

FAITH & CULTURE SERIES

ARCHDIOCESE OF SAINT PAUL AND MINNEAPOLIS

The Church's Teaching on the Dignity of Women Professor Helen Alvaré

1. Introduction

- a. Why two sexes
- b. *"The Bible convinces us of the fact that one can have no adequate hermeneutic of man, or of what is 'human,' without appropriate reference to what is 'feminine.'" (Mulieris Dignitatem 22)*

2. Leading themes

- a. Innovation alongside historical constraint: A Church still "on the way"
- b. Reason but remaining mystery
- c. Empirics affirm the faith

3. Outline

- a. Genesis creation accounts
- b. The New Testament and women
- c. Women in the early and developing Church
- d. Twentieth and twenty-first century leading Church documents and themes
- e. Contemporary challenges to the narrative of Catholic support for women
- f. Brief conclusion

4. Genesis creation accounts

- a. Original equality and unity and the fall
 - Oppression of women as manifestation of original sin
- b. Responses to the usual charges against the creation stories

5. The New Testament and women

- a. Jesus' friendships with women
- b. Jesus' defense of women
- c. Jesus' discussion of crucial divine truths with women
- d. Jesus' highlighting women's exemplary faith
- e. Consideration of the usual charges against St. Paul

6. Women in the early and developing Church

- a. Christian innovations regarding women mixed with cultural artifacts
 - From derivative status to equal child of God

- Mutuality in marriage
- Martyrs and virgins and widows and companions
- b. Significance for growth of Church
 - Attraction to sex, marriage, parenting teachings
 - Widowhood
 - Female births and Church growth
 - Women's conversions
- c. Outstanding figures – leadership, intellect, religious devotions, social services
 - The particular example of U.S. Catholic Sisters

7. Twentieth and twenty-first century leading Church documents and themes

- a. Cultural conditions spurring reflection
- b. Leading theological themes
 - Feminist movement necessary, though incomplete
 - Apology to women
 - Particular gifts and the world's need for them
 - Differences oriented to unity
 - Stop penalizing motherhood; rather exhorting social support for women both in the family and in the world
 - Support for women's leadership in the Church

8. Contemporary challenges to the narrative of Catholic support for women

- a. Male God?
- b. All male priesthood and importance of the laity
- c. Problematized complementarity/problematized interdependence
- d. Contraception and abortion

9. Brief conclusion

- a. Differences without ranking, a difficult concept for the world
- b. The importance of our world today grasping this
- c. The Church can help
