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The Laws of Spiritual Motion: Part 3

Good and evil are in a constant battle and our souls are the prize they seek.

Good seeks to preserve whilst evil seeks to destroy.

Good seeks to set free whilst evil to subjugate and bring into bondage.

Good seeks to encourage, support and persuade whilst evil seeks to coerce, blackmail and entrap, and it will use any means possible.

Good seeks the truth but evil will lie and deceive to get its own way.

Mankind stands between good and evil, and must make a choice between the two. One leads to life and the other to death.

So you would think it an easy choice.....

Giving people choices (free will) doesn't always mean that they will choose responsibly or wisely or 'do the right thing' – the problem is we are all inherently selfish and like to put our own comfort and wellbeing before the needs of other. Evil knows this full well and will take advantage.

Whilst we are well aware of the great commandments, 'to love God....' and 'to love your neighbour as you would be loved yourselves', evil has a way of creating exceptions in our minds that allow us to put ourselves first.

Evil will give easy reason and justification for doing what we know in our heart is wrong. Its intent is to turn us away from what is good.

It will try every means to over-ride conscience, God's Law, the promptings of the Holy Spirit and advice given by spiritual superiors/mentors/etc.

Any decision that puts self above others is generally suspect (unless for example it involves you going for a hospital appointment or for urgent medical treatment – the carer needs to be cared for to function).

Having fallen for it once, it gets easier for us to be persuaded by evil to follow the easy and more selfish path.

Evil does not take kindly to not getting its own way and there are always consequences. It will find any means to challenge any Godly decisions you have made/wish to make and try to convince you that you were wrong.

Evil will even attack us through our consciences and will often use 'guilt' as a means of getting its own way and undermining what is good.

Evil will often misquote Holy Scripture to turn us away from what is good.

Evil will even take the appearance of an angel from God and lead us astray if it possibly can.

So how do we know what is from God, and what is not?

1 John 4 says:

¹ Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

² By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³ and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God.

This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.

⁴ Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

If something is of God, it will glorify God and will also comply with the first two commandments - 'to love God....' and 'to love our neighbours as we ourselves would be loved.' Thus the spirits are tested and are proven for what they are and where they have come from.

To put self above God and the needs of others is to go against those two commandments.

That is not to say that God does not want us to enjoy the good things of life. It is a question of priorities and balance in line with the two great commandments.

Yes, you can have that new camera, a different car, but not if you cannot sensibly fulfil all of your genuine financial commitments and/or at the expense of your immediate neighbours who are in desperate need.

As St James said, (James 2 v 14 – 20):

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?

¹⁵ Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?

¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

¹⁸ But someone will say, 'You have faith; I have deeds.'

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. ¹⁹ You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder.

²⁰ You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?

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So love justifies everything? A biblical perspective:

'In March 2021, the Vatican's doctrinal office shut down proposals for the blessing of same-sex couples, stating that the church "cannot bless sin", but **the cardinal** (Cardinal Hollerich) **questioned in the interview asked whether "God could ever curse two people who love each other."**

So 'love' justifies everything? Does it mean there are no boundaries that 'love' cannot cross? It seems a simple enough question with an obvious answer, but it isn't that simple and the answer isn't that obvious until one's eyes are fully opened*. It is a form of entrapment that presents evil as good.

The answer depends entirely on how you define 'love' and how that love is expressed intimately. Take, for example, the following:-

I love my daughter and I love my son, but is having sex with them as a means of expressing my love for them sufficiently justified?

Is expressing my relationship with my girlfriend in terms of violence acceptable because 'I love her'?

I love my grand-children but is this sufficient reason for allowing me to sexually abuse them?

I love my neighbours but is having sexual intercourse with one or both of them the way to express that love?

It's a simple 'NO!' There are boundaries one should not cross and the bible makes these quite clear. Real Godly love defines those boundaries.

Whilst I believe it is perfectly acceptable for people of the same sex to genuinely love each other (as 'love' is defined in the bible), that precludes it developing into a physically/sexually intimate relationship. Scripturally, sexual intercourse is something limited to marriage for the procreation of children.

The bible makes it quite clear that same sex intercourse/sexually motivated intimacy outside of marriage, is not acceptable in God's eyes.

Same sex sexually intimate relationships are not part of God's plan for creation and are in fact an abuse of creation, for our bodies were not designed for such behaviours.

Taking a purely biblical perspective, I respectfully suggest that those who think such is acceptable have a flawed understanding of the true nature of Godly love and the relationship between 'men' and 'women' (as defined physically at birth - gender is not a choice, but a gift of God).

('Self-declaration of gender' is not a means of making good the Christian definition of marriage between two people of the same sex, and such an arrangement is not and never will be 'a Christian marriage' in scriptural terms, i.e. between one man and woman, as defined physically at birth, for mutual comfort, the procreation of children and intended to be for life).

So it comes down to our inbuilt need to procreate, or put simply, for 'sex'.

'Love' does not equate with 'lust', and 'lust' is not 'love'. Neither is 'being in love' the same as 'loving someone'. They are very different. Somehow, society has become very confused and can't tell the difference between them.

This kind of 'love' (based on sex/infatuation), the one society seems to have accepted as 'the real thing', falls well short of God's definition of love and has nothing to do with 'sacramental and sacrificial love' as defined in Holy Writ.

It is a nothing more than sexual gratification, and ultimately an act of great selfishness. It is a case of 'wanting the pleasure without the responsibility'. 'Love' has become in modern parlance a fleeting moment of sexual conquest without lasting commitment or fidelity, and it falls well short of God's ideal.

The basic foundation for all relationships that involve sexual intimacy is that marriage is the only acceptable relationship, and that marriage shall be between a man and a woman as defined physically at birth, is for life, mutual comfort and (most importantly) for the procreation of children.

Sexually intimate relationships outside of marriage are not parts of God's plan and that includes heterosexual relationships as well as same sex relationship.

There are those, who under the God given freedom of choice authored under 'free will' who may disagree with this. That is their choice, but it is not supported by Holy Writ, and they must accept to consequences of their decisions.

Whatever our decisions in life, we remain constantly in God's love. But that does not mean we can ignore what God's desires are for us.

The first commandment states that we should love God with our whole being and with every breath and heartbeat.

But the need to express ourselves in terms of unrestricted sexual freedom falls very short of the expectations of love as described in the words of 1 Corinthians 13 v 4-8. Where in this text is any mention of the sexual act?

Sexual predation (the fulfilment of 'my' personal, emotional and physical needs over-riding and at the expense of the needs of others), is not an expression of 'love'. It is a matter of supreme selfishness. This falls outside of the basic parameters that define biblical marriage and loving relationships.

In bible terms, the sexual act is not primarily a matter of recreational pleasure but a sacramental commitment within marriage for the procreation of children.

The sexual act outside of marriage is therefore little more than an act of selfish indulgence. The impact this behaviour has on society is intensely destructive as it undermines one of the basic structures that fundamentally holds society together, the family unit. The family unit has been, up until recently, underpinned by the definition and social boundaries of Christian marriage.

The breakdown of Christian marriage in favour of something that is casual, transient and unstable is damaging society as a whole.

There are many studies that show the damaging psychological effects of divorce on couples, their children and their families, and on society itself.

The financial cost of divorces and family breakups to the tax payer is massive - check out the facts and figures on the Office of National Statistics web site.

It even impacts on the housing market – instead of a family unit living in one house, many families are divided between two, sometimes three houses after divorce and/or separation**. (See Matthew 12 v 25)

The Judeo-Christian view of marriage may not be a perfect model for society but there has been nothing put in its place to better it.

The problem with 'Christian marriage' is that it demands a commitment that starts with others and puts 'self' in second place. That is not something that sits well in society at the moment, and the church is very silent on the matter.

Presently, social cohesion is based on 'self' and 'my needs' rather than 'the needs of others' and 'community'. It is very much about 'the present moment' and 'what I want', rather than taking the longer term view and 'my responsibilities towards others'.

In fact, this age could be referred to as the 'age of irresponsibility' (refusing to accept responsibility for my own selfish actions and the needs of others – 'that is nothing of my doing and therefore nothing to do with me'), 'victim culture' (when things don't turn out as I expected, I am the victim and need compensation) and 'offence' (if I am offended by your views then I need to have you 'closed down' but I can express any view I wish without censure or objection or need to justify.) Your opinions and view must coincide with mine otherwise they should not be expressed – or put another way, 'democracy and free speech are dead' and 'I' am the sole judge of what is good or bad).

Individuals do not see themselves as the cause of society's problem but as 'victims'. The old saying of 'do not think of what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country' does not apply to them because they are (in their own minds) a special case and society's rule does not apply to them.

They believe they are 'owed' by society rather than being contributors to it, and after all, they did not ask to be brought into this world so they have a right to compensation.

My biblically based views are not going to sit well with society in general, but that is to be expected. People will always tend to choose what suits their needs over what suits the needs of others unless they stand to gain something out of it. Their focus is predominantly 'self', to look after 'number one'.

These very things are in direct conflict with the two great commandments:-

1. 'Love God....' and obey His laws and commandments, simply because we love and trust Him,
2. and 'love our neighbours as we ourselves would like to be loved' – i.e. put ourselves in second place when it comes to dealing with their needs.

So it is God first, others in need second, and myself last of all. Family fits in with 'others in need' and we shouldn't ignore the fact we have God given responsibilities toward them, whether we 'like' them or not.

When it comes down to it, as Christians we should be aware that our own personal practices and preferences count for little when it comes to maintaining spiritual and biblical integrity - it's God's way, not our way, which is important. As a consequence, and even though it may be difficult and counter-intuitive, we accept in faith and trust the greater truth for the greater good when it comes to society and the greater Christian community.

And if we want to put this into practice, our responsibilities are:-

- 1. We absolutely should not be trying to change the church's scripturally based theological positions on marriage, sexuality and gender, to justify our own personal unbiblical beliefs, practices and life styles.**
- 2. Really understand that changing the rules doesn't change the sin.**
- 3. Hold fast to and defend bible truth at all times.**
- 4. Not be afraid to be counted as a follower of Christ.**

With this in mind I note with great interest these extracts from 'Christian Concern' in response to recent comments made by some of the CofE bishops actively promoting same sex 'marriage':-

'The statements by Stephen Croft and other revisionist bishops that approve of same-sex relations demonstrate the need for radical change in the Church of England – in precisely the opposite direction.

The Church's official position matches the clear teaching of scripture by saying that sex belongs within one man, one woman marriage.

Nevertheless, bishops and clergy have been allowed to sow endless doubt about what Christians have recognised is God's pattern for sexuality.

*Their theological arguments have been debunked time after time by genuine scholars; **Jesus himself clearly upheld the sexual ethics of the Old Testament** while demonstrating grace and offering forgiveness to all who sought it.*

For many years it has been clear that the driving force behind these revisionists is the not study of scripture, nor listening to the Holy Spirit but a relentless desire to mirror society's values.

***This is no less than apostasy.** The apostolic gospel calls all people, everywhere, to repent – to turn away from their sins and towards Christ. Such a radical change to the nature of repentance, to the doctrine of marriage, alters the gospel itself.*

The Church of England's drift towards approving same-sex relations has been disastrous for Christians across the country....

This is the time for true Christian leaders to stand and to make it abundantly clear that the only direction for change in the Church of England is a return to the clear teaching of God.

These bishops swore that they believed "the doctrine of the Christian faith as the Church of England has received it" and promised to "expound and teach it."

Core to the received doctrine of the Church is the doctrine of marriage.

*Since these **bishops are now in open violation of their ordination oaths** they ought to be disciplined and removed from ministry....*

The Archbishops now need to make clear that core teaching of the church on marriage and sexual morality is not up for debate or change.

Bishops cannot be allowed to openly pronounce rank heresy.

Any move by the Church of England to revise the doctrine of marriage will cause open rupture in the Anglican Communion, not only in the UK but all over the world.

Faithful bishops the world over now need to stand up and defend the historic and Biblical doctrine of marriage as between one woman and one man for life.

Full article:- [Bishops openly repudiate the teaching of the Church of England - Christian Concern](#)

I commend Christian Concern's response to be considered by all Christians and that they respond accordingly.

The facts are that heterosexual marriage are still the preferred choice of the greater majority of people, they last significantly longer than same sex 'marriages', and that children achieve significantly higher results educationally and are more emotionally stable. (See NOS statistics.)

As a final and almost inconsequential comment, I offer this last thought.

Under the constitution, the King carries the title of 'Defender of the Faith'.

Whilst his personal preference is to be 'defender of faiths', he is constitutionally committed to his responsibilities as head of the Church of England and must act accordingly – a poisoned chalice if ever there was one! I will be very interested to see how he responds to this 'sexual crisis' within the church he officially heads.

Whether he likes it or not, he is now part of the problem and must act accordingly.

If he cannot then perhaps he should relinquish this part of his constitutional duties and separate church from state rather trying to 'defend the indefensible', what many are now apparently beginning to see as a morally corrupted and spiritually bankrupt organisation that has less and less to do with genuine faith.

However, it isn't just the King's problem. If the Church of England's own membership fails speak out and to uphold biblical and spiritual truths, then none of this matters.

It's actually every Christians problem..... inaction is not an option.

The bible is not negotiable and we can't just pick the bits we like. It comes as a package. Some parts will always be easier to accept than others, but for the more difficult parts we just have to bite the bullet and console ourselves that God knows what He is doing and there is purpose and reason, even if we can't see it.

The alternative would not be a good place to go.

As history has all too often demonstrated, any church or Christian community that turns its back on the bible as the authoritative, infinite, eternal and absolute Word of God will inevitably and simply die.

To turn your back against God and His Word is to turn your back against life itself.

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*** Beware of the Leaven of the Pharisees**

Luke 12 *he (Jesus) began to say to his disciples first, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. ² Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. ³ Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops.*

Matthew 15¹⁴ *Leave them; they are blind guides. If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.'*

Not everyone who wears a dog collar or is a bishop walks with God. The danger is that if you do not test their words, they will convince you to sin as they sin because they proclaim evil as God's will. God knows who they are!

**** Matthew 12 v ²⁵** But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand.

Pastoral responsibilities of Anglican Priests:

I include the following official guidance excerpts regarding the spiritual and pastoral responsibilities of Church of Anglican priests with regard to those in their pastoral care.

It's a good document but it's a pity that many Anglican priests don't take the trouble to read and/or implement its contents on a daily basis.

I offer the following extracts as good foundation for our own ministry.

Full document click link [Guidelines2 \(churchofengland.org\)](https://www.churchofengland.org/guidelines2)

Guided by the Spirit, they are to discern and foster the gifts of all God's people, that the whole Church may be built up in unity and faith.

6.1 The clergy are called to servant ministry and leadership within the Church and the wider community.

6.2 They should develop this gift of leadership within their own ministry through prayer and training, being aware of their own natural leadership style.

6.3 The clergy should recognize and affirm lay ministry that already exists and encourage new ministries, both lay and ordained. They should be ready to assist others in discerning and fulfilling their vocation.

They should actively prompt and encourage new vocations in the Church and in the world.

*6.4 At times as we seek to hear God's call for the Church in this generation, the clergy will hold different views. However, all debate should be had in a spirit of respect and love, and **ministers should always be willing to work with each other, whatever views are held** on current topics of debate.*

6.5 The clergy should promote good ecumenical relationships and encourage respect for all people of good will.

9.3 Reconciliation lies at the heart of the gospel: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2 Corinthians 5.19). The clergy should promote reconciliation in the Church and in the world wherever there are divisions, including those which exist between people of different faiths.

Trust 12

12.2 The clergy are placed in a position of power and authority over others, in pastoral relationships, with lay colleagues, and sometimes with other ministers.

In all forms of ministry, in leadership, teaching, preaching and presiding at worship, the clergy should resist all temptation to exercise power inappropriately.

This power needs to be used to sustain others and harness their strengths, and not to abuse, bully, manipulate or denigrate.

12.3 Pastoral care should never seek to remove the autonomy given to the individual. In pastoral situations the other party should be allowed the freedom to make decisions that may be mistaken....

(That is unless....) *children or vulnerable adults are thereby placed at risk in which case the advice of the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser (or in the case of OSJ, the Executive Bishop) must be sought.*

14.5 Power is exercised and experienced in many ways, and the clergy should beware of the potential of using their position to bully others.

Given the number of incidents where OSJ has experienced individual CofE priests exceeding their authority and stepping outside of their own guidelines and canon, I hope that they will come to realise that the ministry of OSJ or other Christian groups, is not something to be feared and that OSJ clergy can be treated as fellow workers in the ultimate harvest of souls for Christ.

We reach out to the dispossessed, lost and rejected, those who do no longer attend church, have access to a church, have lost contact with their church or have never been members of a church, the very people the CofE has missed, overlooked or turned their backs on.

We are also 'an Order' rather than 'a church'. Our intention is not to get converts or create yet another 'church' but to direct people to where they can best be served spiritually in their own local communities once we have met their immediate needs.

What is there to fear, especially when we try to get these people the long term support and encouragement they need, and hopefully from their local churches?

Enough is enough.

We will be taking direct action as required. On this occasion we will not be 'turning the other cheek' because there is too much at stake.

Division in the body will not serve Christ well, and we should not condone such by our silence.

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In the interests of a more balanced discussion:

There is a lot of talk about women having access to the Christian Priesthood but one rarely hears views in favour of keeping the 2000 year old tradition of the church.

It appears that to offer any kind of argument for this position immediately results in cries of 'misogyny', and suddenly has every feminist marching to beat down the doors and have such tradition and proponents 'cancelled'.

There are other views out there that need considering and shouldn't be ignored. For those who are interested I offer three simple and accessible articles which explain some of the reasoning behind 'a male only' priesthood.

Why Priests Are Men: a Roman Catholic viewpoint

Author: JP Nunez. Source: Catholic Stand

Article not indicated as being copyright at the time of resourcing.

It's very common in our culture today for people to think that much of what we Catholics believe is behind the times and out of touch with the modern world. Most often, these sorts of accusations are levelled against the Church's moral teachings (particularly in the area of sexuality), but that is not always the case. For example, most people see no reason why the priesthood should be reserved to men; they think that the Church's refusal to ordain women is nothing more than a relic of the Dark Ages or a remnant of a patriarchal and superstitious culture that has no place in the twenty-first century. However, I would like to suggest that there is actually a good reason why women can't be priests. Contrary to popular belief, there is, in fact, a real logic behind reserving the priesthood to men.

The Male Apostles

The most common explanation for this practice is that the Apostles, the first priests, were all men. Jesus could have very easily chosen female Apostles if he had wanted to, so it seems clear that he wanted the priesthood to be reserved for men. As a result, since the Church has no authority to go against the wishes of Jesus Christ, she also has no authority to ordain women.

While this is a good argument, it's not exactly what I am going for here. It's an argument from authority, so it simply tells us that women cannot be priests without explaining why this is so. However, I want something deeper; I want to give the inner logic of the teaching. Simply put, I want to find what it is about the priesthood that makes it appropriate for men rather than women.

More Than a Function

To understand why only men should be priests, we first need to understand that a priest's role is not simply functional. In other words, priests don't simply do certain things; they don't simply perform certain functions. Rather, they are also supposed to *be* something: they are sacramental symbols of Jesus Christ himself, able to act in His person (*in persona Christi*). When a priest says the words of consecration over the bread and wine at Mass, he's acting in the person of Jesus saying those very same words; when a priest says the words of absolution in confession, he's acting in the person of Jesus offering God's forgiveness to us.

Consequently, when the Church says that women cannot be priests, she is not saying that men can do certain things better than women. For example, she is not saying that men are better than women at running parishes or giving homilies. Rather, the argument is simply that women cannot be what a priest is supposed to be. Women cannot be sacramental symbols of Jesus the same way that men can.

The Man Jesus

Along these lines, you'll often hear people say that since Jesus is a man, only men can symbolize him. This argument is on the right track, but it needs some nuancing. We need to explain why maleness is essential for symbolizing Jesus but other physical characteristics are not. For example, Jesus was Jewish, so why can non-Jews be priests?

To understand why Jesus' sex is so important, we need to look at the Eucharist.

When a priest celebrates Mass, he doesn't just symbolize Jesus in general. Rather, he symbolizes Jesus precisely in his role in the Eucharist, and in this sacrament, Jesus is present to us as the bridegroom of the Church. In other words, he is present to us as our husband, and if there is one thing that only men can symbolize, it is a husband.

This may seem like a strange idea, so we need to unpack it a bit. In the Old Testament, God is often said to be the bridegroom of his people Israel. For example, the prophet Isaiah tells us:

“For your Maker is your husband,
the Lord of hosts is his name;
and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer,
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the God of the whole earth he is called.
For the Lord has called you
like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit,
like a wife of youth when she is cast off,
says your God.” (Isaiah 54:5-6)

Our Bridegroom

Similarly, when we get to the New Testament, we see the same kind of imagery. For example, St. Paul tells husbands to “love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Ephesians 5:25), and then he explicitly tells us that Jesus and the Church have a marital relationship (Ephesians 5:31-32). In fact, St. Paul in this passage goes beyond anything the Old Testament says about God's love for his people.

He isn't simply saying that Jesus' love for the Church is like marriage; he is actually saying that Jesus' love for us is the model that marriage is based on. Just as he tells us earlier in the letter that human fatherhood is based on God the Father (Ephesians 3:14-15), so too is he now telling us that marriage is based on Jesus' relationship with the Church.

When he says that Jesus and the Church have a marital relationship (Ephesians 5:31-32), he quotes Genesis 2:24, a verse from the story of Adam and Eve that explains that the deep compatibility between Adam and Eve, between man and woman, is the reason for marriage. However, unexpectedly, St. Paul tells us that this verse is actually "in reference to Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:32). While it obviously refers to human marriage, it also has a deeper, spiritual meaning: it's about the loving union of Jesus and his Church. In other words, that union is the deeper, primary reality, and marriage is an image of it. That's why he presents Jesus as a model of how husbands should treat their wives. Marriage is a living representation of the love between Jesus and the Church, so husbands should love their wives just as Jesus loves the Church.

Jesus' Marital Act

Once we understand that Jesus is our bridegroom, we then need to look at why the Mass in particular is marital. Actually, we already saw this in our previous section. St. Paul told husbands to love their wives "as Christ...gave himself up for" the Church, a clear reference to his death on the cross. In other words, by dying for our sins, Jesus gave us the perfect example of how husbands should love their wives (and, of course, vice versa), so his death was in fact a marital act.

Now, the Mass is a re-presentation of Calvary, a memorial of the cross; it makes Jesus' death present to us here and now and enables us to receive its' saving benefits. Consequently, since the cross is marital, so is the Mass.

In fact, we can even take this imagery one step further. At Mass, we receive the Eucharist and unite ourselves physically to Jesus, just like a man and a woman do in the marital embrace. The role of the Eucharist in our spiritual lives is similar to the role of conjugal relations in the life of a married couple: they both create a real physical bond. As a result, the Mass is in fact very marital. It's one of the times in the life of the Church when Jesus' role as our bridegroom comes most to the forefront.

Sacramental Symbolism

From all this, it's clear that women can't symbolize Jesus during Mass the way men can. Only men can symbolize his marital relationship with the Church; only men can represent Jesus as our bridegroom. However, this may seem rather abstract. While the argument makes sense from a purely logical point of view, it may not appear all that important. Why does it matter that priests symbolize Jesus specifically in his role as our bridegroom?

In a nutshell, it matters because symbolism is an essential element of the sacraments. They are not simply opportunities to receive grace; rather, they're also opportunities to experience God in a physical way. We need to experience God in a way that is suited to our nature, and since we're physical creatures, we have to experience him physically. The symbolism of the sacraments is a key part of this physicality. It allows us to experience God through our sense of sight, so it's very important that the symbolism of the sacraments not be obscured.

More specifically, the symbolism of the male priesthood is important because the marital analogy is an essential element of our faith. Whenever we see a priest consecrating the Eucharist, we should be reminded that Jesus loves us so much that the best analogy for his love in the human world is marriage.

Nothing else captures the closeness and intimacy that he wants with us, so it's important that we be reminded of it again and again. The priesthood is an important way that Jesus teaches us about his love for us, so it's important that priests reflect that love properly.

The Other Sacraments

When we think about it this way, we can see that the symbolism of the male-only priesthood actually extends to the other sacraments as well. While the marital nature of our relationship with Jesus may not come to the forefront in those other sacraments the way it does in the Eucharist, it never goes away entirely. If he is our bridegroom in the Eucharist, then he's our bridegroom all the time. Just like a husband and wife do not stop being married when they do things that aren't specifically marital (like going grocery shopping or hanging out with friends), so too does Jesus remain our bridegroom even after Mass is over. He's always our bridegroom, so when priests symbolize him in other sacraments, like confession and anointing of the sick, they are also symbolizing him as our bridegroom, even if that aspect of our relationship with him is not front and centre in those sacraments.

Conclusion

From all this, we can see that reserving the priesthood to men is not at all a relic of the Dark Ages or a remnant of a patriarchal and superstitious culture.

There's actually some pretty solid reasoning behind it. Priests symbolize Jesus precisely in his role as the bridegroom of the Church, and only men can do that. As a result, even though women can run parishes and give homilies just as well as men, the one thing they cannot do, the role of Jesus that they cannot symbolize makes all the difference.

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Why Catholic Priests Must Be Men: source National Catholic Register. Author unknown.

“Only a baptized man (vir) validly receives sacred ordination.” (CCC 1577)

The Catholic Church is one of the last major holdouts among Christians to insist that their clergy be exclusively men. This has been a source of much questioning and, at times, great controversy even among practicing Catholics.

The argument usually focuses on Jesus having picked only men to be his Apostles, in spite of the fact that he clearly felt free to defy contemporary customs in a whole range of other areas of his ministry.

However, at a conference several years ago, something I heard on the subject of male priests really struck a chord with me. And, it convinced me that not only is this issue settled doctrine (per Pope St. John Paul II), but the deep, theological and physiological meaning behind this teaching is badly needed in our culture today.

What many might find odd, at first, is how closely this issue ties in with marriage. (Stay with me on this.) Catholics take John 6 literally:-

I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world.' Then the Jews started arguing among themselves, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?

(And the murmuring continues today among Christians and non-Christians, alike.)

After hearing it, many of his followers said, 'This is intolerable language. How could anyone accept it? Jesus was aware that his followers were complaining about it and said, 'Does this disturb you?

We know this was intended to be literal, because even when most were recoiling at this statement, Jesus didn't back off. He doubled down, reiterating the point four times.

So, Jesus is the giver of life. We receive life from him. He is the “bridegroom” and we are the “bride of Christ – the Church” (in a collective sense). When we receive Jesus – in the flesh – in the Eucharist at Mass, “the two become one flesh” in a literal sense. What a beautiful thing!

In marriage, something very similar happens. The bridegroom/husband gives of himself to his bride. He gives. She is made to receive that gift. The two become one flesh and new life comes from that act – life-giving to the relationship and sometimes in the form of a new image of God being created. Marriage and the Eucharist are woven together in meaning. Both sacraments tell us a great deal about each other.

So, if the Eucharist is what we are doing to reflect Jesus' words, "Do this in memory of Me," then how the "this" is carried out is critical. From these words of Christ at the altar, the "gift of life" is prepared and presented to the bride.

Therefore, the priest – the only one who can perform this action – must be male. He (in the person of Christ) gives life to the faithful – to the bride. And we receive that gift. (And if your church doesn't take John 6 literally, it really doesn't matter what sex your clergy is, and it makes marriage much more malleable to suit whatever definition pleases you.)

This unique role for a select few men offers a profound lesson for our society today. Men have a vital role in the Church and in marriage. There are some things only men have the ability to do. Women, also, play a vital role in the Church and in marriage. They receive the seed of life and carry it. They are (very literally) "tabernacles." It is for this reason a man "genuflects" when proposing to his bride to be. He is honouring this reality by bowing to her and offering deference to her womb — the carrier of images of God — of Life.

While our society continues to wallow in confusion about the sexes, about the meaning of human sexuality, and insisting that men and women aren't really different, thank God Almighty that He has preserved this incredible meaning within His Church. May it be a light to the world and may we appreciate it all the more in how we view the reality of marriage and in the gift of the Eucharist.

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So why do we need 'priests' at all since their role seems so controversial?

Are Priests Necessary? An Anglican view

Author : [Chris Findley](#), December 23rd, 2019. Article not noted as copyright.

The order of paragraphs has been edited for the purposes of this newsletter.

Many people coming into the Anglican tradition from other traditions have questions. Quite often, these questions centre on the sacramental nature of the Church.

This pattern makes sense. After all, the Anglican Church emphasizes sacraments more than some other branches of the Christian Church. All churches have preachers of the Word. Not all have a developed sacramental theology nor a formal liturgical structure.

Even among practicing Anglicans, sometimes we take for granted our practices without reflection or thought, so it is good for us to consider these fundamental questions from time to time.

“Why are Priests necessary?”

The short answer is because the charge of conducting the sacraments is an *apostolic* charge for the care of the Church.

The care of each local church is given to ordained Priests to ensure fidelity both in teaching (Word) and in conduct of the rites (ceremonies/services) of the Church (sacraments) for the upbuilding of the Body of Christ.

If we look at the Ordinal in the BCP 2019, we can see what is asked of our Bishops and Priests. In the concluding Collect for the Litany of Ordinations, the Archbishop prays,

“Give your grace to all Bishops, the pastors of your Church, that they may diligently preach your Word, duly administer your Sacraments, and wisely provide godly discipline...” (p. 500).

In the Priestly Examination, we read,

“Will you then give your faithful diligence always so to minister the doctrine, sacraments, and discipline of Christ, as the Lord has commanded and as this Church has received them, according to the Commandments of God, so that you may teach the people committed to your charge with all diligence to keep and observe them?” (p. 490).

So, as Anglicans, we understand these sacraments to have their source in the commandments of God, not in the traditions of men. And we understand that God has entrusted them to the Church, to our Bishops, and in turn to our Priests

Why are Priests necessary for Holy Communion?

To consider this question, we need to briefly remind ourselves what is happening at the Holy Eucharist.

According to [the Book of Common Prayer 2019](#) [BCP 2019], “*The Holy Eucharist is a chief means of grace for sustained and nurtured life in Christ*” (p. 7). The key in that sentence is “means of grace.”

Of course, the next question is, “How?” For that, [the ACNA Catechism, To Be a Christian](#), is helpful.

Regarding Holy Communion, we say that:

“As my body is nourished by the bread and wine, my soul is strengthened by the Body and Blood of Christ. I receive God’s forgiveness, and I am renewed in the love and unity of the Body concerning sacraments 59 of Christ, the Church.” (To Be A Christian, Q134).

The point here is that the sacrament is efficacious; it is *doing* something. It has a very real spiritual effect on us.

So Holy Communion is more than a symbol. It is a means of grace.

But the Church’s reverence toward this sacrament is not only based in its convictions about its *effect*, but also its convictions about its *source*. Holy Communion and Baptism are considered Dominical sacraments (from the Latin “Dominus,” meaning “Lord”), because they were both directly commissioned by Jesus himself.

In the case of Communion, Jesus gives the charge on the night of his betrayal in the upper room ([Matthew 26:26-29](#), [Mark 14:22-25](#), [Luke 22:14-23](#)).

But to whom did Jesus give this commandment? He was not speaking to the crowds or even to the 72.

He gave the commission specifically to the apostles, who were charged with carrying on this commandment for the benefit of the community of faith that would grow up around them.

It is also interesting that in [1 Corinthians 11](#), the source of much of our Eucharistic liturgy, St. Paul speaks authoritatively as an apostle. He gives instructions and directions on the practice of Holy Communion. This again speaks of apostolic oversight on the sacraments to be faithfully and diligently administered for the care of souls within the Church.

Why is a liturgy/ceremony necessary for Holy Communion?

The question regarding liturgical form is a bit more direct. The short answer is that we have a *Book of Common Prayer* for a reason. Words matter—not in a magical sense, but in a theological sense. What we pray as Anglicans demonstrates what we believe.

What we pray in the service of Holy Communion, the principal worship service of our Church, is extremely important and not left to chance at the whim of the priest.

The liturgical formularies (prescribed forms) in the Book of Common Prayer are designed to help insulate us from cultural fads and, in the extreme, from heresies.

We have the words of institution both from the Gospels and from [1 Corinthians 11](#). We have the prayers of the early Church, as well as the work of the English Reformers. A common gospel, with common prayer, unites us in a common faith for the common good.

The words of institution in the Eucharistic service are specifically designed around an ancient pattern of remembrance and invocation that, coupled with the priestly vocation, ensure the fulfilment of the Church's twofold criteria found in Article XIX of the 39 Articles. There, the "visible Church of Christ" is defined as "a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered" (p. 779).

Conclusion

So, priests and a proper liturgical rite are both necessary for a valid celebration of Holy Communion. These requirements are based on the specific biblical and historic responsibilities given to ordained clergy, following the apostolic pattern and the need to rightly administer the sacraments for the benefit and safeguarding of the people of God.

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On the priesthood.

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Every Christian is called to some form of ministry and has been entrusted with a particular and unique set of gifts talents and skills for building up the Christian community. They are held in stewardship and are not owned.

Those called to be priests have the following responsibilities in addition to those shared by all Christians:

1. to serve by example and be the hands, eyes, ears, voice and love of God to all around them
2. to maintain the integrity of their faith through prayer, bible study, fellowship and open active ministry
3. to uphold and protect the integrity of Holy Scripture as a whole, and not just cherry pick the parts that suit their own lifestyle
4. to freely make available to all those who show due respect and understanding (however limited) appropriate services and sacraments as are required and are scripturally authorised and necessary
5. to be faithful and willing in their duties and guided by the Holy Spirit and by Holy Writ
6. to exercise exemplar servant leadership skills – they must practice what they preach at all times
7. and not abuse their position of trust and/or supposed authority
8. they must remember their calling is to love all people and bring them into the presence of God regardless of how society may judge them – we are all God's children and His creation

9. to make ministry possible through the recognition of gifts, talents and skills in others, and to support and encourage the active stewardship of those gifts, talents and skills so that the entire Christian community may grow love and stature

10. and lastly to remember their calling is one of humility in the service of God and His people. It should never be an excuse to seek additional position or authority over others, or claim some sort of superiority over those in their parochial charge - in God's eyes, all are held in the same love and grace.

Serving as a priest is both a privilege and responsibility, and those who abuse this privilege and responsibility will be called to account.

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Advent:

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Today's church members are sometimes perplexed as to why the Gospel reading for the First Sunday of Advent focuses on the second coming.

The priest can thus explain that beginning the liturgical season of Advent with the second coming reminds us that the work of the first advent (coming) of Jesus is not complete. The risen Jesus instructs (and empowers) the church to continue its witness until the second coming (Matthew 28:16-20).

Matthew has an end-time (apocalyptic) orientation, believing that history is divided into two ages — a present, evil age that God would soon replace with a new age (often called the realm of God or the realm of heaven).

The old age is marked by the presence of Satan and the demons, and by idolatry, sin, injustice, exploitation, sickness, enmity between nature and humankind, violence, and death.

The new age will be characterised by the complete rule of God and the angels, and by authentic worship, forgiveness, mutual support, health, blessing between nature and humankind, and eternal life.

For Matthew, God is acting through Jesus Christ to effect the change. The birth, life, and resurrection are the first phase of the transformation, with the complete manifestation arriving with the second coming. Meanwhile, Matthew's community lives in a conflict zone between the ages. God calls the Matthean community to follow the instruction and model of the Matthean Jesus.

Some scholars affirm that many in Matthew's congregation were losing confidence in the coming of the Realm. The apocalypse was delayed. Their witness was fading. Matthew wrote to encourage them to continue.

Matthew 24:1-31 employs stock apocalyptic language to say, "These signs indicate that you are living in the final chapters of history." Matthew 24:32-44 underscores, "You cannot know the exact time of the final apocalypse, so you need to witness with intensity." Matthew 25:1-46 then tells four interlocking parables to point the community toward Realm-like qualities of life necessary in the great transition. According to Matthew 24:36, neither the angels nor even Jesus can know the precise time the apocalypse will occur. Only God knows.

Matthew 24:37-44 reinforces the idea that the community must "be ready." In this context, to "be ready" is to continue to do what Jesus taught in the Gospel of Matthew. The community is to prepare for the final advent less by doing special things and more by living and witnessing as Jesus instructed. The liturgical season of Advent is an annual reminder of the importance of faithfully doing what Jesus said.

Matthew's Gospel uses four examples to underscore the fact that the community cannot know when the cataclysmic event will occur. The first is from the days of Noah (Matthew 24:37-40). Before the flood, people carried on with their daily lives — eating, drinking, marrying. But they knew nothing about future events until, suddenly, “the flood came and swept them all away.” The listener would remember that the story of Noah in Genesis 6-8 calls attention to the unfaithful lives of many in Noah's generation, a situation similar to that of Matthew's own generation. But the emphasis on the reference to Noah in Matthew is on the sudden coming of the flood.

The second example is two people in a field, perhaps working. Suddenly one is taken (Matthew 24:40). The third example is two women grinding meal together. One is taken. (Matthew 24:41). Where are the field worker and grinding woman taken?

These examples could prompt many preachers to address a popular misinterpretation. Premillennialism (also known as Darbyism or Dispensationalism and associated with the “Left Behind” series) takes these texts to refer to “the rapture,” when believers are airlifted out of the world while the rest of humankind suffers the tribulation.

However, neither Matthew in particular nor biblical eschatologies generally contain the detailed time-line scenarios of premillennialism. To the contrary, Matthew encourages the congregation to remain faithful in witness even in the midst of conflict until the second coming (Matthew 24:1-28). Perhaps one way to prepare in Advent is to leave behind “Left Behind.”

The fourth example is a homeowner who did not know when and where a thief was coming. Had the householder possessed such information, the householder would have stayed awake and prevented the break-in (Matthew 24:43). The congregation, then, should stay awake.

From Matthew's perspective if people do not know when the second coming will occur, they cannot wait until the time is near in order to prepare for it. Matthew wants the congregation to be prepared through witnessing at all times (Matthew 24:42, 44).

Before the preacher moves from the exegesis to the sermon, the preacher needs to make an important theological determination: How do the congregation and preacher relate theologically to the apocalypticism of this passage (and of Matthew more broadly)? I see three main options (recognising that there can be many nuances).

1. Some preachers (and listeners) believe we are living in the last days. These ministers can use the imminence of the second coming as an immediate reason to prepare in Advent.

2. Many congregational members believe a final manifestation of the Realm is ahead, though they are ambivalent as to when. It might be soon, or it might not be. The preacher who addresses this group encounters an audience much like Matthew's, and will do well to encourage listeners to stay alert in spite of the delay.

3. Still other congregational members take apocalyptic language as figurative and as tied to a first-century world view that is no longer their own. They do not anticipate a singular event that will instantly transform the world. Instead, they believe God is constantly present, luring the world toward Realm qualities. The preacher can invite these listeners to participate with God in bringing about such realm-like life.

In each case, a priest can help believers identify interpretive possibilities and identify what they gain and lose with each option, while pointing out that Jesus in all options calls the disciples, and empowers them, to witness faithfully to God's ultimate purposes of love, peace, joy, and abundance.

Coming to such clarity is a powerful way to prepare through Advent. AMEN

PRAYERS:

May God bless you all with rivers of His holy love & peace this Christmas and throughout the coming year, in Jesus name, Amen.

Dear Heavenly Father, it's Advent, a season of anticipation and celebration, a time to reflect on every good thing you've already done for us in Jesus, and the glorious things yet to be realised.

Lord, You've made promises you alone can keep; you give peace that can be found nowhere else.

We praise you; we bless you; we worship you. As Advent progresses, fill us to overflowing with gratitude, humility and joy.

And grant us joy-filled intrigue, like that felt by the angels. Your heavenly servants were overwhelmed as they pondered your unfolding story of redemption and restoration, for men and creation. We are the people the prophets were speaking about. We are the people angels envied. Hallelujah, many times over!

Lord in your mercy prepare us for you're coming, in those in need. On this day we pray for the homeless, the refugees the expelled and forgotten people everywhere and we remember especially today all those involved in the caring professions as they seek to make a difference for the men and women they serve.

May they know that your guiding hand is with them in their daily work and tireless endeavours.

We ask you to help us all to use our gifts and our talents to the greater good of all, challenge us to drive away complacency and apathy when we know in our hearts that we can do more to help and sustain those in need.

We pray for others for whom this day will seem long and hard, for those in hospital or ill at home, those struggling with despair or depression, those seeking work, and for those for whom this day will be their last.

Comfort and heal all who suffer, give them courage and hope in their troubles, and bring them the joy of your salvation.

Jesus Christ is the light of the world a light which no darkness can quench we remember before God those who have already gone before us and we light a candle to symbolise the light of Christ which eternally shines and brings hope.

You turn our darkness into light in your light shall we see light

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ.

May the grace and the peace of Christ give us the eyes of faith to reach out more urgently to those in need around us; and may the Blessing of God the Father, God the Son ~~✠~~ and God the Holy Spirit, be with us as we follow Him. Amen

THE MEANING OF ADVENT.

For the longest time I figured Advent meant “to wait.” Waiting for Christmas to happen, waiting (as a youngster) for Santa Claus, waiting for the Christmas tree to go up, waiting for all those presents I hoped to get (and hoping I wasn’t too greedy).

Wrong, was I wrong though. The root of the word Advent isn’t “to wait,” it’s “to come.” And doesn’t that make more sense, not just from a logistics standpoint but from a spiritual one?

Advent is the celebration of the coming of Christ.

Whether you open windows on an Advent calendar or light candles every evening or look at the Christmas decorations going up around our towns—unspeakably early it seems to me—you’re celebrating the upcoming arrival of a huge event.

Advent officially starts the Sunday after St. Andrew’s Day or, better put, the first of the four Sundays before Christmas (not counting Christmas). That puts it Sunday, November 27, this year, and if that seems early, it’s because Christmas is on a Sunday this year, giving us more days to pray, look at Scripture, sing, set up our creche, all those things you do to honour the season.

Tis the season, indeed, to be jolly.

Why?

Because we’re looking at not just one coming, one that’s already happened, but another that we wait for with great Anticipation and joy, the Second Coming.

God stepped down and came to the earth in the form of Jesus, the very Son of God, born to a humble couple from Nazareth. in even humbler circumstances—as the gospel writer Luke showed us—in a stable with a manger for a bed.

We don’t have to wonder if it’s going to happen because we know it happened already from the accounts we’ve read. Like celebrating your birthday—it’s the Lord’s birthday. You know it’s coming, that red-letter day marked in the calendar, and you’re filled with anticipation of its arrival.

As for Christ’s return and the coming of the kingdom of God, there’s no human certainty of exactly when that’s to happen, only gleaning it from the prophecies in Scripture, and what we do here on earth to further that coming. The sharing of God’s love through warmth, kindness, generosity and service.

The very uncertainty of exactly “when” strikes me as a gift.

You read Paul's letters and can tell he thought it would happen any moment, and it led to his commitment and devotion and witness. Can we not follow his model?

"O come, o come Emmanuel" we sing at Advent, all our yearning for that good news. And because Christ did come, our yearning is not empty or vain. It bubbles along with the joy of the season. See that star in someone's front yard, shining in the darkness. A reminder of the star that did come, guiding the wise men to the Christ Child.

Christmas is coming. And every decorative reminder out there can speak to our hearts, giving cause for hope and joy.

May we all look forward too, and enjoy this coming Season of Christmas, that we give much love and blessings to all we meet, our families our friends and strangers, not forgetting to accept the love and blessings afforded to us by all others. Let us greet each other with a warm smile, as we offer our greetings to all. God Bless you all. Amen

+David