



Advancing  
Women in Church Leadership  
FutureChurch

## SCRIPTURE READINGS THAT SUBORDINATE WOMEN... MAKE SURE THEY DON'T HAPPEN IN YOUR PARISH

In August 2000 the Irish Catholic Church proposed dropping seven texts from a proposed new Lectionary because they “give an undesirably negative impression regarding women.” The Irish bishops’ new *Domestic Violence* document recommended the following texts for deletion:

- \* **Ephesians 5:22-24** ...*wives should submit to their husbands* etc.
- \* **1 Timothy 2:11-15** *A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent* etc.
- \* **1 Corinthians 14:33-35** ...*women should remain silent in the churches* (and following).
- \* **1 Corinthians 11:3-16** *Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man* (and following).
- \* **Colossians 3:18** *Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.*
- \* **1 Peter 3:1-6** *Wives in the same way be submissive to your husbands* (and following).
- \* **Titus 2: 4-5** *Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands so that no one will malign the word of God.*

Responding to the Irish bishops’ decision, a September 1,2000 Catholic News Service interview with Father James Moroney, director of the U.S. Bishops’ Secretariat on the Liturgy, reaffirmed the bishops’ concern about New Testament readings which subordinate women. They also publicized Lectionary alternatives now available to the U.S. church and described below.

The current U.S. Lectionary, which has been in use since Advent 1998, provides the option of using a short form of the readings from Colossians and Ephesians, that “omit[s] verses which were reported to have caused widespread misunderstandings when proclaimed in some parishes,” according to Moroney. If a priest does choose to use the longer form of these readings, Moroney said, he should explain the reading in the context of the church’s teaching and the original cultural context of the Scripture.

But which readings were revised? In the U.S. church only the Colossians and Ephesians readings have short options provided. **1 Pet 3:1-6** and **Titus 2:4-5** were not modified “because there are other options already available” according to Moroney who also noted that these are in the second volume of the lectionary awaiting confirmation by the Holy See.

**Colossians 3:12-21** which includes the offending phrase *wives be submissive to your husbands* used to be assigned every year on the feast of the Holy Family (usually the Sunday after Christmas). In the new Lectionary it is assigned only to Year A, and there is the option to leave off the offending verses 17-21. Year B and Year C have completely new readings but if the presider chooses he has the option of using the Year A readings. Thus, the offending verses could theoretically be read every year unless the presider exercises his option of omitting them as in Year A.

**Ephesians 5:21-32** which says that *the husband is head of his wife* (and following) is read on the 21st Sunday of Ordinary time in Year B and on Tuesday of the 30th week of Ordinary time in Year II. The revised Lectionary allows a shorter form in the Sunday reading where vs. 21-24 are omitted so that the *Husbands love your wives...* is heard but not *Wives be subordinate...*

### Suggested Action

**Take this flyer to your pastor and parish liturgy committee. Ask them to make sure Scripture readings that subordinate women aren’t being read from the pulpit in your faith community.**