

# **Examining the policy of a male-only clergy in the General Church** **by Shada Sullivan**

The purpose of this paper is to examine in detail the issues that pertain to the policy of a male-only priesthood in the General Church. We will examine the nature of the new church and how we view its revelation, the purposes of the priesthood and its potential hazards, some inconsistencies in the current policies, and finally, what a balanced priesthood might look like. The discussion will center around universal principles in the theology of the New Church, which were introduced in the paper *There is no Deficiency, Only Blessing*.

## **The New Church: Now it is allowed...**

Because the nature of church, as the mechanism for transforming truth into goodness (T---->G), is necessarily dependent on the quality of truth available to it, God has always tried to give us the best possible form of truth he can, even when we humans were doing our best to show that we didn't want it. When his direct presence didn't work with the Most Ancient Church, he gave us the Word, then Jesus and finally, the Writings. The regenerative cycle cannot work without a true understanding of what is good. And this is why this passage from *True Christianity* feels so important to those of us who identify as New Church:

508[3] Later on, as I came closer to the building, I saw an inscription above the door: Now It Is Allowed, which means that we are now allowed to use our intellect to explore the mysteries of faith.

[5]In this church, we are allowed to use our intellect to explore and penetrate all the church's mysteries and also to use the Word to support what we find. The reason this is allowed is that the teachings of the new church are continuous truths revealed by the Lord through the Word. Rational arguments that support these truths cause the intellect to open up more and more at its highest level and to be elevated into the light that the angels in heaven enjoy. That light is essentially truth. In that light, acknowledgment of the Lord as the God of heaven and earth shines in its glory. This is the meaning of the inscription *Now It Is Allowed* over the door to the temple, and the meaning of the fact that the sanctuary veil in front of the angel guardian was lifted up. It is a principle of the new church, you see, that falsities shut down the intellect but truths open it up.

This is an invitation that is open to all humankind, men and women alike. It is not more accessible to one gender or another, nor do we require a priesthood to mediate its fulfillment. This invitation is the heart of the church, the heart of the spiritual life, one where there cannot be any dependence or exceptions. We are allowed to enter or we are not; there can be no equivocation on this point.

And here, one must also make a stand for humility. “Now it is allowed...” does not grant us omnipotence, it does not even guarantee us answers, but it does sanctify the entering. Swedenborg wrote of this memorable relation at a time when it was blind faith that was sanctified. Questioning, wanting to understand God, was an indication of the diminishment or adulteration of faith. The promise of the New Church is opposite - that the hallmark of a true faith is an enlightened faith. But note, this promise is not that having an enlightened faith will be easy. Our human minds are as limited as ever. Rather, it is that we may enter the struggle to understand with joy and freedom.

*Sacred Scripture 77* underscores how important this invitation is to the spiritual life of the church and the people within it.

The Word is the Word according to the understanding of it with man, that is, as it is understood. If it is not understood, the Word is indeed called the Word, but with man it does not exist.

This is why the New Church must stand for freedom of understanding, because we know how important it is to having a Living Word. A Word with which the understanding of humanity is not engaged is useless, it cannot have any effect. And the desired effect is for truth to be understood and loved, so that this love can be returned to God, completing the cycle. From universal principles, there can be no intellectual dependence in the New Church, on the part of the laity with the priesthood, or on the part of one gender with another. Blind acceptance of truth, no matter the origin of the truth, has no agency and cannot participate in the larger saga of the heavenly marriage.

### **An open and loving approach to viewing the Writings**

The topic of “how we should view the Writings” is so large that I will not pretend to be able to do it justice here. However, since proponents for an inclusive clergy often advocate for non-traditional interpretations of the Writings, it is an important topic to address.

It is sometimes thought that those who stand for an inclusive clergy in the General Church do not believe that the Writings are the Word. The argument is characterized as: “we know the Writings say this, but it hurts our feelings, so we don’t believe it. And in order to justify not believing it, we don’t think the Writings are the Word, and we would prefer to take them or leave them as we see fit.” The implication is that such people do not take the Writings seriously. However, this characterization is unfair. I believe that most advocates for women’s ordination in the General Church take the Writings very seriously, and do not wish them to be unceremoniously shoved aside at whim. They simply want to see policy reflecting universal spiritual principles in a way that makes sense.

The Word of God is always accommodated to the discernment of humankind. The Lord’s Divine Truth itself is above even angelic understanding, so in His mercy it is

presented in ways that we can successively understand according to our state of enlightenment. Even for truth in the lowest heaven, where it arrives after five levels of accommodation, “human language is incapable of expressing a large part of it.” (*Secrets of Heaven* 8443).

As it is against the laws of Divine Providence for us to be compelled towards faith (DP 129), an intermediary from the human race is always employed in delivering revelation. This means, however, that the earthly container for revelation will be made in the world and through the world, and so it must be of the world; it cannot be apart from the world through which it was delivered. This is not a bad thing. To admit this fact, does not necessarily imply a denial of the sanctity of the Word, or an unwillingness to attend to the Word in the literal sense. Rather, it represents an openness to *engaging* with the Word. As tempting as it may be to relax our rational mind due to the sense of certainty that comes from discovering a reliable source of heavenly truth, the miracle of accommodation calls on us to engage in a clear-eyed partnership with the Word, one that does not shy away from contextualization.

Swedenborg did indicate that he was “instructed by the Lord alone” (SE 1647) “who has been revealed to me and enlightened me” (DP 135). He called his revelation “immediate” (HH 1) and characterized it as “complete inspiration” in a letter. And further, from *Apocalypse Explained* 1183:

It has been given me to see [the light of heaven], and from it to perceive distinctly what has come from the Lord, and what from the angels. What has come from the Lord has been written, and what has come from angels has not been written.

This testimony implies a perfect revelation. But we can all see that, at least in appearance, the Writings are not completely perfect. How can we approach these dissonant realities?

*True Christianity* 154, in talking about the apostles, and also angels, gives us some idea about how the Lord works through all of us:

The Lord filled them all with his spirit, but they each took a portion of it that depended on the quality of their perception, and they each exercised that portion depending on the quality of their own ability. All the angels in the heavens are filled with the Lord - they are in the Lord and the Lord is in them. Yet for each of them, the speech and action depends on the quality of the mind. Some speak and act simply, and some wisely, with infinite variety. They all speak on their own initiative on behalf of the Lord.

Swedenborg was not applying this passage to himself, but we must ask whether we believe that Swedenborg was subject to the same spiritual principles as “all the angels in the heavens?” Did his speech and action, or rather, his writing, “depend on the quality of his mind” (a mind that belonged to an 18th century, affluent, European male)?

And if not, by what mechanism was his mind enlightened? Was he experiencing a process of conjoining truth with his intellectual mind, as he described in *De Verbo* VII:6 (20):

To interpret the spiritual sense from truths of doctrine opens heaven, because that is the sense in which the angels are, and so man by means of that sense thinks together with angels and thus conjoins them to himself in his intellectual mind...

Or was the embodiment of his natural, intellectual mind transcended? And if so, was it transcended only during his spiritual experiences, or also while he was describing them?

Swedenborg spoke as well about the fact that heavenly truths can indeed be expressed in natural language, but not perfectly. From *De Verbo* 111:4 (6):

It has been granted me sometimes to be among the angels...I heard things ineffable and inexpressible. . . Afterwards it was given me to understand that I could not utter nor describe them by any spiritual and celestial expression, but that nevertheless they could be described even to their rational comprehension by words of natural language. And it was said that there are not any Divine arcana which cannot be perceived and expressed also naturally, although in a more general and imperfect way...

In the case of this particular revelation, Swedenborg was the one in charge of expressing the heavenly truths in natural language. And therefore, we must then contend with his choices as to expression, which sometimes include massive generalization, pompous tone, extremely colorful metaphors, and obvious stylistic changes from book to book. (And this doesn't even begin to deal with issues of subsequent translation). What if it appears that different choices of expression would have been more useful?

For example, Swedenborg would sometimes choose to illustrate spiritual principles with examples from the natural world. Since that time, a few of those examples have been shown to be untrue by modern science. Does this fact change the spiritual principle that the example was supposed to serve? Not necessarily. From the relationship of that truth to universal principles, our rational mind can do its own work of seeing where it might fit. However, it does illustrate that the Lord respected Swedenborg's freedom to choose an inaccurate example. The Lord knew it was inaccurate, or at least might become so with the passage of time. Yet, human freedom is so important that even the transmission of revelation must be subject to it. God trusts that those who approach scripture affirmatively will grasp the larger scheme. Individual examples don't matter.

So too, we can call to mind the many categorical statements that Swedenborg made about religious or ethnic groups that appear offensive to modern sensibilities. Does his boorish wording sometimes make it difficult to see the spiritual truth within? Yes. Would

we teach our children to write in such a categorical manner today? Absolutely not! We can choose to evaluate Swedenborg's choices of expression through the lens of universal freedom and rationality, leading us to disagree with him as to optimal wording, and still look to the spiritual principles that the examples are pointing us toward.

So, as impressive a figure as Swedenborg was, he need to remember that he was human, with all the attendant complexities this introduces for us, future readers. Surely, God must have understood exactly who Swedenborg was, understood him to be embodied in his time and place, and yet still used him, all the while respecting his freedom.

Allowing consideration for cultural context or scientific inaccuracy does not mean that the next step is diminishment of belief in the Writings. A questioning mindset does not equal diminishment of belief. A questioning mindset assumes that God means for his Word to be understood by us. It is questioning in an affirmative way, one that seeks resolution and reconciliation of ideas within a universal framework as the ultimate goal. Divine Truth must pass through many layers before it is understood by us, and the least we can do is pledge our engagement with it. In all things, it can help us to be asking, "What is the Word pointing to?" I believe that God means for us to be actively guarding against complacency, and actively standing for love, and judging all truth by the standard of good.

### **Experience vs the senses**

The issue of whether or not to ordain women in the priesthood of the General Church would not be on anyone's radar if not for women speaking up about their experience. And not just about their experience as it exists by itself, but their experience within the context of the derived doctrine. Women are comparing interpretations of doctrine to their own experience and are saying "This doesn't make sense to us!"

There are some who feel nervous about the idea of spiritual truth being confirmed in experience, because of passages such as this one:

*Secrets of Heaven* 233[3] These considerations show that people who consult sensory evidence and factual knowledge in matters of belief plunge themselves not only into doubt but also into denial, that is, into thick darkness.

But it is important to note the difference between pure sensory evidence and experience. One might use the example in *Secrets of Heaven* 6945(2) where Swedenborg says that those who rely on the senses would see the bodily death of a person and conclude there is no afterlife. This is a very different process from approaching spiritual truth in an affirmative way, and then trying to see how it meshes with our experience of life. This is what *Divine Providence* 60 describes:

(4)...heaven is granted only to those who know the way to it and walk in that way. This way can be known to some extent, too, from knowing the character

of those who constitute heaven, and from knowing that no one becomes an angel or comes into heaven except one who brings an angelic character with him from the world. Present in an angelic character, moreover, is *a knowledge of the way from walking in it*, and a walking in the way through a knowledge of it.

Or *Divine Providence* 168(3):

...our thinking enjoys this enlightenment to the extent that it retains the sense granted by that inner enlightenment and also knows *from experience* what is true and good.

In the Writings, Swedenborg is constantly calling on us to confirm truth in the light of our experience, either our experience of some scientific or natural truth or our experience of what constitutes common sense. Individual experience is not the same as natural facts of the senses, and is meant to be used as part of our spiritual toolbox for the discernment of truth. With prayerful attention to bringing our hearts and minds into integrity with God's will, our experience can be a valuable spiritual guide.

It is important to pay attention to what doesn't sound right to us in the Word, and to prayerfully approach in an affirmative way, looking to what the Lord might be trying to tell us. If it doesn't sound right to our conscience, then something about how Swedenborg expressed that particular truth, is *not* right, or at least, not optimal. It might merely be awkward expression, it might merely be cultural context or a poorly chosen example. This doesn't mean that the Word is not true, or we should jump immediately to the idea that the Writings are worthless. But truth without good is empty and the divine mandate is to engage with the truth until we can see the goodness within. Until we recognize that good with our higher will, see how conjunction with God can be served by a specific truth, we cannot transform truth into good as part of the regenerative cycle.

### **What is the purpose of generalizations?**

When talking about the nature of large populations, we must necessarily use generalizations, which are principles, ideas or statements having a general application. The point of using generalization is to be able to speak with ease about general principles, without considering all the details or specific aspects of individual things. There is value in generalizations - they allow us to think from universal principles, and when derived from universal principles, there is truth in them.

However, generalization is a tool, and should not be used to unilaterally negate the truth of personal experience. The purpose of generalizing is not to make judgments upon or diminish variety of experience. The purpose of generalizing in a spiritual context is to acknowledge the broader workings of God within creation and to feel reassured that creation has an underlying order of which we are a part. But it is not within humanity's purview to dictate the manifestation of that order within individual experience.

For example, take the Myers-Briggs personality test. This test evaluates personality traits within four different binary categories. One of the categories is Thinking vs Feeling (T vs F) and people are given a score that places them on a spectrum indicating the likelihood of their personality being driven in thinking ways or feeling ways. It turns out that 75.5% of women identify as an Fs and the remainder as Ts. And also, 43.5% of men identify as Fs and the remainder as Ts. So what of this 24.5% of women and 43.5% of men who are expressing their personalities in a way that is different from how *Marriage Love* describes the norm? Are they broken, or out of order somehow? Not at all! The Myers-Briggs is not testing for pathology, these are normative personality variations.

We have a very human tendency to take note of things that might be generally true, and then make prescriptions about how we all should be. This becomes especially fraught if we are taking what we consider to be “divine truth” and thinking about how to apply it in this world. We want this earth to be the best place it can be! We want it to reflect divine order! But, we must be very careful not to characterize normal human variation as being “out of order.” The best and most humane approach is to recognize the beauty of how God’s order of things can be generalized, while still maintaining an openness to how His Providence chooses to manifest this order on an individual level. *Divine Love and Wisdom 213(2)* tell us how the infinity of the Lord is reflected in the variety of individuality:

In addition to these images of the Infinite and Eternal, there is a further image of the Infinite and Eternal in the varieties of things and the fact that no substance, state, or object can ever occur in the created universe that is identical to another. Not in the atmospheres, not in the substances of the earth, nor in the forms arising from them, thus not in any of the constituents which fill the universe, can anything identical to another be produced to eternity.

The fact of this is visibly apparent in the variety of facial features among all human beings. No one set of facial features is identical to that of another anywhere in the world, nor can there be to eternity. Consequently neither is any mind the same, of which the face is a reflection. (Rogers)

## **What is the Priesthood?**

At the heart of the regenerative cycle is the idea that human beings are spiritual creatures, and that our natural choices can have the spiritual effect of bringing us closer to God. Universal principles teach us that there is a natural world and a spiritual world, and that they are intimately connected. This connection is called a correspondence, a co-responding, meaning that this connection is a living one - the natural and the spiritual can have an effect upon each other. Every single thing in the natural world co-responds with something in the spiritual world. When we view this relationship from our end, the natural world, the actual natural things in it that correspond to spiritual things are called representations. The relationship of the natural with the spiritual exists apart from our

acknowledgment of it. But when we do acknowledge representations, they can have a powerful effect on us, a reinforcement of our relationship to the spiritual.

The traditional function of a priesthood has always been in some way to help mediate the connection between the spiritual and the natural. As the kind of connection that people have had to God throughout the ages has changed, so has the duties of the priest. These duties have included participating in representative rituals, either with knowledge of the significance of the representations or not, as well as preaching, study, exegesis, and leading their followers in good examples of behavior. The Writings describe the duties of a priest thusly:

*The New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine* 315 tells us that it is the duty of the priest to both teach and guide. To teach the truth as they and their church derive it from the Word, and guide their congregations in the practice of living that truth in a good way. *True Christianity* 154 [2] and 146 elaborate further: they are to do so using their own voice and their own intelligence but from the Lord within them, and without mistaking passion for the Holy Spirit.

*The Doctrine of Charity* 160 tells us that it the job of the priest to lead souls to heaven, and that truth from the Word will affect them in proportion to the amount they are emotionally invested in leading said souls.

*Marriage Love* 21 and 308 imply also that priests are supposed to represent that Lord in certain rituals in order to perform the ministry of blessing.

So, along with occasionally representing the Lord in ritual, we can see that priests are to be guides for people navigating the regenerative process; they help to find, highlight and elucidate truths from the Word and they are to help model how those truths are to be lived. The finding, highlighting and elucidating will be part of a process that involves study, research, contemplation, prayer and perception, and the modeling will be part of a process that involves loving, supporting, listening, encouraging and acting. And they are to perform this function even while they themselves are engaging in their own regenerative process! Quite the tall order. *New Jerusalem and Heavenly Doctrine* 315 further states that when priests have helped their congregation to complete the cycle and to send their love back up to the Lord through the living of a good life, then they are called “good shepherds.”

When engaging in the truth-centric duties, priests are aligning themselves with the masculine principle, (G---->T), and when engaging in the good-centric duties, priests are aligning themselves with the feminine principle (T----<G). From universal principles, we know this is possible due to fact that the priest is human, a finited form of both principles.

You might also say that the priest, by teaching truth and leading to the good of life, is striving to bring both the image and likeness of the Lord to their work. And in doing this work, the priest should strive to bring both principles, masculine and feminine, as



equally as possible, for the sake of balance. Male priests would bring the masculine perspective as part of their gender and the feminine perspective as part of their humanity. Female priests would bring the feminine perspective as part of their gender and the masculine perspective as part of their humanity. Though naturally there might be perspective preferences, both genders can access the dynamics of all parts of the regenerative cycle. (For a treatment of the masculine and feminine principle within human beings, see *There is no Deficiency, Only Blessing*).

Priesthood as helper in regenerative cycle

Good----->Truth----->Good

Male Priest (gender, **humanity**)

Good----->Truth----->**Good**

Female Priest (**humanity**, gender)

**Good**----->Truth----->Good

The question of priestly representation is also something that needs to be considered on several levels. *Divine Love and Wisdom* 233 tells us that with the incarnation, representative worship was abolished. Representatives themselves were not abolished, as this is the nature of the relationship between all things natural and spiritual, but the representative nature of worship was no longer a necessity for connection between people and God. This does not mean that conscious representative worship is not helpful for us a church, but we do need to remember that it is no longer a necessity and that the heart of worship is how much we are looking toward use.

What do priests represent in the Word? *Secrets of Heaven* 3670 tells us that, in the Word, priests and kings represent the Lord, and more specifically, it is the priestly office itself that does the representing, not the person.

[2] The same may be seen from the representatives which also exist at the present day. For all kings, no matter who they are or what they are like, represent the Lord through the kingly office itself residing with them; and in like manner all priests, no matter who they are or what they are like, do so through their priestly office. The kingly office itself and the priestly office itself are sacred, no matter who serves in them. Consequently the Word taught by someone evil is no less sacred; nor is the Sacrament of Baptism, or the Holy Supper, or similar ministrations any less so.

The context of this passage is character, not gender, but it does lead us to the question: if the character of the person doing the representing does not matter, does the gender? Is it more important that the priest be male than good? Does this mean that the Lord's image is more important than His likeness? If it is the office itself that is representative of the Lord, can a woman fulfill that office, or is there something very specific about the priesthood that requires male representation?

Arguments for a male-only priesthood will make the point that God's image - what we see of Him in the Word and the world - is a result of and is represented by the masculine principle. Does this mean that only men should be priests? It might, if only men participated in the masculine principle, and if men were the only gender capable of regeneration. However, women do take part fully in the regenerative cycle, and do experience an affection for truth which is the essence of the masculine principle. Women may not *be* masculine, but that does not mean that the masculine principle is entirely foreign to their experience. *Divine Providence* 322 states:

We are all born human, which means that we have the image of God within us. The image of God within us is our ability to discern what is true and to do what is good. Our ability to discern what is true comes from divine wisdom and our ability to do what is good comes from divine love. This ability is the image of God; it is enduring with everyone who is whole and is never erased.

Each one of us, male or female, is essentially human in the way that God is human (DLW 11), each one of us born in God's image and likeness. Our divinely-derived humanity is something that we all share, so women should be able to represent the Lord as to His elemental humanity, both His image and likeness.

### **Examining the General Church preaching hermeneutic**

This topic could easily generate enough for its own paper, but briefly:

The current General Church preaching hermeneutic is based on the idea that all preaching should come as directly as possible from the Word, and that the preacher should endeavor to avoid bringing in any personal reflection on the topic. For example, General Church priests are taught to never say "I" in a sermon, and are also taught to avoid using personal anecdotes or to make reference to any literature apart from the Word. (It must be noted that not all General Church priests choose to preach in this way, but rather, this is the way they are taught). An argument against women in the ministry is that, due to a lesser separation between will and intellect, women would not only be less willing but less capable of preaching in this way, and therefore, more likely to profane the truth. And even though, historically, men are apparently pretty bad at avoiding profanation, their increased ability to separate will and intellect at least gives them a passing shot. So, in regard to this argument, we must ask two questions: is this style of preaching the best style for the church? and does a separated will and intellect protect male preachers from profanation?

Passages such as *Secrets of Heaven 8943* can help us understand the reasons for the current approach to preaching:

But what springs from the Word, only this can be of service for offering worship to God, since this is in itself living...From all this it is now clear that a true worship of God has its origin in things of the Word and not at all in those of self- intelligence.

and *True Christianity 810*, which talks about priests who preach primarily from their own ideas:

"I have heard several reasons why those preachers are deprived of their priestly status. People gave me the following as the primary reason. "They shape their sermons to conform with their own earthly light and therefore their own spirit rather than with the Word and therefore the spirit of God. Yes, they do begin their sermons by quoting the Word, but they merely touch these quotes to their lips, and go no further because the quotes do not taste good to them..."

"As a result there is no more spiritual content in their talks than there is in the tweeting of a songbird...The mystical content in their sermons, which concerns justification by faith alone, we would liken to the quails that were blown from the sea into the camp of the children of Israel, which led to the death of thousands of people (Numbers 11:[31-34]). *Theological teachings concerning goodwill and faith working together, though, we liken to manna from heaven.*"

Certainly, there is tremendous value in a hermeneutic that places ultimate authority in the Word; as a church we should never consider placing *ultimate* authority anywhere else. However, TCR 810 is specifically condemning a very particular kind of preaching, one that gives mere lip service to the Word, and then specifically goes on to espouse faith alone. It is not the fact that the priests are using their own ideas that is the problem here, it is that they are using their own ideas in support of the doctrine of faith alone, in complete *opposition* to the Word. However, theological teachings that strive to marry love and faith together are "like manna."

The current hermeneutic assumes that preaching falls categorically into the "teaching truth" part of a priest's job description and the "leading to the good of life" is something that a priest does by pointing out the truth (and then providing a good example in his own life). However, leading to the good of life is also something that could potentially have a place in the pulpit, provided that a rigorous and holistic hermeneutic is developed that still places ultimate authority in the Word but allows for a more constructivist approach to the dilemmas of modern life. The Writings were written in a different time and don't have much specific to say about modern issues. From *Divine Love and Wisdom 333*:

Useful functions for our acceptance of what is spiritual from the Lord are all the elements of our religion and its worship, everything, then, that teaches us to

recognize and understand God and to recognize and understand what is good and what is true--that therefore teaches us eternal life. These, like academic disciplines, we get from parents, teachers, sermons, and books, and *especially by devoting ourselves to living by them.*

Another translation is giving “*serious attention to life according to them*” (Dole 1986) Leading to the good of life is a very important part of the priest’s job and I believe there is a good case to be made that it is appropriate that they take a more active role in wrestling with application through preaching in order to make General Church sermons more “like manna.” Women could be a valuable part of this process, providing a perspective that determinedly looks to use.

Does this override the listeners’ freedom? Obviously, when priests are trained to always speak with authority, then the danger is prescription. People will react negatively if derivation or illustration is presented as fact. However, a holistic hermeneutic could very well train priests how to speak with authority regarding what the Word says and then speak with humility about its derivations. The ultimate worship to God is living a good life; external worship rituals are only of a good purpose when they help us actually apply truth in a good way. *Divine Love and Wisdom* 334 talks about the fact that worship is not for the Lord’s sake but for ours, so that the self-love that hardens our heart can be removed. “This yields the softening of heart and humility from which reverence and worship flow.” The key is to acknowledge that all things come from the Lord and to act as we are like servants or stewards given responsibility the Lord’s goods (DLW 333). But as stewards, we need to be asking ourselves, what have we done with the truth that we have been given? Have we made real use of it?

### **Hazards of Ministry**

So, while an argument can be made that the current preaching hermeneutic might not be serving the church, this does not speak specifically to the idea of a lesser separation of will and intellect in women. This concept is integral to an argument for a male-only clergy that speaks to the “hazards of ministry.”

This argument, as I have characterized it, proceeds thusly:

“It is a precept of divine order that interior things flow outward into exterior things, and not the other way around. This is the way in which the natural world exists through correspondences. Human beings in the Most Ancient Church by creation observed this flow - whatever they knew as true they automatically willed and transformed into use. However, with the Fall, it became necessary for our will and intellect to be separated. Given that we are now born with a selfish will, it seems impossible that we could ever wish be regenerated, since according to divine order, nothing true that we encounter in world should be able to impact our will, as that would be something external impacting something internal. But the Lord has effected a miraculous “reversal of order” by flowing into us and giving us an affection for truth, whereby upon finding truth our intellect recognizes it as true and guides the will in transformation according to this truth.

The problem with this set-up is that the will is stubborn, and does not always allow itself to be guided by the intellect. Herein lies the seed for all kinds of hypocrisy and profanation, where human beings might acknowledge the truth but fail to will it, or even will the opposite.

The greater amount of genuine truth that is known, the greater the opportunity for the will to go against it. Therefore, the business of the priesthood - constant and focused interaction with doctrine - contains within it the inherent hazard of profanation. The more separate the will and the intellect, the more likely it is that the intellect will be strong enough to guide our natural human will. And since men experience a greater separation of will and intellect, and a more persistent focus on intellectual things, they are naturally a better fit for a vocation that courts profanation. Women, with their superior love of uses, but a lesser separation of will and intellect, are more vulnerable to the hazards of ministry, and this is a possible danger to their spiritual lives.”

This argument based on “hazards of ministry” needs to be challenged on several levels, specifically regarding the relationship of the will and the intellect. The will and the intellect can never be truly separated, as they derive their source from the distinct oneness of love and wisdom that exist within the Lord. *Divine Providence* 61 makes clear this dynamic. The apparent separation of the will and the intellect is in fact a separation of the *old* will and the intellect, a buffer so to speak, that gives us enough breathing room so as to not immediately throw ourselves headlong into hell. But in truth, it is not this apparent separation of will and intellect that saves us, it is the Lord flowing in to us and creating a *new* will that saves us. The intellect will *always* be pulled along by the will, and the Lord in His mercy has made sure that we have a choice about which will to follow (AC 1902). From *Secrets of Heaven* 5351:

The same may also be recognized from the consideration that a person's will takes precedence over his understanding; for the desires in a person's will are the primary constituents of his life, while the ideas in his understanding are secondary to them; and he acts in accordance with the desires of his will. What goes forth from the will is called good in the case of those who through regeneration have received from the Lord a new will; but it is called evil in the case of those who have had no wish to receive such.

So, we must be careful not to venerate the apparent separation of the will and intellect too much, as it is simply damage control, or an appearance to circumvent our own selfishness. True order is the conjunction of the will and the intellect, and we ignore this reality to our detriment. *True Christianity* 602 states that: “regeneration is a matter of the will and only secondarily a matter of the intellect.”

The only freedom that the intellect has is to choose which will it will serve. So, when stating that women have a “lesser” separation of will and intellect, what is meant is that women are more likely to heed the wishes of the will. And when evaluating the greater likelihood of profanation, it means that women are apparently more likely to choose to

serve their fallen wills, to their own spiritual detriment. So let me just state this very clearly: the heart of the argument is that women as priests, when given the choice between the new will and the old will, will more often choose the old will (the result being their own spiritual harm).

This is problematic for several reasons. The danger associated with being a priest is not a danger specific to the vocation, but rather the danger that any very spiritually inclined person would face in their process of regeneration. One of the gifts of the revelation of the New Church is the fact that we can now all be exposed to vastly greater amounts of genuine spiritual truth. There is no real *functional* difference between the dangers faced by a priest, and those faced by any intelligent lay person who chooses to engage themselves intensively with the doctrines. The process by which they *might* choose to profane the truth is exactly the same. It is the inherent danger in our spiritual-church style of regeneration. So, if by virtue of being human, men and women are regenerated by exactly the same process, but statistically speaking, given more chances to profane, women will profane more often, then this argument is saying that women would be more likely to fail at the process of regeneration, more likely to fail at *life*. Universal principles of spiritual reality do not support this conclusion. In order to *not* be making this argument, one would have to suppose that the danger to priests is of a completely different kind than the regular process of profanation that all humans face, and the hazards of ministry argument does not make that claim.

Further, since the will and the intellect cannot ever be truly separated, effective regeneration relies on a true understanding of which will, the old or the new, is motivating the intellect (TCR 604). And one cannot make an evaluation about the quality of the will, without actually experiencing the nature of that will. One cannot have awareness of emotion without access to emotion. True objectivity rests in understanding how the will and intellect relate to each other, not in separation between them. And in fact, investment in the illusion of the separation between the will and the intellect can be a detriment to understanding our true motivations. One cannot evaluate an emotion that one does not believe exists. TCR 606 characterizes regeneration in terms of “being awake:”

People who have not been regenerated are dreaming; people who have been regenerated are awake. In fact, in the Word, our earthly life is compared to sleep, and our spiritual life to wakefulness.

The number goes on to speak of the foolish and prudent virgins in the book of Matthew. The foolish virgins had lamps but no oil. “The lamps mean things that belong to our intellect; the oil means things that belong to our love.” We need to be able to tell the amount or quality of oil in our lamps. We need to be awake enough and vulnerable enough to actually see the old will for what it really is. True objectivity about spiritual things depends on our ability to do this. (For further discussion of the topic of “true objectivity” see *There is no Deficiency, Only Blessing*).

## The nature of profanation

The assumption that women would more likely profane the truth is more of a derived doctrine than an explicitly stated one. *Divine Providence* 231 lists several different kinds of profanation but none are mentioned as being more likely for women than men. Most of the passages that make a direct connection between interior states, and women teaching or preaching are from the *Spiritual Experiences*, of which #436 is one example:

This kind of punishment comes to those who let themselves be led along by their desires, and even though they see and acknowledge truths, nevertheless go back on them, drawn by their yearnings. Thus they go forth into the field of understanding and recognize [truth], but being drawn by their desire, fall back into opposing it. *This is especially applicable to women, in whom desires normally take precedence, when they join in like men in matters regarding the doctrines of faith.*

Most arguments for male-only clergy agree that passages from *Spiritual Experiences* alone would not be enough to make a prohibition on women's ordination. The argument is, however, that these passages are supported by more universal doctrines such as the spiritual differences between men and women, or the dynamics of the marriage relationship. But equally important, one must ask if these passages are supported by the universal doctrines of freedom and regeneration.

The problem with passages such as *Spiritual Experiences* 436 (for a discussion of SE 5936 see *There is no Deficiency, Only Blessing*) is not that they are saying that women can become corrupted, it is that they are saying that women can become corrupted *when* they engage like men in doctrines of faith. This is separating intent from the act and saying that somehow "uses" have a power over us that is greater than the intent that accompanies them. This is a reversal of cause and effect. "Uses" are born out of causes, and not the other way around. From *True Christianity* 67 we read:

...use is the end which love purposes, and accomplishes through the cause; and when use results love and wisdom really exist, and in use they make for themselves a habitation and an abiding-place, where they rest as in their own home.

If a woman has a brain (a "form") that particularly *loves* the processes of the masculine principle, which is searching/analyzing truth out of an affection for it (the "cause") then this leads directly to her particular and personal form of use (the "end"). Uses do not exist separately from cause. They do not exist "out there" and a woman cannot mistakenly stumble into the wrong one, fall under its magical power and have her mind corrupted. This idea is in complete opposition to the doctrine of freedom, and without freedom, there is no reason for us to exist. Use is the end which love purposes, so where there is love there is use.

Additionally, profanation can only occur where there is contempt for God. *Divine Love and Wisdom 241* tells us that “the quality of our wisdom and use are determined by the quality of our love” (Dole 1986) The quality of our love is what drives wisdom and use, it is that which drives the efficacy of our vocations in this world. It is not separation of will and intellect per se that allows a priest to be effective. It is the willingness to love the Lord and to acknowledge all things are from Him. Women are capable of this willingness and this acknowledgment, just as men are.

### **An arbitrary line**

Oscar Wilde once wrote: “Morality, like art, means drawing a line somewhere.” In the General Church, there has been a line drawn around the priesthood. People on both sides of this argument will concede that current policies have been developed in an attempt to be in line with doctrine, out of a love for the church, and a desire to reflect the Lord’s order in an earthly organization. However, to those who object to a male-only priesthood, the policies can seem somewhat arbitrary and inconsistent, and when observed as such, the question becomes whether these policies are reflecting the Lord’s order in the best possible way, or are they just the result of “always being done this way?”

Churches must straddle a very challenging divide, in that they are part of human culture, but they must also stand apart from it, in order to maintain religious freedom. Change is very difficult, and it is a justifiable concern to many that the church might change its policy on the priesthood in response to culture rather than doctrine. Certainly, the church must do what it thinks is right, not what it thinks is expedient.

What makes this argument hard to countenance, however, is that it has already done so. The party line on women’s uses has historically been a moving one, even in the General Church, each time resting in one arbitrary spot that seemed “right” for the time. The same arguments that are being brought forth in opposition to women’s ordination are exactly the same arguments that at one point, prevented women from speaking aloud in doctrinal classes or holding seats on the church’s boards and corporations. In so far as any argument against women’s ordination rests on an interpretation of women’s roles, the fact that the same arguments were ultimately disregarded in other situations diminishes their legitimacy.

If the same arguments were used now as then, it is not doctrine that has changed but the interpretation of it. And if it was acceptable to evolve our interpretation of the doctrine about women’s uses in regard to participation on boards, why is it not acceptable to do so with the ministry? The answer would be that the priesthood is different somehow, more important. That the treatment of women’s uses in the Writings reveals something of the different spiritual natures of men and women, while there is flexibility in the greater world, but there cannot be flexibility in the priesthood because it is too important a use, and the danger of profanation is too great.



But then, if the the delineation of gendered uses is so important for the ministry, and the principles of marriage love must be applied to it, why do we allow for unmarried priests? There has been much written about the superlative gifts that women have as the carriers for conjugal love within a marriage:

Conjugal love is the inmost of conscience (de Conj 41).

Each one has heaven according to his conjugal love (1<sup>st</sup> Index Sp. Marr.).

As true conjugal love in its first essence is love to the Lord from the Lord it is also innocence . . . As that love is innocence, it is the very esse of all good; and therefore man has so much of heaven in himself or he is so much in heaven, as he is in conjugal love” (AE 996:2).

Truth can be conjoined to good and good to truth only by means of innocence. True conjugal love derives its existence from innocence, because it derives its existence from the conjunction of good and truth (HH 281, 367).

Wives have this gift because they are most tender loves and ardent zeals as it were, for the preservation of conjugal friendship and confidence, and so for the happiness of life of both (ML 155[2]).

When angels are separated from their consorts they are indeed in intelligence, but not in wisdom; but when they are with their consorts, they are also in wisdom. As truth turns itself to good, so truth becomes living (AE 998:4).

If men are so severely lacking in love without the presence of women, then why allow priests to serve unmarried? Could it be that an apparent danger of profanation is considered much worse than an apparent deficit of charity, goodness and innocence? That the teaching of truth is much more important than the leading to the good of life? What does that say about our values as church?

Or perhaps, it is believed that the general sphere of women in a given congregation and/or acquaintance is enough to redeem any unmarried priest? Then why isn't it also the case that the general sphere of men does not make up for the supposed deficit in women's intellect? One can see how this appears arbitrary. We can clearly see from experience that unmarried priests can serve the church excellently. The further we go into prescription about uses from marriage principles, the more tangled up we get in application because people are individuals, and will exhibit an enormous spectrum of gifts, abilities and preferences.

Love drives wisdom which drives use. It is not appropriate to take generalized examples of masculine or feminine uses and be prescriptive about them. Uses will come from form, and God makes the form in ways much more varied than we can comprehend. The question is, can we respect that?

## **Conclusion: A call for balance**

Advocates for women's ordination do not wish to deny the differences between men and women, or diminish the beauty of married love. Instead, I believe they wish for two things: that the differences can be framed in terms of different perspectives rather than different abilities, so that the whole humanity of women be respected, and that dynamics that refer to the sacred relationship between one man and one woman not be inappropriately applied to policy where the doctrines regarding humanity as a whole would be a better fit.

Humans are both subject to generalized truth and capable of seemingly defying it. Already, within the male-only priesthood, there are differences of perspective and varying levels of focus on truth vs charity, of emphasis on the masculine and feminine principles. There are also varying levels of capability on both sides. This is because the current priesthood is composed of human men who are each capable of expressing their unique combination of ideas and loves. This is healthy and useful, as it allows priests to learn from each other. Women simply wish for the same principle of holistic humanness to be applied to them as well. Because, ideally, a priesthood of both genders would be helpful to each other in the same way. Differing perspectives already exist; the addition of women (human beings capable of defying generalization just as men are) would simply expand the same dynamic. We are all both human and gendered.

Nor do advocates of women's ordination wish to deny that men and women have different tendencies of perspective, only that conclusions about ability, or future dangers, should not be drawn from generalizations about perspective. By creation, the lens through which women see will be colored by the feminine principle of truth grounded in good. But that does not mean that the masculine principle means nothing to women or that it is perceived as alien to them. Many women delight in how the masculine principle manifests within their personal skills, talents and joys. It is perhaps rather like the symbol for the tao, the ying and yang. The masculine principle contained within the feminine perspective, or the feminine principle contained within the masculine. Men and women *have* both, *love* both, and *use* both, but they build up different frameworks with which to contain these principles within themselves.

These different frameworks were created to be complementary to each other. When one framework is missing, the priesthood, as a use, is out of balance. Many male priests will be drawn toward manifesting the feminine principle and they may well mitigate some of the imbalance. However, the focused trajectory of the masculine principle (driven by will, but heading towards truth) means that a male priesthood as a whole might have some perceived deficits, just as an entirely female priesthood would be similarly out of balance.

Some of the deficits of a male-only priesthood might be: not being able to express the truth lovingly, wanting to be right more than being loving, being oblivious to emotional

needs, or believing truth is required when love is required. Sometimes it ends up looking like the choice comes down to supporting the purity of doctrine over the emotional needs of the church. But can we not see that this is a false dichotomy? There are male priests that endeavor to focus on loving usefulness, just as there could be female priests that love to study high theology. The point is to strive for balance; a balance within which the wisdom of Divine Providence can be expressed, and a balance that will naturally showcase the beautiful confluence of gender strengths and personality preferences within each human being.

What could a balanced clergy look like? *Divine Love and Wisdom* 326 talks about there being a human image to everything in the universe:

We can tell from all this, then, that if we focus on functions, there is a human image to everything in the universe. We can also tell that this testifies to the fact that God is human, because the things just listed do not come into being around angelic people from themselves, but from the Lord through them. They actually arise from the flow of divine love and wisdom into the angels, who are recipients, and are brought forth to their sight the way the universe is created. So people there know that God is human and that the created universe, functionally viewed, is an image of God.

How can the General Church clergy be a human image, when half of humanity is not allowed to participate in its workings?

Or further, from *Divine Providence* 4(4):

A form makes a unity more perfectly as it's constituents are distinguishably different, and yet united.

5. There is some image of this unity in everything that has been created.

6. It is the intent of divine providence that everything created, collectively and in every detail, should be this kind of whole, and that if it is not, it should become one.

And finally, *Divine Love and Wisdom* 330 talks about the three levels of a person - the body, rational faculty and spiritual character, or body, mind and soul.

The body is like the foundation. The person's rational faculty is like the superstructure of the house. His spiritual character is like the furnishings in the house. And conjunction with the Lord is like his inhabiting of it.

The differences between men and women are ordained by creation, and our personalities and gifts are often governed by our genetics; neither of which are under our control. What we do have control over is whether or not we choose to be united. All of us in the New Church are invested in receiving the Lord as a guest in our home. *"It is the intent of divine providence that everything created, collectively and in every detail, should be this kind of whole, and that if it is not, it should become one."* Unity is

achieved *through* distinctiveness not *by* it. Separation by prescription only makes us weaker; it is by *embracing* differences, *welcoming* them that the we will create a form - a home - in which the Lord can inhabit.