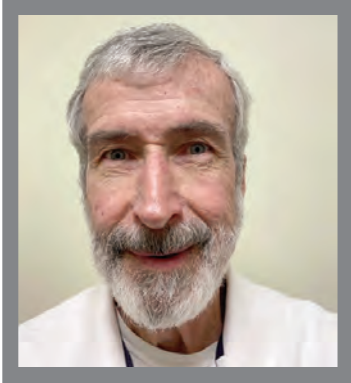


Our Readers Write:

An Anniversary Reflection



The following reflection was sent by John Hank to his ordination class of 1972. John was ordained for the Diocese of Newark, NJ.

Happy 50th Anniversary to the Roman Catholic Priesthood!

It was 50 years ago today that Archbishop Thomas A. Boland ordained us - and they've been years of joys and sorrows, exciting times and boring times, times of "same old, same old" and times of surprises.

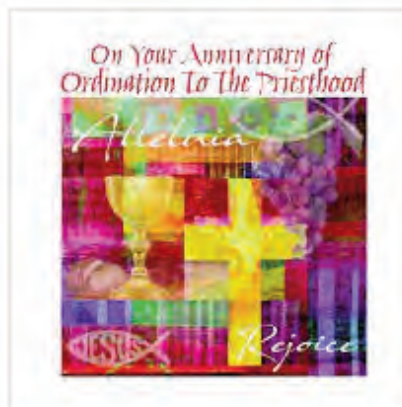
I know I never expected to marry, but twenty years ago I married the woman who saved my life by confronting me to confront my self (two words on purpose) and I have not regretted my decision for a moment. We have two adult daughters and I am a truly lucky man.

I have had a number of different jobs over these years and now I am the chaplain at Indian Creek Foundation in Souderton, PA, so my connection with ministry has resumed.

The attached is a result of the preceding information about my life and my job - and my reflection on why I could be ordained while my wife and daughters are relegated to the status of second class.

As you'll see, I begin with my remembrance of what I remember Anthony Padovano introduced us to in first theology, what Thomas Aquinas got wrong about physiology, and why the Church's continuing exclusion of women is, at best, outdated, wrong, and immoral. And yes, that is a strong statement but a necessary one if the Church hierarchy expects to be taken seriously by thinking persons and a majority of its people. So, happy 50th anniversary of the gift of our ordination - may we soon be allowed to share this gift with all who are so gifted regardless of gender or sexual identity.

Peace, and be safe,
John Hank



***Why the Roman Catholic Church
Won't Ordain Women –***

which is different than

***Why the Roman Catholic Church
Can't Ordain Women***

In my first year of theological studies in the seminary, I remember my dogma professor stating that our theology – that is, our understanding of God - is based on our understanding of the physical universe.

He then went on to make the connection: As scientists study the natural world to learn more about it, philosophers try to interpret what their discoveries mean for our understanding of life and how best to live it. Artists and writers in their turn express in form and literature what the philosophers understand so that, in effect, the implications of scientific discoveries will "filter down" to the rest of us "ordinary people". And, in turn, theologians apply the philosophical terminology for understanding the physical universe to our understanding of God's revelation and our consequent understanding of, and our relationship with, God.

{This Writer's Disclaimer: While that professor may or may not have said all that exactly, it is one of the enduring memories I took from the class and, over the years since then, it has been the basis for the title of, and what follows in, this presentation.}

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So now for a review of the background for what has been and continues to be the restriction of ordination to men in the Roman Catholic Church (hereafter referred to simply as the “Church”), because that Church’s traditional practice of a male-only priesthood did not develop in a vacuum.

A Historical Overview of Procreation

Aristotle:

His Influence –

Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.) was, as the Encyclopedia Britannica describes him, one of the greatest intellectual figures of Western history. He was the author of a philosophical and scientific system that became the framework and vehicle for both Christian Scholasticism and medieval Islamic philosophy.

It was Aristotle’s influence on Christian Scholasticism that is key to this topic.

About a century before Aristotle, the philosopher Empedocles (c. 494-434 BCE) identified fire, air, water and earth as the four basic elements for all we see in the world. Aristotle accepted the theory that all matter is composed of those four natural basic elements – namely: earth, air, fire and water – and then added a fifth element, called “aether”, for the region above earth. (This theory was generally accepted until the 17th century when Robert Boyle began what today is regarded as modern chemistry.)

On The Differences between Males and Females –

Aristotle believed women were inferior to men. In his work *Politics* (1254b13–14), Aristotle states “as regards the sexes, the male is by nature superior and the female inferior, the male ruler and the female subject”. In *Politics* (1.12) he elaborated: “The slave is wholly lacking the deliberative element; the female has it but it lacks authority; the child has it but it is incomplete”. Cynthia Freeland wrote: “Aristotle says that the courage of a man lies in commanding, a woman’s lies in obey-

ing; that ‘matter yearns for form, as the female for the male and the ugly for the beautiful’; that women have fewer teeth than men; that a female is an incomplete male or ‘as it were, a deformity’.” Aristotle believed that men and women naturally differed both physically and mentally, reduced women’s roles in society, and promoted the idea that women should receive less food and nourishment than males. He claimed that women are “more mischievous, less simple, more impulsive ... more compassionate ... more easily moved to tears ... more jealous, more querulous, more apt to scold and to strike ... more prone to despondency and less hopeful ... more void of shame or self-respect, more false of speech, more deceptive, of more retentive memory [and] ... also more wakeful; more shrinking [and] more difficult to rouse to action” than men.

Aristotle also wrote that only fair-skinned women, not darker-skinned women, had a sexual discharge and climaxed. He also believed this discharge could be increased by the eating of pungent foods. Aristotle thought a woman’s sexual discharge was akin to that of an infertile or amputated male’s. He concluded that both sexes contributed to the material of generation, but that the female’s contribution was in her discharge (as in a male’s) rather than within the ovary.

Aristotle further explained how and why the association between man and woman takes on a hierarchical character by commenting on male rule over ‘barbarians’, or non-Greeks. “By nature the female has been distinguished from the slave. For nature makes nothing in the manner that the coppersmiths make the Delphic knife – that is, frugally – but, rather, it makes each thing for one purpose. For each thing would do its work most nobly if it had one task rather than many. Among the barbarians the female and the slave have the same status. This is because there are no natural rulers among them but, rather, the association among them is between male and female slave. On account of this, the poets say that ‘it is fitting that Greeks rule barbarians’, as the barbarian and the slave are by nature the same.”

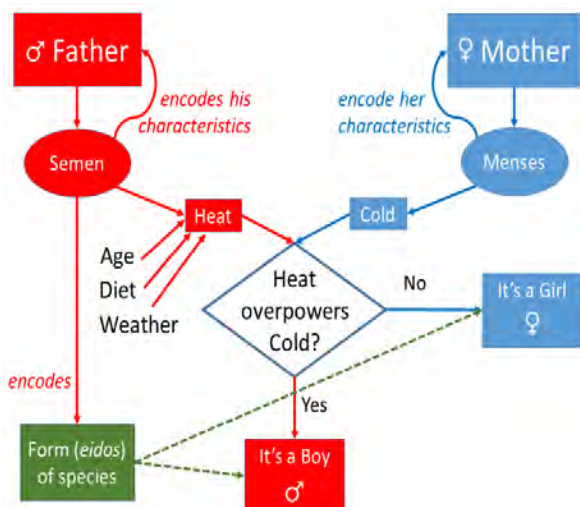
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On Women's Role in Inheritance

Aristotle's inheritance model is not concerned with financial wealth but, rather, sought to explain how the parents' characteristics are transmitted to the child, subject to influence from the environment. In his view, an active, ensouling masculine element brought life to a passive female element.

The system worked as follows. The father's semen and the mother's menses encode their parental characteristics. The model is partly asymmetric, as only the father's movements define the form or *eidos* of the human species, while the movements of both the father's and the mother's fluids define features other than the form, such as the father's eye color or the mother's nose shape. The theory has some symmetry, as semen movements carry maleness while the menses' carry femaleness. If the semen is hot enough to overpower the cold menses, the child will be a boy; but if it is too cold to do this, the child will be a girl. The child's sex can be influenced by factors that affect temperature, including the weather, the wind direction, diet, and the father's age. Features other than sex also depend on whether the semen overpowers the menses, so if a man has strong semen, he will have sons who resemble him, while if the semen is weak, he will have daughters who resemble their mother.



St. Thomas Aquinas:

Fifteen centuries after Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas (1224/5 – 1274 C.E.), was one of the preeminent Catholic thinkers of his time and, in many ways, the voice of Scholasticism. St. Albert the Great, a contemporary and a teacher of Thomas, in response to some students referring to Thomas as a “dumb ox”, reportedly told them that “This dumb ox will fill the world with his bel-
lowing.” And, in many ways in “the Catholic world”, he has – and he continues to be a significant influence to our time.

Thomas, a philosopher and theologian, was heavily influenced by Aristotle and Aristotelian thought about the basic elements and their role in anatomy and biology. It is this legacy that I think has been a determining influence on the Catholic Church’s attitude concerning the ordination of women. Here’s why.

On How A Woman is Born To Be A Woman

“Objection: It can be argued that woman should not have formed part of the world as it was initially created. For Aristotle says that a female is an occasioned {my note: in the etymological sense of “downfallen” or “declined”} male. But it would be wrong for something occasioned and [hence] deficient to be part of the initial creation. Therefore woman should not have been a part of that world.” (Thomas answers that the female is defective as a particular event; not as part of the general scheme of things). *Summa Theologica*, 1, qu. 92, art 1, ob. 1

Reply:

“Vis-a-vis [seen as caused by] the *natura particularis* [i.e., the action of the male semen], a female is deficient and unintentionally caused. For the active power of the semen always seeks to produce a thing completely like itself, something male. So if a female is produced, this must be because the semen is weak or because the material [provided by the female parent] is unsuitable, or because of the action of some external factor such as the winds from the south which make the atmosphere humid. But vis-a-vis [seen as caused by] *natura universalis* [general

Our Readers Write:

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Nature] the female is not accidentally caused but is intended by Nature for the work of generation. Now the intentions of Nature come from God, who is its author. This is why, when he created Nature, he made not only the male but also the female.” *Summa Theologica*, I, qu. 92, art 1, ad 1.

Note: Thomas Aquinas followed Aristotle in attributing the conception of a woman to a defect of a particular seed. The male semen intends to produce a complete human being, that is, a man, but at times it does not succeed and produces a woman. A woman is, therefore, a *mas occasionatus*, a failed male. Thomas stresses that this does not imply that women were not part of God’s grand scheme of creation. However, a female is not perfect.

‘According to the medicine of his century, which, of course, Thomas did not correct, woman was an incomplete man, a half-baked male, whose unfinished characteristics come about through some weakness in the parents, some disposition in the human material or some extrinsic cause such as, for example, a strong south wind at the time of conception. Nevertheless Thomas thinks it is unjust to consider woman a cosmic accident; she was not an accident, this creature was made on purpose, deliberately planned by God.’ (Walter Farrell, O.P., *A Companion to the Summa*, I ch. 12. Cf. also M. Nolan, *The Defective Male: What Aquinas Really Said*, New Blackfriars.)

A Revision of Thought:

It is obvious, given Aristotle’s and then Thomas’ understanding of the physical science of conception and birth, that women are, through no fault of their own, seen as imperfect human beings in their very essence and therefore – for those schooled in this way of thinking – unworthy to be ordained priests, who were (and, by many, still are) seen as representatives of the perfect male Jesus Christ. The obvious and main problem with this idea is that we no longer accept as accurate or true this understanding of the differences between men and women.

It was in 1677 when Antonie von Leeuwenhoek, using a simple microscope, saw “seminal Worms”, as sperm were often called, that scientists became aware of sperm and began to investigate their role in procreation. A more defined understanding of the complementary roles of both egg and sperm would take time to develop and refine. In fact, in some ways, it is still ongoing with studies of the X and Y chromosomes and the importance of the SRY gene. But what has become – or at least – obvious is the simple fact that women are neither deformed males nor of inferior dignity compared to men.



And now for another bit of ancient history with a theory – one that is even older than Aristotle – for understanding the physical universe, and where that thinking is now.

A Historical Overview of Matter

Democritus:

In the fifth century B.C.E, a short time before Aristotle, a Greek philosopher named Democritus (c. 460 B.C.E. – c. 370 B.C.E.) built on and expanded the idea, first proposed by Leucippus, that all matter is composed of basic particles which he named atoms, since in Greek the word *átomo* means individual or indivisible. He posited that atoms exist in space, which is simply a void. and are unique to each structure which they constitute.

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For example, no matter how small something is sliced or divided, the atoms of fur are the same but they are different than the atoms of a stone which are all the same. It would be more than two millenia before his concept would be reconsidered.

More Recent Ideas:

In 1704 C.E., Isaac Newton proposed a mechanical universe with small solid masses in motion. A century later, the nineteenth century would witness much exploration of atomic structure. In 1805 the English chemist and physicist John Dalton published a work proposing that elements are made of extremely small particles called atoms. While it may look like he simply copied what Democritus had suggested, Dalton gave scientific footing to the atom as a fundamental chemical object. While modern atomic theory is somewhat more involved than Dalton's, the essence of his remains valid and the theoretical foundation in chemistry.

In the twentieth century the science of physics virtually exploded. At its very start in 1900 C.E., Max Planck (1858 – 1947 C.E.) made the assumption that energy is made of individual units, or quanta, and so revolutionized our understanding of atomic and subatomic processes. In 1924, Louis de Broglie proposed that there is no fundamental difference in the makeup and behavior of energy and matter; on the atomic and subatomic levels either may behave as if made of either particles or waves.

Three years later Werner Heisenberg proposed that precise, simultaneous measurement of two complementary values - such as the position and momentum of a subatomic particle - is impossible. Over the next several decades more physicists refined the theory until it became known as "the principle of wave-particle duality", where elementary particles of both energy and matter behave like either waves or particles, depending on the conditions. Contrary to the principles of classical physics, their simultaneous measurement is inescapably flawed; the more precisely one value is measured, the more flawed will

be the measurement of the other value. This theory was further refined and became known as "the uncertainty principle."

An Application to Ordination

So the question, understandably, might be asked: what has all this to do with ordination?

The short answer is: **a lot**. But that doesn't clarify the understanding of the need for the Church to change its refusal to ordain women. Perhaps the following application can help.

When the scientific understanding of matter consisted of four elements, and sexual "discharges" consisted of semen and menses, it was not unrealistic to consider as significant factors observable influences such as temperatures and wind directions. But with our current understanding of matter in either or both of the fields of genetics and subatomic physics, it is unrealistic to consider females as defective male human beings whose only value comes from God being able to make something worthwhile (i.e., necessary for procreation) out of something otherwise worthless.

In short, then, it is not only outdated and unreasonable to deny the ordination of women, it contradicts the revelation in Genesis where we read that when God created us "in the divine image", it specifies that God created us "male and female". It is past time for the Roman Catholic Church to correct the practice of what it claims to preach.

And a different perspective, but one that applies nonetheless, is from our own American history. "Ain't I a Woman?" is the name given to a speech, delivered extemporaneously, by Sojourner Truth (1797–1883) at the Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio, on May 29, 1851. It did not originally have a title.

Ain't I A Woman?

Well, children, where there is so much racket there must be something out of kilter. I think that 'twixt the negroes of the South and the women at the North, all talking about rights, the white men will be in a fix pretty soon.

But what's all this here talking about?

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place!

And ain't I a woman?

Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me!

And ain't I a woman?

I could work as much and eat as much as a man - when I could get it - and bear the lash as well!

And ain't I a woman?

I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me!

And ain't I a woman?

Then they talk about this thing in the head; what's this they call it? [member of audience whispers, "intellect"] That's it, honey.

What's that got to do with women's rights or negroes' rights?

If my cup won't hold but a pint, and yours holds a quart, wouldn't you be mean not to let me have my little half measure full?

Then that little man in black there, he says women can't have as much rights as men, 'cause Christ wasn't a woman!

Where did your Christ come from? Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with Him.

If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again! And now they is asking to do it, the men better let them.

Obliged to you for hearing me, and now old Sojourner ain't got nothing more to say."



Press Conference: Forum on Women

In the summer of 2015, CORPUS joined other members of Catholic Organizations for Renewal to sponsor a national Forum on Women: What Pope Francis needs to know. Our public position is eternal.

Question: *Why would CORPUS, an organization about priesthood, co-sponsor a Forum on Women?*

Answer:

CORPUS began in 1974 when priests, who had fallen in love, wanted to remain in active institutional service, but only if their wives were accepted and their marriages celebrated. Our history reflects a commitment to the co-equal status of women in the church and in society and their worth as co-equally reflecting the face of God.

It is telling, indeed, that if an ordained priest in active ministry falls in love and cannot come to terms with the church's policy of mandatory celibacy, he is free to pursue the relationship (affair) as long as it is quiet and discrete. What does this say about the worth of a woman?

I

If a priest falls in love and this relationship (affair) is blessed with children, a priest is free to continue in active institutional ministry as long as news of the affair is kept quiet. Women and children are often paid to promise silence using church funds. What does this say about the worth of a woman?

If a priest from another denomination requests to be recognized as a Roman Catholic priest, he is welcomed and celebrated along with his wife and family, as long as he signs an affidavit that he will not remarry if his wife dies. What does this say about the worth of a woman?

But if a man, born and raised catholic, becomes ordained and then falls in love, a calling we believe is also from God, he is forced to leave active ministry; required to move more than 40 miles away from his last parish; forbidden to participate in any parish ministries, including lector or Eucharistic minister and is frequently not granted permission to marry in a Roman Catholic Church.

These men of CORPUS have made the choice to cherish women as co-equal partners in love and life.

CORPUS stands as a witness to the worth and wonder of women's presence in our lives, our marriages, our families, our church, and our world.

