument I have advanced provides an ontologically deeper, and thus more metaphysically robust, link between Christ's maleness and the maleness of the ordained priesthood. The argument presented here shows how the priest makes Christ's male body his own in a deeper metaphysical sense, inasmuch as the priest conforms himself to Christ's maleness via a substantial compositional part of Christ's human nature (his signate matter, i.e., his individuated and differentiated body). The Bridegroom argument, on the other hand, holds that the priest identifies himself with Christ's maleness via a purely accidental feature of Christ's humanity (important though it be), that of Bridegroom.

Conclusion

High-ranking churchmen like Archbishop Hesse can express a willingness to "think about and discuss" the idea of women's ordination if they wish (see the introduction to this essay), but such openness is theologically naïve and misguided from its inception. Men who enter the ordained priesthood become conformed to the person of Christ in a qualitatively unique way, inasmuch as they become identified with his maleness by virtue of their sacramental (Eucharistic) function. As maleness is essential to Christ's humanity, so is it to the ministerial priesthood. To favor women's ordination is at bottom, then, to fall into Christological error (semi-docetism).

By showing that sound theological argument stands on the side of the all-male priesthood, I have lent theological muscle to John Paul II's definitive ruling out of the admissibility of women to priestly ordination. Hardly a "paper that stifles," *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* instead safeguards the

⁹⁶ This argument can be found, e.g., in *Inter Insigniores* §5, as well as in Butler, *Catholic Priesthood*, 83–84 and 90–92.

Christological and anthropological foundations of the priesthood; it upholds the necessary link between the Incarnation—inclusive of the assumed male sex—and the ministerial priesthood. In this way, the speculative argument advanced in this essay helps provide a theological account for why Jesus could, on the one hand, lift up women as equal to men in personal dignity and social status and yet, on the other, accept only men as apostles, that is, institute an all-male priesthood.

In the final analysis, the exclusion of women from the ministerial priesthood is, in the words of *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, “to be seen as the faithful observance of a plan to be ascribed to the wisdom of the Lord of the universe” (§3). This essay’s principal thesis is to suggest that the male sex assumed by the incarnate Lord sits at the core this plan. *Inter Insigniores* §4, for its part, puts the emphasis on fidelity to the manner of acting by the same Christ who instituted the priesthood and the sacraments: “When [the Church] judges that she cannot accept certain changes [regarding the sacraments, inclusive of the priesthood], it is because she knows she is bound by Christ’s manner of acting. Her attitude, despite appearances, is therefore not one of archaism but of fidelity: it can be truly understood only in this light.” As this essay has sought to argue, affirming fidelity to the all-male priesthood is to affirm fidelity to the Incarnation itself—in its full concrete reality—and thus fidelity to how the “plan ascribed to the wisdom of the Lord of the universe” is expressive of that reality. N·V