

# Women's exclusion reaches beyond policy

By Father Richard P. McBrien  
Syndicated columnist

On October 15, 1976, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published — with the approval of Pope Paul VI — a "Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood."

Soon thereafter, this century's leading Catholic theologian, Karl Rahner, S.J., wrote a brief commentary on the document in which he argued that if the Congregation's "basic thesis is not assumed as a priori certain, the burden of proof evidently lies with the Declaration and not with its opponents" (Concern for the Church,

p.43).

In other words, it is not those who favor the ordination of women who have the burden of showing it to be possible. The burden is, rather, on those who claim that it is impossible.

The argument *against* the ordination of women is based on tradition and the will of Christ.

Briefly, it goes something like this: Women cannot be ordained because the tradition of the church is against it, from the earliest years to the present.

The tradition of the church its against the ordination of women because the teaching and practice of Jesus himself is against it.

The central argument from tradition is weak. It presumes that the church is already in full maturity, whereas it may still be in its infancy, its period of institutional formation.

How would the year 1990 look from the vantage point of the year 19,900, for example? Would the church of 1990 not seem very much a part of the early church? The immediately post-biblical church? The foundational church even?

The argument from tradition assumes a different cast when one looks *forward* rather than *backward* across the vast landscape of history.

The argument from tradition also rests



## ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

on an unhistorical reading of the New Testament. There is no biblical evidence that Jesus left us an ecclesiastical blueprint. Indeed, there is much evidence to the contrary (see, for example, Frederick Cwiekowski's *The Beginning of the Church*).

Neither is there any evidence that Jesus explicitly forbade the ordination of women (the Pontifical Biblical Commission's report to Pope Paul VI in 1976 reached this very conclusion). Indeed, as many have hastened to point out, we also don't have any textual evidence that Jesus ordained *anyone*, male or female.

The most interesting and revealing argument against the ordination of women is the Christological one; namely, that women cannot be ordained because Christ mandated that women cannot be ordained.

Rarely does anyone ever press the question that is begged in this appeal to the will of the Lord: Why would Jesus have made such a prohibition in the first place? What possible reason would he have had to forbid the ordination of women?

If one had the patience and the skill to peel the onion of this Christological argument, one would probably uncover a particular understanding of humanity and of God: Jesus must have determined that women cannot be ordained because women are, at root, inferior to men.

Furthermore, since every human being is made in the image and likeness of God, and since God is masculine, women are less godly than men. Therefore, women as women are incapable of the priestly work of mediation between God and ourselves.

Crudely put, that seems to be the real underlying theological argument against the ordination of women.

All these arguments beg the question, why? *Why* does the tradition not allow for the ordination of women? *Why* does the teaching and practice of the New Testament Church not allow for the ordination of women? *Why* does the teaching and practice of Jesus not allow for the ordination of women?

The question concerning the ordination of women may be immediately a question about the church and its ministries. But it is, at root, a question about the nature of God and the nature of human existence.

# Evil Queen Jezebel corrupts Israel and her king

By Cindy Bassett  
Courier columnist

After the death of King Solomon, who was the wisest king in all of Israel, there were many other rulers. Some were evil and some were good. None were as evil as King Ahab.

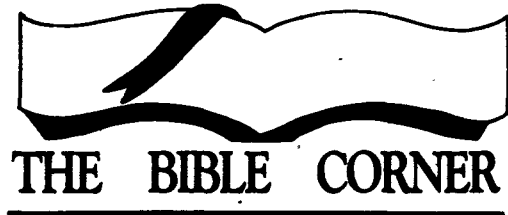
The first thing King Ahab did when he came to power was to make a treaty with the king of Sidon, the ruler of a country that worshipped false gods. But the very worst thing King Ahab did was to marry Jezebel, the king's daughter.

When Jezebel came to Israel as queen, she brought with her all of the 850 prophets of the false god, Baal. To please her, King Ahab built a temple to Baal. Soon it seemed as if everyone in Israel was worshipping at the altar of Baal.

Because of Queen Jezebel, King Ahab ordered the death of all of God's prophets. Only one prophet, Elijah, remained, and he refused to be silenced.

"What did you say?" Queen Jezebel asked on the day that Elijah came to the palace. "I think I may have heard you incorrectly."

"I think not," Elijah said boldly. He repeated his message a second time. "The God of Israel will not be dishonored. So that you may know that he is the one true



God, not a single drop of rain will fall in the land until I say so at his command."

"How can you allow this man to speak to me like this?" Queen Jezebel said to the king. "Who does he think he is anyway? Baal is the ruler of the universe. He controls the rain. You'll see!"

After Elijah had gone, Queen Jezebel said, "You should have sentenced that fool to death immediately? Order everyone in the land to pray to Baal for rain. First we'll prove Elijah wrong. Then he must die for his actions!"

Three years passed and not a single drop of rain fell just as Elijah had predicted. Nearly all of the rivers were dry. The earth was parched and brown and there was a severe famine in the country.

King Ahab ordered the death of the prophet, Elijah. A search was conducted for him everywhere, but no one could find him.

Finally, one day, Elijah went to see King

Ahab.

"Satisfied now?" King Ahab said to him. "You have brought great misery on all of Israel."

Elijah was not the least bit put off. "It is you who have caused this trouble for Israel. It was bad enough that you worshipped Baal. But you have corrupted the entire country by your actions."

"So what is to be done now?" King Ahab asked.

"Killing me will do nothing to end the drought. I propose a challenge to your false god, Baal. Once and for all, I want the people of Israel to see that this god will do nothing to help them," the prophet said.

"Accepted. We'll see, as you have said," King Ahab agreed.

King Ahab sent messengers all over the land. A short time later, Queen Jezebel came with all of her false prophets to meet Elijah for a contest on Mount Carmel. Thousands of people from all over Israel came to view the challenge. The odds were 850 to one ... (To be continued next week.)

Scripture reference: 1 Kings, Chapter 16:29-18:19.

Meditation: "Do not let yourselves be led away from the Lord to worship and serve other gods. If you do, the Lord will become angry with you. He will hold back the rain, and your ground will become too dry for crops to grow" (Deuteronomy 11:16-17).

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