

Gender and Sacrifice

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This is an attempt to see what some of the underlying assumptions in the current debates on the ordination of women in the Roman Catholic priesthood are. It seems to me that the debate is not getting anywhere because of the lack of common language of discussion. In such a quandary, the best thing to do would seem to be to look at the implicit assumptions of both sides. Perhaps we are really present at one of those night battles which both Newman and Matthew Arnold saw as characteristic of controversy in their own day, where neither side understands either the explicit arguments or the implicit assumptions of the other. If so, the best service an observer can do would be to see how these implicit assumptions plug into wider world-views.

One of the major arguments for the ordination of women is that the Church is inevitably affected by the social structures and cultural values of the age it is living in. Therefore the supposed argument from tradition lacks weight. There were not women priests for the same reason that there were not women lawyers or engineers. Objection to the ordination of women is just another case of the way in which religion of any sort seems to become a bulwark of extreme conservatism in social ideas, perhaps because of religion's sociological role in stabilizing society and maintaining identities over time. Another form of this argument is that the Church cannot afford to continue neglecting the very great pool of ministerial talent that undoubtedly exists among women.

If we look for the implicit assumptions, they would seem to belong to the general ideology of equality that surfaced in Western society about 1750, and gave both the American and French Revolutions their distinctive concern with the equality of citizens in the republic.¹ This was an ideal of political, rather than economic, equality. Marxism would seem justified in arguing that this kind of egalitarianism reflects the need of early capitalism for a free market in labour, unrestrained by hereditary class groupings, but leading to new forms of economic inequality. Nor were all the implications immediately realised. If all men were entitled, as the American Declaration of Independence declared, 'to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness', what, then, was the position of slaves? Either they should be emancipated, or they should be classed as permanently unfit for liberty. Racism is a perverse offspring of egalitarianism.

For women, indeed, the consequences of the ideology of equality

were still more slowly realised. Indeed, the Victorian image of woman as 'the angel of the house' may reflect not so much a wish to discourage initiatives for emancipation as a desire to keep family life as a space free from the crudely quantitative values of the market-place. The movement for women's political emancipation in the English-speaking countries from about 1880 onwards seems to relate to an increase in demand for women white-collar workers. Again, there are obviously links between the demands of contemporary feminism and the incomplete degree to which women participate in the labour market.² It would also be possible to argue that women have played a very similar role in the Church, providing all manner of services and support, but excluded from decision-making, except at a very limited level.

The implicit assumption behind this line of argument is that the ideology of equality should hold in every aspect of society. But should it? Or are there no areas of human life in which diversity and distinctiveness can be and should be encouraged? If we see labour as a commodity which can be exactly quantified and paid for, then all who provide the same quantity of labour should be remunerated at the same price; but it does not follow that all human relationships can be defined as relations of quantifiable labour. However, feminism here is capable of self-criticism, for while the main tide of feminism is concerned with asserting the equality of women and their right to have access to power, there is a current which stresses the need to defend and develop specifically feminine identities and positions. In this, feminism is not different from other movements of liberation, particularly those associated with ethnic minorities, which begin by claiming equality, but go on to assert specificity, or, to put it differently, look for a space of their own rather than a share in other people's.³

If we look now at the arguments against the ordination of women, in general they seem to rely on the appeal to tradition. Now, inasmuch as this is simply the point that women were not ordained in the past, and, therefore, cannot be ordained in the future, it hardly seems convincing. If, however, the argument is that at the level not so much of doctrinal definition as that of symbolism, between the image of woman—or, more platonically, of femininity—and that of the Eucharistic sacrifice, this seems worth exploring.

One form of this argument is based on a view of human personality in which there is a sharp distinction between male and female spirituality because of an innate personality difference between men and women. Clearly, if we believe in an essential body-soul unity, our understanding of how the body has religious signification will be different from one inspired by the 'ghost in the machine' theory. But it might be better to speak of different types of experience available to women and to men, rather than of some fundamental difference of soul.

Because this differential access to experience depends primarily on differing bodily structures and only secondarily on different cultural and social roles, it would seem that contrasts in the ritual roles assigned to men and women are not simply reducible to socially imposed inequalities. Having said this, I would like to develop the argument which, although (so far as I know) it has never been presented exactly in this form, is perhaps the major implicit objection on the part of many people to the ordination of women.

Let me first state that I am writing this as an anthropologist, not as a theologian or a canon lawyer, neither of which I am. The view of ritual which I use here is drawn from Godfrey Lienhardt's *Divinity and Experience* and Victor Turner's *The Forest of Symbols*. My understanding of *anamnesis* is drawn not, as it should be, from the Platonic and patristic sources, but from Gregory Dix's *The Shape of the Liturgy* and the poetry of David Jones. I would justify my getting an anthropological word in on the grounds that the relation between woman and priesthood, more specifically the images of womanhood and priesthood, is an anthropological one, since it relates to the congruity or incongruity of symbols.

The Mass is a sacrifice. What is a sacrifice?⁴ Probably no one definition can be absolutely satisfactory for all the events which can be classified as sacrifices, but in the Judeo-Christian tradition, and in many African traditions as well, the idea of sacrifice seems to imply a death, and such a death will always combine, albeit in very varying proportions, the idea of expiation with that of new life coming through death. Now the Mass is the *anamnesis*, that is, not simply the recalling but even the re-presenting of such an expiatory and life-giving death, the death of Christ. In other words, it is both a replaying of violence and an exorcism of violence. We usually think of the passion of Christ from the point of view of his acceptance of suffering; but if we think of it from the external point of view of the violence directed against him, we may see it as a series of events where violence first achieves its greatest triumph in killing the man who is also God, and is then 'turned round' to be a means to new life.

I do not think we often think of the Mass in this way. If we did, it might alter quite appreciably our understanding of what the Church can do in situations of endemic violence, or in dealing with violent people, or in seeking to heal the roots of violence in the human experience. If the Mass is both an *anamnesis* of violence and its exorcism, then it has dimensions more challenging and more powerful than those suggested by the conventional description of the Eucharist as 'the family meal of the Christian community'. If I am asked for an example of the Mass acting specifically as a challenge to violence, then the circumstances of the martyrdom of Archbishop Romero, murdered by right-wing terrorists at

the consecration in the Maundy Thursday Mass, come irresistibly to mind.

Is it fair to link violence with masculinity? Or is this simply a lying myth of *machismo* and its mirror-image, the secessionist type of feminism? The heritage of man the hunter, man the warrior, man the forger of the means of destruction, is sufficiently continuous in human history to make such a link justifiable, just as life-giving and nurture may be linked to the image of femininity. Certainly, the ethnographic evidence, evidence, at least from Africa and the Mediterranean Basin,⁵ seems to confirm that there is a tie-up between masculinity, violence, and sacrifice as both controlled violence and the cure of violence. It seems understandable that men are generally ('always' is a very unsafe word to use) selected as sacrificing priests.

But does this necessarily apply to Catholic Christianity? Two very formidable objections can be brought forward against my line of argument. First of all, this is presenting Christianity as a tribal religion and the Mass as essentially just another, albeit more effective, expiatory sacrifice. But even if the Mass 'assumes' (in the Hegelian sense) all other sacrifices, it also transcends them, being the sacrifice not only of the crucified, but also of the risen, Christ. Therefore, it cannot be tied down to the anthropologist's book of rubrics. Secondly, however clever my arguments may be, they still must be wrong, because by excluding women from the confection (as the old technical term was) of the Eucharist, they condemn them to a permanently marginal position in the Church.

Now my first reply would be that in this article I am not trying to set up a once-for-all knock-down argument, which would permanently dispose of the question of the ordination of women. I am trying to raise the quality of argument above the level of 'It's only those stupid old men in the Vatican', or 'What preposterous people these women must be'. If the Mass were simply 'the family meal of the Christian community' and nothing more, then indeed it would be more appropriate for a woman to be the normal minister. If we start to see the Mass as an encounter with violence that makes it creative, the link between masculinity and the priesthood becomes more intelligible.

However, the objections do deserve some kind of answer, and I would sketch out one as follows. The passion and resurrection of Christ form the centre of God's plan for our redemption, but the incarnation cannot simply be reduced to the redemption, nor, indeed, the redemption simply to the death of Christ. In the same way, the whole economy of grace in the Church and the world is not simply reducible to the Mass, central though it is to Catholic devotion. In the Mass itself, there is a dialectic of word and sacrifice, and in the spiritual life of ordinary Catholics there has been for centuries a dialectic between Eucharistic

devotion and devotions to the saints, particularly Mary. In this century, the liturgical movement, in part reacting against an overgrowth of minor devotions, has stressed the importance of conscious participation in the Mass; but this has led in its turn to the growth of what Rahner called 'pan-liturgism', the reduction of everything in the Christian life to what happens within the four walls of a church. I am certainly not saying that women who want to be priests should content themselves with saying the rosary; what I am trying to say is the reduction of all devotion to participation in the Eucharist, and of all ministry in the Church to the Eucharistic priesthood, seems unsound, if we look at the Church's history.

Having said this, I think I should try and sketch out one form of ministry for women which would seem very appropriate for precisely the same kind of reasons for which, I have argued, it would be inappropriate to ordain women priests. If, as I have earlier argued, 'life-giving and nurture may be linked to the image of femininity', would it not be suitable to have women as the normal ministers of baptism? And since, for Christians, death is the gateway to another kind of life, could not women ministers also normally conduct the rite of funerals? Again, there is absolutely no theological reason why a woman minister could not be delegated to be the official witness of the Church.

Would all this be half-a-loafism? I hope not; the half-a-loaf argument implies that everything is a quantifiable commodity, and hence that everything is either more valuable than, less valuable than, or exactly equal to, everything else. Struggles for equality over the past two centuries have been necessary, because so generally inequalities of power have resulted in oppression. The imposing of equality has, however, often gone with a view of society as being composed of so many atomic individuals. But, as one of the characters in Malraux's *L'Espoir* remarks, the real opposite of oppression is not equality but fraternity. Life is enriched when it is experienced as the interplay of differences, rather than the juxtaposition of equivalences.

It has become fashionable for theologians to drop respectful curtseys in the direction of the social sciences, but in practice this seems little more than the readiness of the theologians of the sixties to take 'modern man' as their guru. If knowledge and opinion are socially conditioned (which is very conventional wisdom among all brands of sociologists), then it should be possible to show this with regard to theological opinion. If one analyses the institution of the priesthood according to the axioms of an egalitarian society, it seems very difficult to find any real objection to the ordination of women. But if one tries to relate the sign of priesthood as the instrument of the transformation of violence to the sign of femininity seen as the giving and nourishing of life, then they may be seen as contraries, though not contradictories. But

precisely because I believe that the religion of the Incarnation-enfleshment must take account of gender, I believe that there is an urgent need for the Church to give much greater recognition both to women as people of the Church and to the significance of femininity in its worship and self-understanding.

- 1 My ideas about equality have been very much influenced by the French anthropologist Louis Dumont, who was stimulated by his encounter with the Hindu caste system to reflect at length on ideologies of equality and of hierarchy. See his *Essais sur l'individualisme*, Paris, Seuil, 1983.
- 2 See Ivan Illich, *Gender*, London, Marion Boyars, 1983, for an ingeniously argued case that the incorporation of women in the labour market has not brought about their emancipation and that a society characterized by highly differentiated cultural and economic roles ascribed by gender would not necessarily be more unjust than present-day Western society, which professes to recognise simply the biological differences of the sexes.
- 3 An example of movements seeking for 'space' rather than 'equality' would be contemporary North American Indian movements.
- 4 For a round-up of recent anthropological and theological views on sacrifice, see M. Fortes and M. Bourdillon (editors), *Sacrifice*, Cambridge University Press, 1980.
- 5 Islam, of course, is a fascinating example of a great religion which attaches very little importance to sacrifice, but sacrifice is significant in many forms of popular Islam.

The Theology of Robots

Edmund Furse

Artificial Intelligence: an introduction

The initial reaction of nearly all theologians and religious people to the very idea that it is possible to talk about 'the theological dimensions' of the existence of robots would—today—be dismissive, and, more often than not, scornful. 'It makes no sense,' most theologians would say. Before beginning to argue that one day, on the contrary, it will make a lot of sense, something much more general must be said about robots, or, more specifically, about Artificial Intelligence.

Artificial Intelligence, or AI as it is usually abbreviated, is the study of computer models of intelligent behaviour. Some scientists are interested in