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Women in Ministry — Interesting Editorial Slant

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Regularly, *The Los Angeles Times* makes for interesting reading. In terms of political slant, the paper has moved to the left of *The New York Times*, and it now occupies a major position among the nation's most influential newspapers. Even as paid circulation has dropped significantly since the 1990s, the editorial slant to the left is a constant.

Interestingly, the paper's editors decided to take on the issue of women in ministry in Sunday's edition. The editorial, "[Women and Religion](#)," was introduced with this tag under the headline: "Gains among women in the clergy are under attack in both Catholic and Protestant churches."

Gains under attack? Here is how the editors introduced their essay:

According to the New Testament, women were among the earliest followers of Jesus and played an important role in early Christian communities. Even today, the "man in the pew" is likely to be a woman. But women in many Christian denominations continue to complain that they have been unable to break through what is sometimes called the stained-glass ceiling. Obviously, theology plays a part in this phenomenon, but so does the conviction — found among believers and nonbelievers alike — that this is a man's world.

This is fascinating, to say the least. The editors of *The Los Angeles Times* have been reading the New Testament? They are certainly right in their statement that women have been central to the Christian movement from the very beginning of the Church. But the editors then offer a sympathetic lament to those women who complain of a "stained-glass ceiling." They then concede that "theology plays a part in this phenomenon," but go on to insist that patriarchy and discrimination against women also plays a part.

The editorial then shifts to look at recent developments in the Roman Catholic church, including warnings from the Vatican and the local Cardinal, Los Angeles Archbishop Roger M. Mahoney. In the first case, the threatened excommunication of a priest for participating in the "unauthorized ordination" of a woman is cited as a hardening of the Vatican's position. This hardly seems to be the case. Has the Vatican *ever* looked lightly at "unauthorized ordinations?"

The editors do seem to understand that the Roman Catholic restriction of the priestly office to men is based on tradition and the representational and sacerdotal nature of the priestly office. "It's tempting to think that women face barriers only in the Roman Catholic Church and others that limit the priesthood to men," the editors explain. "But even in churches that do ordain women, equality between the sexes has been elusive."

Indeed, the pulpits of liberal Protestantism are still generally occupied by men. The editors cite a study that indicates that 93.7 percent of "solo pastors" are men. This is all the more shocking given the fact that women students now outnumber men in liberal seminaries. It does seem that the editors have a point here. These churches and denominations claim to have no theological problem with women serving as pastors. But, in reality, few congregations actually make the choice to call a woman as pastor. Why? They alone can tell us.

Finally, the editors turn to more conservative Protestant churches and denominations. As the editors acknowledge, the



conviction that the role of pastor and the teaching office is limited to men is rooted in a biblical argument:

In the Roman Catholic Church, tradition is cited as the grounds for not ordaining women. In Protestant churches, resistance to female pastors is likelier to be grounded in biblical passages such as 1 Timothy 2:12: "And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence."

They then conclude:

In either case, the arguments that keep women from full participation are attributed to a higher authority. So why do they sound so much like the complaints about assertive women that long have issued from the mouths of men?

Well, that's an interesting question — but a strange question to be raised by the editors of *The Los Angeles Times*. The way they pose the question comes down to this: They imply that the biblical arguments put forth by conservative Protestants are just disguised forms of simple discrimination. How would they know this?

Well, they might believe that the Bible is just a human book, and thus fully distorted by cultural prejudices. Or, they might believe that the Bible's statements on the question simply lack authority. The plain fact is that we cannot read the minds of these editors — nor can they read the minds of those who, on biblical authority, believe that the office of pastor is restricted to men.

The difference here seems to be that the editors believe that they *can* read our hearts and minds. This is editorial audacity of a rather remarkable sort. In any event, this editorial serves notice that the secular media — with *The Los Angeles Times* in the lead — see this issue as within their editorial purview. We see in this editorial the cultural price of holding the line on this issue. We can see clearly what would be required to gain the commendation of the editorial board of *The Los Angeles Times*. As if we didn't already know.

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