

The Mutual Superiority of Women and Men as Leaders

"Women are not allowed to become clergy in many conservative religious groups. Is it hypocritical to think that a woman can lead a nation and not a congregation?"

1.....Some cynics have been saying that there's so much "faith" talk in politics these days that it's as though we were about to elect not a president but a pastor-at-large. The two occupations seem radically different, but the overlap in sensitivities and strategies is large.

2.....In our wider family, an equal number of men and women are ordained clergy. God has made each sex (in some ways) superior to the other, and neither makes better leaders than the other. One of America's shames is that we have not yet had even one woman president.

3.....My church, the United Church of Christ, has *strong traditions of women's leadership* both ordained and lay. We have had ordained women for more than one and one-half centuries. On Cape Cod, the Craigville Tabernacle (which I chaired for eleven years) has had at least one woman preacher each summer since the beginning of Craigville's Christian Camp Meeting Association in 1872.

4.....An eminent Catholic monk, Henry Nouwen (who taught at Harvard and Yale before spending the remainder of his life working at L'Arche, a ministry with mentally feeble men) made a habit of a monthly spiritual conversation with some deeply Christian woman. Our learning more about the human brain and the human mind includes our learning more about *how differently men and women think*, and how abnormal and depriving it is for great decisions to be made by men only or women only.

5.....Biologically more tied to children than are men, women historically have been assigned to nesting, to **home** as their primary sphere of responsibility. The woman "was" home, the man "came" home: the **world** was his primary sphere of responsibility. In our present culture of sexual equality, we may have strayed too far from biology, from heeding the hormones. Rousseau freed men from being husbands and fathers to being individuals, and Betty Friedan freed women from being wives and mothers to being individuals. But equally well-trained individuals of both sexes are freer also to be *partners* and to transcend the old distinctions of "women's work" and "men's work." Freud's "Biology is destiny" is less extensively true that it was in the past.

6.....Since I can name some great women pastors and presidents (of other nations), it's natural for me to advise parents to be as observant of and open to their daughters' life-inclinations as to their sons'. The biblical wisdom that the "your" in "God will direct your paths" does not refer to boys only.

7.....No, it is not "hypocritical to think that a woman can lead a nation and not a congregation." Rather, it is *ignorant*. Ignorant of how to read the past in the light of the present. Ignorant of how the Bible, which emerged from and so reflects the past, anticipated the freeing of women from their historically assigned inferiority to men: "There is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

BY WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | SEPTEMBER 5, 2008; 12:27 PM ET

Comments

Please report offensive comments below.

Some folks are comfortable with theocracies, hierarchies, and patriarchies - with the Catholic Church you have virtually all three, unchanged in 2000 years.

Any institution that doesn't change with the times is eventually doomed. In a couple of generations the Catholic Church in the USA may well more closely resemble a sect, rather than a major religion.

Given the huge numbers represented by Catholics today, that seems highly unlikely. However, amazing things can happen in 20-30 years.

Eventually, women will refuse their traditionally subordinate roles on a global basis - and this includes the administration of religion.

As the metaphysics fades from religion in general, it becomes more and more the social phenomenon that it actually is. Elsewhere in society women are achieving parity with men.

In the very near future, all bets are off regarding what women will and will not accept, as full equals - role differentiation based on 'natural law' and 'divine revelation' is a chimera, and nothing more than a mental construct that's been handed down - sometimes for millenia!

And in a very real sense, the world we live in and the world we interact with is nothing more than a collective of interactive mental constructs - the product of consciousness from beginning to end.

People need to take more responsibility for their religious beliefs - given that they are manmade from start to finish.

POSTED BY: COMMON SENSE | SEPTEMBER 9, 2008 10:07 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Fr. Larry,

So Jesus couldn't have been God unless he could write his name in the sand? (Not much snow in Palestine). Why would a supposedly omnipotent being make divinity (or the ability to represent it) dependent on plumbing?

POSTED BY: LEPIDOPTERYX | SEPTEMBER 8, 2008 3:56 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

JJ, KNOCK IT OFF!

POSTED BY: GABY | SEPTEMBER 8, 2008 3:23 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Minister, teacher, author

An ordained United Church of Christ and American Baptist minister, "On Faith" panelist Dr. Willis E. Elliott has been a pastor, teacher, lecturer, administrator, consultant (to Newsweek for 38 years), church executive, and the author of six books. [more »](#)

[Main Page](#) | [Willis E. Elliott Archives](#) | [On Faith Archives](#)

The Mutual Superiority of Women and Men as Leaders

No, it is not "hypocritical to think that a woman can lead a nation and not a congregation." Rather, it is ignorant.

[» Back to full entry](#)

[More Posts About: Mainline Protestant](#)

[All Comments \(21\)](#)

W.E. Elliott's Bible & U.C.C. sais, Revelation sais a Women will Lead the Men :

Please see

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Church_of_Christ

Please see

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Church_of_Christ

"According to the 2007 yearbook, the United Church of Christ has approximately 1.2 million members and is composed of approximately 5,518 local congregations.

September 7, 2008 9:46 PM

"According to the 2007 yearbook, the United Church of Christ has approximately 1.2 million members and is composed of approximately 5,518 local congregations.

September 7, 2008 9:46 PM

Please see

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Church_of_Christ

"According to the 2007 yearbook, the United Church of Christ has approximately 1.2 million members and is composed of approximately 5,518 local congregations.

POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | SEPTEMBER 7, 2008 9:46 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

It may seem affirming to a person absent of their understanding of the zayin Biblically to claim in point 6 in their analysis that the inherent meaning of one true Bible verse allows the idea of women being in leadership in the clergy or elsewhere over men. Yod Yahweh Jehovah intends to direct the paths of His people (and those who in their asinineness choose to defy the Name of the Son of Man or Yahweh Jehovah or the Holy Spirit of Yahweh Jehovah given to men via the Son of Man). It is the intention of Yod Yahweh Jehovah that men be in authority over women. In First Timothy Chapter Two Verse Twelve, it says "And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence." It is clear that Yod Yahweh Jehovah intended the apostle Paul to communiatate His Divine Will for men and women. The Chapter does not make reference to this command from Yod as applicable to the church only if one reads the entire chapter. Scholars may have missed if scholars believe that the chapter applies only to the church. The chapter does not specify church instruction only. It mentions who should be in teaching, who should be in authority, and who should be in silence. Furthermore, in Chapter Five Verse Twenty-One Yod Yahweh Jehovah through the apostle Paul gives Word. The Word is "I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality." It is clear that those who are of a Biblical understanding of the verse and Yod's intention for His Creation are absent of reason if they are intending to elevate a woman over a man in authority of any kind anywhere at any time.

It is Yod Yahweh Jehovah's Will that the woman be the helper of the man.

POSTED BY: BARRYFITZ | SEPTEMBER 7, 2008 8:29 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Untill 144,000....

POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | SEPTEMBER 7, 2008 8:14 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

"I can't recognize what I said in your comment."

This would seem to be a recurring issue, Reverend.

If one says that women can't preach religion in any of your churches, why is she all of a sudden entitled to command her religion in *my* private life?

Any given church. Such as you defend.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | SEPTEMBER 7, 2008 6:39 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

TO PAGANPLACE (9.7.08):

I can't recognize what I said in your comment.

I spoke for the ordination of women, which has been practiced for a century and a half in my church (Congregational, now United Church of Christ).

You "wonder exactly why women aren't allowed to preach your religion in 'church'."

?

POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT, PANELIST | SEPTEMBER 7, 2008 5:31 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

TO FR. LARRY GEARHART:

1

You call "a very perceptive comment" my statement "how differently men and women think" & "how abnormal and depriving it is for great decisions to be made by men only or by women only." I cannot believe that your positive comments include my second comment, which is a radical criticism of your church's hierarchy.

2

Yes, leadership at the RC parish level is (increasingly) gender-transcendent.

3

Yes, the equality in Gal.3:28 is vertical: each human being's primary relationship is to God, the fact which relativizes human horizontal relational differences. But the primary relationships tends to trump the secondaries, as in "Philemon" the slave Onesimus is primarily his owner's brother. Thus, in the same verse, men & women are primarily "in Christ," & thus (I conclude, but you do not) ecclesial equals.

4

Yes, I agree that "the gender differences are God-given" (unlike, I add, the master/slave economic difference). And elsewhere in his oeuvre, St.Paul can even say that women, unlike men, are not created imago dei (1Cor.11.7). But our Lord indicates that God's design is that the human telos be genderless ("as the angels in heaven"): we should not be ignorant that biological & societal differences are temporal & transitory. On that basis, I extended the meaning of Gal.3:28 (as your comment did not, & needn't have).

5

As for Jesus choosing "twelve men," please read N.T.Wright's current "On Faith" column. (He is widely considered, including by me, the greatest living N.T. scholar.)

6

As to "why Jesus was a man," it is in the same semantic domain as to why he taught us to pray to God as our "Father." The divine (in the philosophical-metaphysical sense) transcends gender, but you & I agree that the biblical revelation uses masculine terms (nouns & pronouns) for deity. I taught Hebrew & Greek to seminarians & have always been a defender of "the Christian language" for God. But I'm uncomfortable with your bespeaking "the importance of gender, in general, in incarnating the will of God." You seem to be on the verge of making a case against the ordination of women as priests in parishes (a case that can be rationally made, but which I call "ignorant" in light of the not inferior leadership gifts of women).

POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT, PANELIST | SEPTEMBER 7, 2008 5:23 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

I definitely have to wonder exactly why women aren't allowed to preach your religion in *church* but encouraged to preach your religion with government enforcement capabilities.

Oh, I get it, they're supposed to *receive* the party line in there and then go impose it.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | SEPTEMBER 7, 2008 1:15 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

"Our learning more about the human brain and the human mind includes our learning more about how differently men and women think, and how abnormal and depriving it is for great decisions to be made by men only or women only."

This is a very perceptive comment. It would be nice to see an equally deep appreciation of the significance of gender differences in the other comments.

I would add that in a typical Roman Catholic parish, today, decisions are not arrived at in a vacuum. Men and women both have critically important input into every significant decision on governance, education, ministry and investment. Real leadership in a parish is much more a matter of leadership ability and experience than it is a matter of clerical position.

"No, it is not "hypocritical to think that a woman can lead a nation and not a congregation." Rather, it is ignorant. Ignorant of how to read the past in the light of the present. Ignorant of how the Bible, which emerged from and so reflects the past, anticipated the freeing of women from their historically assigned inferiority to men: "There is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28)."

This is where your insight breaks down. Galatians 3:28 clearly refers to our connection with God. Paul was not saying our connection, as men and women, to God is precisely the same, or indistinguishable. He was saying that God does not award extra points to men over women, or vice versa. We are equal in the eyes of God, but not the same.

The gender differences are God-given, even though the realization of these differences by a given man or woman are not perfect, and even though we human beings will not fully understand or appreciate God's design or his purposes. An objective reading of the bible should make it clear that the different gifts of men and women, both as individuals and as archetypes translate into different roles in salvation history. It was no accident that Mary Magdalene was the first witness of the Resurrected Christ. It was no accident that Jesus chose twelve men to take leadership responsibility for carrying on his teaching. Magdalene's role was a natural result of her profound, feminine devotion. In that way she typifies the devotion and the roles of women throughout the bible and throughout the history of Christianity.

You won't understand why Jesus chose twelve men unless you can understand why Jesus was a man, and why he was born of a sinless virgin, and unless you can understand the importance of gender, in general, in incarnating the will of God.

Meanwhile, it strikes me as quite unbecoming of a man of the cloth to declare a position as "ignorant" without bothering to deal with the substance of that declaration.

POSTED BY: FR. LARRY GEARHART | SEPTEMBER 7, 2008 12:14 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Well said, as usual.

There are many examples of women as spiritual leaders in both the Old and New Testament.

POSTED BY: HOMESOWER | SEPTEMBER 5, 2008 6:35 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

WILLIS E ELLIOTT

Nice post and I would like to add that two of the most important things that I have learned in my life, I learned in second grade from a Nun.

And they are: "God is Love" and "We are all equal in God's Eyes".

Take care, be ready.

Sincerely, Thomas Paul Moses Baum.

POSTED BY: THOMAS BAUM | SEPTEMBER 4, 2008 12:36 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

The comments to this entry are closed.