**Moral Discernment**

**Coptic Orthodox Biblical View**

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**Coptic Orthodox Church**

“*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God,*

*and profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*”

(2Ti 3 : 16)

As Christians, the Holy Scripture should be our main reference and source of authority, judgment and decision in all moral aspects if we believe that it is “*profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness”*. The Holy Scripture is sufficient for all moral fields, in it we discover responses to all our inquiries including the contemporary ones we are facing nowadays.

If, as Christians, we believe in the Holy Scripture and that “*prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke [as they were] moved by the Holy Spirit*” (2Pe 1 : 21), then we should follow God commandments even if they were different from the contemporary view. If our discernment is not through the Holy Scripture then we are afraid to be deviating from the correct path.

Following are few examples of topics already resolved in the Holy Scriptures:

**Homosexuality**

In the Holy Scriptures Homosexuality is considered a great sin. God said, “*If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination.* ***They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them***” (Lev 20:13). He also commanded, “*You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination*” (Lev 18:22). According to the Law of Moses the punishment of homosexuality was death, and our Lord Jesus Christ said, “*I did not come to destroy but to fulfill*” (Mat 5 : 17).

Accordingly, God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah obviously demonstrating His wrath particularly against this sin. The story is very clear and well known (cf Gen 19: 1-29).

In the New Testament St. Paul said, “*For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge,* ***God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting***” (Rom 1:26-28).

St. Paul also wrote, “*Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers,* ***nor homosexuals, nor sodomites****, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God*” (1Co 6:9,10).

In the first Epistle to Timothy, St. Paul said, “*knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for* ***sodomites****, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is* ***contrary to sound doctrine***” (1Ti 1:9,10).

In the Epistle of Jude it is written, “***as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire***” (Jud 1:7 NKJ).

**Suicide**

God said, “***Do not kill***” (Ex 20: 13). The person who commits suicide kills himself and does not repent. Our Lord Jesus Christ said, “…*unless you repent you will all likewise perish*” (Luk 13 : 3).

God said in the Book of Genesis: "*From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed*" (Gen 9: 5,6). In the Law of Moses it is written that, “***the murderer shall surely be put to death***” (Num 35:16).

It is also written, “*Do not be overly wicked, Nor be foolish: Why should you die before your time*” (Ecc 7:17).

In the New Testament St. John in his first Epistle wrote “…***you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him***” (1 Jo 3:15).

Hence, in spite of the fact that **Judas** the betrayer regretted, and threw back the thirty pieces of silver, he perished (cf. Acts 1: 16-20) because the last act he did was that he killed himself. Suicide is a sin of killing with no repentance, simply because the person himself dies.

One exception is in case of previous mental or psychological breakdown medically certificated by a specialist.

**Abortion**

The embryo from the first minute of its formation is a person, therefore abortion is considered murder. This is not a personal point of view but we shall prove it from the Holy Scriptures.

First of all God blessed Adam and Eve and said, “***Be fruitful and multiply***” (Gen 1:28). “Fruitful” refers to the fruit of the womb, and “Multiply” means increase in number and number means more persons. Here it is clear that there is a relation between the fruit of the womb and the person.

Second point is that after the Angel’s announcement to St. Mary she went to St. Elizabeth “*with haste*” (cf Lk 1: 39) meaning that she was in the first days of her pregnancy. Then it is written that, “*She entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that* ***the babe leaped in her womb****; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, Blessed are you among women, and* ***blessed is the fruit of your womb****! But why is this granted to me, that* ***the mother of my Lord*** *should come to me?*” (Lk 1:40-43).

Now, Elizabeth considered Mary the mother of the Lord during the first days of her pregnancy. Virgin Mary would have never been the Mother of the Lord according to His Divinity but according to His Humanity. Since His Humanity was personalized in the Person of God the Word, therefore His Humanity received a person who is the person of God the Word from the first moment of the formation of the humanity when united to the divinity.

Moreover, John leaped in his mother’s womb, this means he had understanding, feelings and was filled with the Holy Spirit while still in the womb. This proves that he was a person when he was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesized.

Previously, God said to Jeremiah, “*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you;* ***Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations***" (Jer 1:5 NKJ). What did God sanctify in the womb and ordained as prophet? Is it not the person Jeremiah.

Besides, St. Paul wrote, “*when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, by our father Isaac,* ***for not yet being born****…* ***it was said to her, The older shall serve the younger. As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated***" (Rom 9: 10-13). God loved the person Jacob and hated Esau while not yet being born.

Lastly, I shall mention an interesting point. It is written in the Book of Genesis, “*Now the sons of Jacob were twelve… the sons of Rachel were Joseph and Benjamin…* ***These were the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Padan Aram***” (cf Gen 35:22-26). Now Benjamin was born “*in on the way to Ephrath that is, Bethlehem*” (cf Gen 35:19), but was counted as being born in Padan Aram where he was conceived of. This means he was counted as son to Jacob since he was conceived of.

Our conclusion according to the Holy Scriptures is that the embryo at any stage is considered a person, therefore abortion is an act of murder.

**Addiction**

St. Paul wrote: “*All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me,* ***but I will not be brought under the power of any***” (1Co 6:12). Being addict means that one is under the power of drugs or its likeness. According to St. Paul who wrote with the guidance of the Holy Spirit one has to refuse to be under the power of anything. A simple and direct commandment.

St. Paul also wrote, “*For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church*” (Eph 5:29). Addiction is not only hating ones flesh but damaging it, and sometimes even leading to death.

**Apartheid**

St. Paul wrote, *“****here is******neither Jew nor Greek****, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are* ***all one in Christ Jesus****”* (Gal 3 : 28).

St. James wrote, “***My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, [the Lord] of glory, with partiality****.* *For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool,"* ***have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts***” (Jm 2: 1-4).

**Euthanasia**

We do not own ourselves, we have no right to end our lives or anyone else’s life. St. Paul said, “*Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and* ***you are not your own***” (1Co 6:19).

It is only for God to determine the day, hour, minute and even second of one’s death, it is written, “*No one has power over the spirit to retain the spirit, And* ***no one has power in the day of death***” (Ecc 8:8). It is also written, “*Do not be overly wicked, Nor be foolish: Why should you die before your time*” (Ecc 7:17). Moreover, “*To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven: time to be born, And a time to die; A time to plant, And a time to pluck what is planted*” (Ecc 3:1,2).

If God allows a person to experience pain He knows that this is for the salvation of His soul. God is more sympathetic than anyone on earth. It is written, “*God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it*” (1Co 10:13). Also, “*For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*” (2Co 4:17).

**Ordination of Women**

See attached paper by our late Patriarch of blessed memory H.H. Pope Shenouda III.

# The Orthodox View

# on the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood

# Following is the Orthodox view on the ordination of women to the priesthood presented at the Anglican Lambeth Conference in England in 1988 .

A paper was prepared by His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the see of Saint Mark and presented by His Eminence Metropolitan Bishoy during his attendance as an observer and representative of our church.

The Holy Bible is the chief source of reference in our research. Within it we can locate the expression of Divine thought on this issue. “All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

In searching for the truth, we could never depend upon our own wisdom. We must refer to the scriptures, remembering the Lord’s words in the Book of Proverbs, “My son, do not forget my law, but let your heart keep my commands; Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; Do not be wise in your own eyes; Happy *is* the man *who* finds wisdom, and the man *who* gains understanding; Her ways *are* ways of pleasantness, And all her paths *are* peace. She *is* a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy *are* *all* who retain her.” (Prov. 3:1,5,7,13,17,18).

It is not our right to form teachings, legislations or orders in the church, that do not conform to the Holy Bible. Thus Saint Paul the Apostle recommended the Thessalonians saying, “Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.” (2 Thes. 2:15). Then he emphasizes the same concept and exhorted them saying, “But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you **withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us**.” (2 Thes. 3:6).

The second source of reference for our research is the ecclesiastic tradition. Especially the traditions of the early church, considering that it is received directly from its proper sources, (i.e. Jesus Christ and His disciples). If we search through the Holy Bible and the old traditions of the Church we find the following:

**1. Women do not teach in the church:**

In this respect, Saint Paul the Apostle said, “**Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man**, but to be in silence. For **Adam was formed first**, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.”(1 Tim. 2:11-15).

In the teachings of Saint Paul the Apostle on this subject, we recognize that he gave a justification for forbidding such a thing. This justification has nothing to do either with the available social circumstances at that time, or with the circumstances of the church that his disciple Timothy pastored. However, he relied upon aspects concerning men and women since the beginning of the creation, even prior to the banishment of Adam and Eve from paradise due to sin.

If we know that women should not teach in the church, then chiefly it is not permissible to grant her any priestly ranks, since the priest serves the holy sacraments besides teaching and leading the church within the limits of his responsibility.

1. **Man is the head of woman according to the Biblical teachings:**

Saint Paul the Apostle said, “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in everything.” (Eph. 5:22-24).

How could we apply this teaching if priesthood was granted to women? How could she submit to her husband in all aspects if she is the one who leads, pastors and teaches? Sheep should submit to their pastor, students to their teacher, people to their leader and children to their parents.

We also read, “But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman *is* man, and the head of Christ *is* God. For man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man.” (1 Cor. 11:3,8,9).

1. **The Priest represents Christ Himself:**

Through the authority of the Holy Spirit within priesthood, the Lord Jesus Christ granted His disciples authority to forgive sins on earth, to reconcile people with God and to carry the blessings of salvation and redemption to all the people on earth, since they became stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4:1).

The Lord, made them priests according to His example, offering the sacrifice of redemption in the merit of His own sacrifice on the cross, being an arch-priest forever. Saint Paul the Apostle bounded his preaching role of teaching, to his apostolic work of priesthood and sacraments. He expressed this in saying, “the grace given to me by God, that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, **ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit**.”(Rom. 15:15,16)

Saint Paul considered that gentiles who accepted the faith and examined the similitude of death with Christ through baptism and sacraments, as an offering in which the Divine fire burns making it sanctified and accepted before God.

No one can deny that the work of priesthood is an extension to the salvatory work of Christ on earth. Thus the priest represents the Lord Jesus Christ in this salvatory message. It is said that Christ the Lord, is an **archpriest, not an arch-priestess.**

From another point of view, we recognize that it was not haphazardly that Christ the Lord was a man and not a woman. It is written “Jesus of Nazareth, **a Man** attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know” (Acts. 2:22). Any newly born child could be a male or a female, but Jesus Christ was born a male as He is the great archpriest. He has a spiritual fatherhood and authority upon the whole Church, since He is the head of the Church. It is written, “For unto us a Child is born, Unto us **a Son** is given; and **the government will be upon His shoulder**. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, **Everlasting father**, Prince of peace.” (Isa. 9:6,7). Here, the Divine Inspiration clearly declares the presence of a tight relationship between fatherhood, principality, leadership and guidance.

1. **The Ordination of Women to the Priesthood has neither previously occurred in History nor in Tradition:**

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself chose all of His disciples men, not one woman was among them, not even as an exception. He handed the Church to twelve male apostles, and then He sent a missionary of seventy men. He committed the Church to His disciples (Mat. 28, Mark 16) who were all men. Likewise, our fathers the Apostles did not choose any woman to become a priest, rather all their successors were all men without any exception.

1. **Virgin Saint Mary and Priesthood:**

Saint Mary who is the most holy human person, did not pursue any priestly work. If the priesthood was legitimate for women, she is the most deserving than any person throughout the ages, everywhere.

Those who demand priesthood for women should practically contemplate on the example of Saint Mary. She truly gave birth to the Word of God, shared in rearing Him while He is the greatest archpriest and yet she retained her natural role as a mother and absolutely never required priesthood.

1. **The Eucharist and Priesthood:**

We recognize that Christ the Lord handed the officiation of the Eucharist to His male disciples, to whom He spoke on the Paschal table saying, “**do** this in remembrance of Me.” (Luke 22:19).

1. **The Origin of Priesthood:**

Since its beginning, priesthood originated as mentioned in (Exo. 13:1,2) “Consecrate to Me all the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, *both* of man and beast; it is Mine.” What is meant refers to all the firstborn males in place of the firstborn whom God redeemed in the land of Egypt when He killed all the Egyptian firstborn. Then, He substituted all the firstborn males with males of the tribe of Levites, “Then the Lord said to Moses: “Number all the firstborn males of the children of Israel from a month old and above, and take the number of their names. And you shall take the Levites for Me—I *am* the Lord—instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel, and the livestock of the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the livestock of the children of Israel. So Moses numbered all the firstborn among the children of Israel, as the Lord commanded him. And all the firstborn males, according to the number of names from a month old and above, of those who were numbered of them, were **twenty-two thousand two hundred and seventy-three**.” (Num. 3:40-47).

The number of Levites were, “all the males from a month old and above, *were* **twenty-two thousand**.” (Num. 3:39).

Since there was a difference in the numeration of two hundred and seventy three, God requested five shekels for each individual (Num. 3:47). If it was possible to grant priesthood to women, it would have been more deserving to take the difference in numeration from the females who were born before their brothers.

1. **Priesthood for Men only:**

All forms of priesthood presented to us in the Holy Bible were all men. From the priesthood of the first patriarchs like Noah, Job, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, to Aaronal priesthood, Melchizedeck priesthood, or the priesthood of the Apostles and their episcopal successors. The entire priesthood has been men. Thus, priesthood for woman is an innovation in the religion.

1. **Division in the Church:**

Surely, this innovation in religion would be a cause for disputes that would affect the unity of the Church. Either the unity within the Anglican Church, or in its relationship with the other churches. Here we would like to say that we are apprehensive to an increase in an approach, rather than an increase in remoteness between our churches.

1. **The Results of exaggeration in offering rights to woman outside the boundary of biblical teachings :**

We observe that the world is embarked rashly in modifying biblical teachings to an extent that those defenders of the rights of women are trying to imply femininity to the name of God Himself. They forbid words like our or your heavenly Father. Thus, altering the Holy Bible in many subjects concerning the Divine hypostaseis and Their relation, i.e. the relation of the Son to the Heavenly Father. Some points affect the redemption and atonement of Christ, and His Spiritual Fatherhood as an archpriest.

1. **Practical obstacles:**

There are practical obstacles to women during intervals of pregnancy, giving birth and nursing, of which the female employees usually take extensive leave from their employment. Being occupied in priestly work may cause complete negligence in the role of a housewife and in rearing of children.

**Complaints and Responses:**

According to the words mentioned in the Holy Bible opposing the ordination of women as priests or observation in the prevailing tradition of the ancient churches, some may impute to the fact that women generally did not have positions of status in the society in general. Subsequently, they were forbidden from performing a priestly role in the church, coinciding to the prevailing social status of that epoch. Presently, women have their effective role in the society, so the biblical teachings and ecclesiastical traditions concerning this subject need re-examination.

In response, we state that women in all generations had their estimation. Some women were prophetesses (i.e. Mariam the sister of Moses and Aaron, Deborah the judge and prophetess, Khilda the prophetess, etc.). In the Holy Bible as well as history, there are famous queens like Queen Esther, Queen of Sheba whom Jesus Christ mentioned and queens of many nations like Cleopatra, etc.

In spite of the fact that the above-mentioned status held by women, yet priesthood remained **a field** that women -according to God’s economy among His people- do not encroach. A woman can be a queen, a leader of an army, and Biblical Books could be in her name. There is no scope for pretence in the unavailability of positions of status for women in ancient societies.

During the days of Christ the Lord, women had great positions of status i.e. the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene who announced the resurrection, the women who offered their homes as churches like Mary the mother of John who was called Mark, Lydia the seller of purple, Priscilla the wife of Aquila (see Rom 16), the daughters of Phillip the preacher who prophesized and many others mentioned by Saint Paul in Rom. 16. He mentioned each by name and their efforts in the church but he never attributed the priesthood to any of them.

The ecumenical councils in which the leaders of the whole church participated did not include any woman.

**The Role of Women in the Church:**

It is fitting for women to be deaconesses (without imposing of hands) assisting a bishop in many services, like Phoebe the deaconess of the church of Cenchrea and Olympias the deaconess of Saint John Chrysostom the Patriarch of Constantinopole.

Special roles are granted to women in many activities of social service in the church, i.e. sewing, teaching women and children, painting icons, making priestly vestments, caring for orphans, sojourners and the needy, etc. However, there is no biblical or historical support for their teaching or priestly service **to men**.