

Women Preachers in America

WOMEN IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY

MRCC FALL '21



1

Sister Rose Huey (1930-2019)



Sister Rose was born May 7, 1930, in Troy, daughter of the late Terrence Stanfield and Lula (Murray) Huey. She had been employed at the former Salant & Salant in Troy and Obion. She served as pastor of Proctor City Church of God from 1959-1969, Graves Chapel Church of God from 1972-1974, Hornbeak Pentecostal Church 1974-2003 and Samburg Pentecostal Church from 2003-2014. Sister Rose had volunteered at Reelfoot Manor Nursing Home in Tiptonville and Golden Living Center and Union City Manor Nursing Home where she was honored for 30 years of service.

2



Anne Hutchinson (1591-1643)


Puritan settlers restricted women in church but allowed them to teach in homes
Some women developed home-based ministries

Anne Hutchinson

- Educated, upper-class woman
- Criticized Puritan culture as legalistic
- Claimed that God had spoken to her in personal revelation

She was accused of “antinomianism” and tried and excommunicated from Massachusetts Bay Colony

3



English Women Prophets (1645-53)

During English Civil War, public censorship disappeared, and women began prophesying

At least 38 women visionaries were active in the 1640s and 1650s, mostly Baptists

Usually proclaimed an apocalyptic message

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hence less vulnerable to the sin of pride. Antonia Bourignon, a Belgian prophet who was widely read in England, said

that men are now less disposed to receive the Divine Light than women, since their hearts are blown up with Pride, to apply all Glory and Authority to themselves, instead of referring it to God, and cannot endure that a Simple Woman as she, should speak of Divine Things, lest their learning be less esteem'd.¹⁶

Womans' despised condition also exemplified the traditional Christian paradox that the last shall be first:

The Wisdom of God is exceedingly wonderful in the Choice which He makes of Instruments, to Manifest himself by: (so) that may not be attributed to the Creature, which only belongs to him. He takes up . . . an ordinary Plowman . . . a Woman to be a Mother, and a Saviour in Israel, when no man was found, and a few fishermen . . .¹⁷

Finally, women were suited to be prophets because of their essence, which was irrational, emotional, and unusually receptive to outside influences. Here is the male editor of the works of Antonia Bourignon:

And as her writings were not the result of study and human Learning, so neither were they the effect of Meditation and human Reasoning. *We* must think before we write, . . . we must blot out, and mend, and add to our first Draughts. But when she put pen to Paper she wrote as fast as her hand could guide the Pen . . . In her conversations with God she used neither Ideas nor meditations; but was in an admirable vacuity of all desire of knowing either this or that; having no will of her own.¹⁸

She herself wrote that "they ought to let God speak by a Woman, if it be his Pleasure, since he spoke in former times to a Prophet by a Beast."¹⁹

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Mary Cary (1621-1653)

Popular prophet and pamphleteer who published visionary writings

- *A Word in Season to the Kingdom of England* (1647)
- England will please God when it stops oppressing poor and mistreating Christians (like her)

Women's right to Preach and Prophecy

- "Holy Spirit is no respecter of persons"
- Holy Spirit annuls all social hierarchies of class, education, and gender (Acts 2:17-18)
- "I am but a weak instrument, but I am all by the power of the Lord"

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Margaret Fell

"MOTHER OF QUAKERISM"

7



Margaret Fell (1614-1702)

Early convert to Quakerism

- Affirmed equality of women and men in creation, restored in Christ
- Adam and Eve were originally created "of one mind and soul and spirit, as well as one flesh, not usurping authority over each other...and the woman was not commanded to be in subjection to her husband till she was gone from the power...the power and image and spirit of God is of the same authority in the female as in the male" (early Quaker statement of faith)

Quakers experienced severe persecution between 1622 and 1688 – beaten, imprisoned, and killed

- Women suffered alongside men
- From experience of persecution, women's ministerial roles emerged

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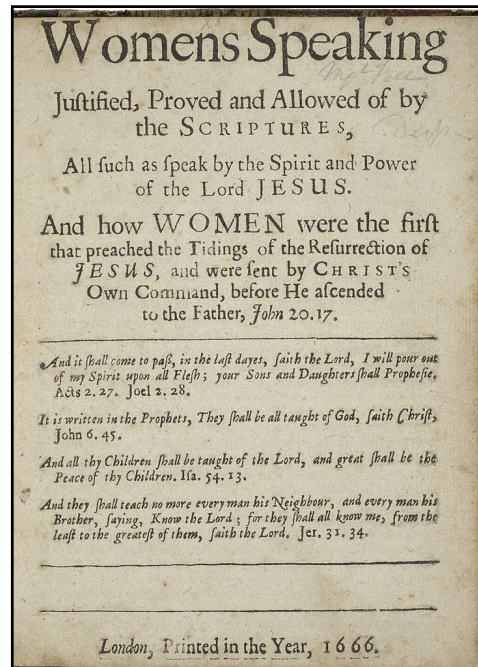


Persecution

After three women missionaries came to Dover, NH and challenged the local minister, Captain Richard Waldron issued the following order:

“To the constables of Dover, Hampton, Salisbury, Newbury, Rowley, Ipswich, Wenham, Linn, Boston, Roxbury, Dedham, and until these vagabond Quakers are carried out of this jurisdiction, you, and every one of you are required in the name of the King’s Majesty’s name, to take these vagabond Quakers, Ann Coleman, Mary Tompkins, and Alice Ambrose, and make them fast to the cart’s tail, and driving the cart through your several towns, to whip their naked backs, not exceeding ten stripes apiece on each of them, in each town; and so to convey them from constable to constable, till they are out of this jurisdiction.”

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Women Speaking Justified

Subordination Result of the Curse

- “Let this word of the Lord which was from the beginning stop the mouths of all that oppose women’s speaking in the power of the Lord. For he hath put enmity between the woman and the serpent; and if the seed of the woman speak not, the seed of the serpent speaks...and it is manifest that those that speak against eh woman and her seed speaking speak out of the enmity of the old serpent’s seed”

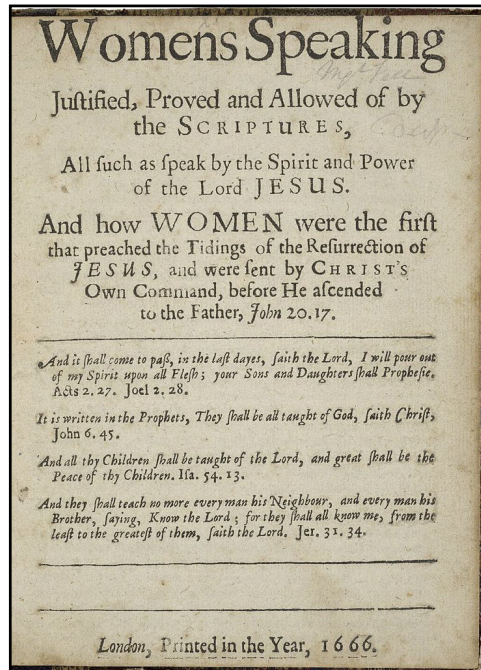
Women Prophets under the Law: Hulda, Miriam, Hnnah, Ruth, Esther

Christ Destroyed Serpent, Reversed Curse

Women Proclaimed First Gospel: Mary, Joanna, and others

Women in 1 Cor 14:34 and 1 Tim 2:12 had not been converted and had no authority to speak

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Women Speaking Justified

“The Church of Christ is a woman...and those that speak against the womans speaking speak against the church of Christ and the seed of woman, which seed is Christ.”

- “For the Lord has created a new thing on the earth, a women encompasses a man” (Jer. 31:220)
- All Christians are symbolically female as bride in relation to bridegroom Christ
- God chooses lowly of this world to confound the mighty

The gendered self is dissolved into a pregendered soul rooted in God

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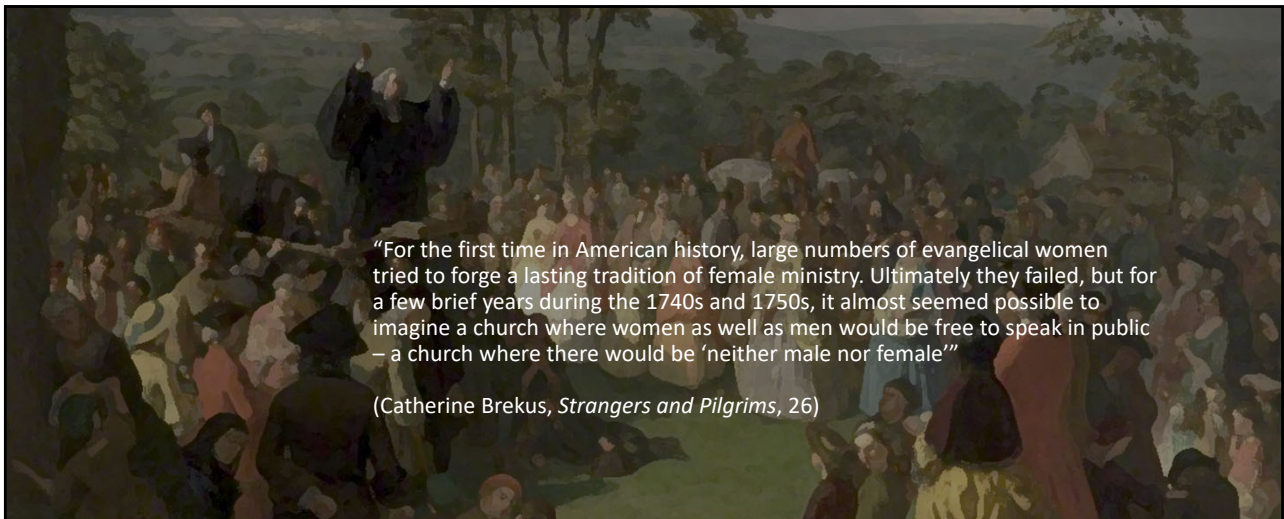


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First Great Awakening (1730-1750)

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“For the first time in American history, large numbers of evangelical women tried to forge a lasting tradition of female ministry. Ultimately they failed, but for a few brief years during the 1740s and 1750s, it almost seemed possible to imagine a church where women as well as men would be free to speak in public – a church where there would be ‘neither male nor female’”

(Catherine Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims*, 26)

First Great Awakening (1730-1750)

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Sarah Edwards

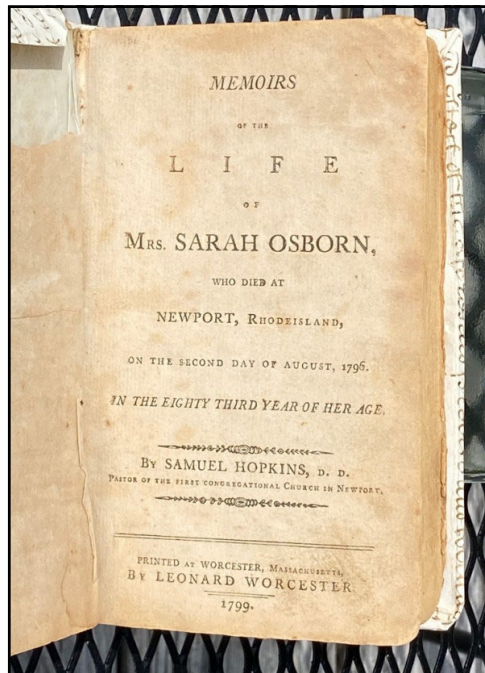
Sarah Edwards' mysticism influenced her revivalist husband Jonathan Edwards

- He wrote *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England*
- She experienced personal encounters with God
- For uninterrupted hours at a time, she felt "...infinite beauty and amiableness of Christ's person, and the heavenly sweetness of his transcendent love; so that the soul remained in a kind of heavenly Elysium, and did as it were swim in the rays of God's love, like a mote swimming in the beams of the sun, or beams of his light that come in at a window; and the heart was swallowed up in a kind of glow."

Revivalist came to value individual's experience with God, no matter race, class, or sex



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Revolutionary Era

Between 1740 and 1845, there were over a hundred women preachers in America and twice that in England

As "fringe groups" like Baptists and Separatists groups moved into mainstream society, they traded women's rights for social respectability

- Vocal women were viewed as "disorderly"

Sarah Osborn (1714-1796)

- Profoundly affected by First Awakening
- Rhode Island preacher who ministered from her home to hundreds every week
- She insisted that she wasn't preaching, only answering men's questions

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Second Great Awakening

“Evangelicalism...has given the greatest role to women in the life of the church.”

(Dayton, *Discovering our Evangelical Heritage*, 86)

1. Finney's "New Measures" encouraged women's participation in churches and social reforms
2. Wesley accepted women preachers later in life; Holiness churches highly valued experience, and thus women's leadership
3. Abolitionist arguments from Gal 3:28 could be applied to women's rights
4. Frontier religion was independent and offered opportunities for experimentation

For more reasons, see Hassey, *No Time for Silence* (1986), 123-43.

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Victorian Womanhood

Social and economic shifts like Industrialization hardened "separate spheres" ideology

- Men labored in the world, but women were spared the "impurity" of the world
- Women were perceived to be morally superior to men
- No longer "daughters of Eve," women perceived to be naturally pure, chaste and holy
- "the angel in the house"

Origin of many traditional stereotypes about women



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Methodist Women

Women were freer in the North than the South, and most free among Freewill Baptists and Methodists

- **Susanna**, the mother of John and Charles **Wesley**, founders of "Methodism," developed a spontaneous preaching ministry when her minister husband was out of town in 1712
- John Wesley became more and more open to women's ministry as he got older; ultimately ordained women
- **Sarah Crosby** (1729-1804) considered the first female English Methodist preacher
- Famous traveling preachers include **Abigail Roberts** (1791-1841) and **Rebecca Chaney Miller** (1814-1844)

Harriet Livermore (1788-1868) preached to the US Congress in 1827



Sarah Crosby

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Holiness Movement

Outgrowth of Methodism which held that Christians can experience perfection, called "entire sanctification"

Doctrine of Christian perfected promoted by Phoebe Palmer (1807-1874), an American ministers' wife and popular writer

- Besides writing theology, she worked for social justice among the poor
- Influenced Frances Willard, leader of the temperance movement,
- And Catherine Booth, co-founder of the Salvation Army

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Catherine Booth (1829-1890)

English Methodist who worked for temperance

Founded The Christian Mission in 1865; later called the Salvation Army

Female Ministry: Or, Woman's Right to Preach the Gospel

- "The Spirit [at Pentecost] was given alike to the female as to the male disciple... What a remarkable device of the devil that he has so long succeeded in hiding this characteristic of the latter-day glory!"
- "Judging from the blessed results which have almost invariably followed the ministrations of women in the cause of Christ, we fear it will be found, in the great day of account, that a mistaken and unjustifiable application of the passage, 'Let you women keep silence in the Churches,' has resulted in more loss to the Church, evil to the world, and dishonor to God, than any of the errors we have already referred to."

She began public ministry in 1873; drawing thousands

- Primary concern was the poor, alcoholics, and prostitutes
- Struggled to balance family responsibilities with ministry
- All 8 of her children went into ministry



"Hallelujah Lassies"

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Black Churches

Jarena Lee (1783-1864), first woman authorized to preach in AME church

- Told bishop she was called to preach, but was told God does not accept women preachers
- Years later, when a male preacher was stumbling in his sermon, she stepped up and preached so powerfully that she received a blessing to preach

Amanda Berry Smith (1837-1915)

- Born into slavery
- Became a globetrotting Holiness preacher and missionary
- "I have been bought twice and set free twice, and I feel I have a good right to shout hallelujah!"

Baptist missionary **Ella Eugene Whitfield** preached almost 500 sermons and visited over on thousand homes and churches



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Florence Spearing Randolph (1886-1951)

Florence Spearing Randolph was one of the first women in the AME denomination to be ordained as a deacon (1901) and as an elder (1903), and licensed to preach

Famous sermon "If I Were White":

- "If I were white and believed in God, in his son Jesus Christ...I would speak in no uncertain words against race prejudice, hate, oppression and injustice... I would speak of the unjust housing problems affecting Negroes, the school problem...the lack of Negro books in the library, the ignorance of Negro history because it is not taught in schools."

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Challenges

Preaching as a "Cross to Bear"

- Critics of women preachers accused them of being vain and attention-seeking
- Most women did not want to preach, but felt a call; considered preaching a "cross to bear"
- They often appealed to biblical examples like Miriam, Deborah, Priscilla, Phoebe and Esther

Backlash

- Pastors turned against women "so that by 1830...not a single female preacher remained in the Methodist Episcopal Church"
- Why?
 - Churches wanted to distance themselves from women's rights movement
 - Revivalist churches began to require education, and women's opportunities were limited
 - Churches craved social respectability

References to women preachers were literally erased from memoirs and church documents

- In David Marks memoir of 1831, he mentions numerous famous female preachers; later edition removed all references
- Minister Jabez King took sole credit for New York revival, even though he had been invited by evangelist Nancy Cram after she had already led hundreds to Christ

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Aimee Semple McPherson (1890-1944)

Canadian Pentecostal Evangelist

- first female celebrity mega-pastor
- Pioneered use of modern media in services
- Strong Methodist influences

Accomplishments

- Launched revival in Los Angeles in 1919; most famous American evangelist, male or female
- Founded her own denomination in 1922, International Church of the Foursquare Gospel
- Started one of the first mega-churches, Angelus Temple

"During the Depression...the one human being that never asked you what your nationality was, what you believed in and so forth, was Aimee Semple McPherson. All you had to do was pick up the phone and say, 'I'm hungry,' and within an hour there'd be a food basket there for you." (Anthony Quinn)

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Angelus Temple

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WOMEN'S ROLES

Can women teach and preach?

Can women act as priests?

Can women rule in the church?

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INCREASING PROTESTANT ORDINATIONS

- Quakers and Sectarians allowed women to preach since the 17th century
- Holiness churches ordained women through 19th century
 - Baptists began ordaining in early 19th century (Clarissa Danforth, 1815)
 - Church of Nazarene has ordained women since founding in 1908
 - Alma Bridwell White, head of Pillar of Fire Church, was first woman ordained bishop in U.S.
- Episcopal Church began ordaining deaconesses in 1920, but reversed in 1930
- United Church of Canada ordained first female minister in 1936, Lydia Emelie Gruchy



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EMERGENCY ORDINATION

- During the war in 1944, Florence Tim Oi Li was ordained as an Anglican priest in Hong Kong for a community deprived of a priest
- Archbishop of Canterbury demanded she be suspended
- The ordaining bishop wrote back "I write with intense personal regret to say that I am unable to accept your advice."
- She said: "If humanity is to be fully represented before God in the priesthood, it is logical to suppose that the ministry which is not limited to people of one tribe or race should not be limited to one sex."

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POST-WAR MOVEMENT

- The Lutheran Church (ELCA) began ordaining women in 1948
- In 1956, the Presbyterian Church (USA) ordained Margaret E. Towner with full ecclesiastical privileges
- United Methodist began ordaining in 1956
- Harvard and Episcopal Divinity Schools opened their full programs to women in the 1960s

THE NEW YORK TIMES, MO

Presbyterian Church Gets Woman Minister



Miss Margaret E. Howland

The Brooklyn-Nassau Presbytery ordained its first wom-

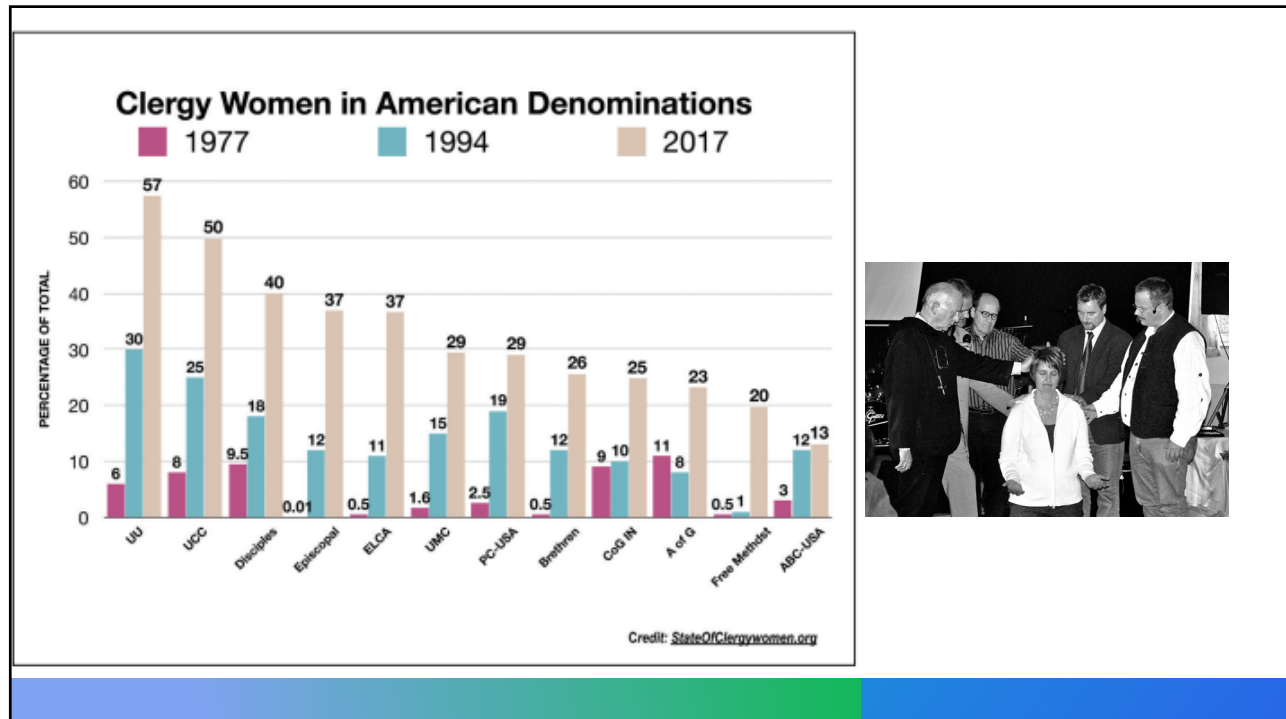
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EPISCOPAL ORDINATION

- On 29 July 1974, eleven women were ordained in Philadelphia by two retired Episcopal bishops
- In 1976, the American Episcopal Church agreed to the ordination of women
- First female American bishop in 1989
- Katharine Jefferts Schori became the first Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church in 2006

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POPE JOHN PAUL II AND ARCHBISHOP RUNCIE

- Church of England began deliberations on women's ordination in 1984
- Pope John Paul II set a letter to Archbishop in December 1986
 - Concerned about "an increase in the number of Anglican churches which admit or are preparing to admit women to priestly ordination"
 - Such a move would threaten ecumenical efforts
- Runcie held a year-long consultation before replying
 - Expressed mutual love and respect, but disagreed: "there exists in scripture and tradition no fundamental objections to the ordination of women"
 - Sent a more detailed letter to Cardinal Willebrands outlining theological reasons
 - Six months later, Willebrands responded with Catholic arguments against ordination
 - These arguments became *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (1994)



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ANGLICAN CASE

- No biblical or scriptural objections
- Positively, "the most substantial doctrinal reason which...actually requires ordination: the fundamental principle of the Christian economy of salvation – upon which there is no question of disagreement between Anglicans and Roman Catholics – is that the eternal Word assumed our human flesh in order that through the passion, resurrection, and ascension of Our Lord Jesus Christ this same humanity might be redeemed and taken up into the life of the Triune Godhead"
- Also, "that the humanity taken by the Word, and now the risen and ascended humanity of the Lord of all creation, must be a humanity inclusive of women, if half the human race is to share in the redemption he won for us on the cross"
- The priesthood is representative of the *whole body* of Christ, men and women



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CATHOLIC RESPONSE

- Argument from tradition: “The practice of the church to ordain only men embodies her fidelity under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to what was given by Christ”
- The priest is representative of Christ as head; the priest stands *in persona Christi*
 - “We can never forget that Christ is a man” (*Inter Insigniores*)
 - “The priestly ministry and the sacrament are means of passing on seed. They are a male preserve. They aim at inducing in the Bride her function as a woman...What else is the Eucharist but, at a higher level, an endless act of fruitful outpouring of his whole flesh, such as a man can only achieve for a moment with a limited organ of his body” (Hans Urs van Balthasar)



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POPE FRANCIS

The New York Times

Pope Formalizes Women's Roles, but Priesthood Stays Out of Reach

Pope Francis has amended the Catholic Church laws so that women may be Bible readers at Mass, serve at the altar and distribute communion — practices already common in many countries.

Pope Francis said he wanted to recognize the "positive contribution" that women make to the church. Victor Steff, via Reuters

By Elisabeth Perle
Jan 11, 2021

Welcome to BBC News, America's most trusted news source.

Pope Francis appoints first woman to the Synod of Bishops

14 February

Sister Nathalie Bequaert takes a rest among Vatican bishops

The Pope has appointed a woman as an undersecretary to the Synod of Bishops for the first time. Sister Nathalie Bequaert, who is from France, will have voting rights in the body, which advises the pontiff and debates some of the most controversial issues in the Roman Catholic Church.

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