

HOLY FAMILY CAMPAIGN

Ending Subordination in the Catholic Church

INSIDE THIS RESOURCE PACKET

What Catholics Hear	p. 2
When the Lectionary Fails	p. 3
Church Teaching	p. 4
Theological Foundations	p. 6
The Subordinating Texts	p. 10
A Short History of the Lectionary	p. 14
Can the Lectionary Be Changed?	p. 15
Advocacy and Action	p. 16
Sample letters	p. 17
Addresses for letters	p. 24
Prayers	p. 26

Lectionary readings that explicitly promote subordination of women and slaves should be excluded from our liturgical life

It is tragic, even scandalous, that in the 21st century, the Catholic Church, which incorporates the transformative wisdom of the Second Vatican Council along with a challenging and robust catalogue of Catholic Social Teaching, continues to subject Catholics to lectionary texts that explicitly encourage the subordination of women and enslaved peoples. Yet, these exhortations are part of our Sunday and weekday readings -- teachings that Catholics will hear and assimilate.

On the one hand, these teachings will confirm their most destructive impulses, their sense of superiority, and their notions of privilege as divinely sanctioned. For example, survivors of domestic violence know that abusers see biblical texts that subordinate as one of the rationales supporting their dangerous, controlling, and abusive behavior. White supremacists and those who consciously or unconsciously employ white privilege to dominate people of color are emboldened by biblical texts that encourage enslaved peoples to obey their masters. They conflate their worst xenophobic, nativist biases with the will of God.

On the other hand, many Catholics will feel the pain and shame of knowing these Catholic teachings contradict the values of the Gospel by explicitly promoting domination of one group or one gender over another. They will rightly cringe upon hearing these texts and advocate for change.

NOTE: As you explore this resource, it is helpful to know that the lectionary is organized over a three year Sunday cycle (Year A, B and C) and over a two year Weekday cycle (Year I and II). There is a special arrangement for Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter, and for the special celebrations of the year.



HOLY FAMILY CAMPAIGN

Ending Subordination in the Catholic Church

What Catholics hear on the Feast of the Holy Family and the placement of other Lectionary texts that subordinate

Sunday readings

Feast of the Holy Family

Colossians 3: 12-21 exhorts women to be subordinate to their husbands, “as is proper in the Lord.” This is the second reading proclaimed for the Feast of the Holy Family during the Christmas season every year. Because this reading falls on a Sunday and a feast day, greater numbers of Catholics hear it and assimilate it as sacred teaching on family life.

There are optional readings. Colossians 3:12-17 excises the subordinating text and can be substituted for the longer reading. Also, in Year B, Hebrews 11:8, 11-12, 17-19 is an option and in Year C, 1 John 3:1-2, 21-24 is an option. Yet, because the longer reading, Colossians 3:12-21 is listed first, it is too often chosen as the reading for that feast day.

Twenty-first Sunday, Ordinary Time, Year B

Similarly, Ephesians 5:21-32 exhorts “wives to be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord.” This admonition is heard on the Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary time in Year B.

There is an optional shorter reading. Ephesians 5: 25-32 excludes the subordinating text, but because it is optional, the longer text is too often used.

Ritual celebrations

Weddings

Ritual celebrations, such as weddings offer Ephesians 5:21-32, Ephesians 5:21-33, or 1 Peter 3:1-9 as options for readings. All three texts admonish women to be subordinate to their husbands. There are approved shorter readings that excise admonitions to be subordinate -- Ephesians 5:2a, 23-33 or 5:2a, 25-32.

Weekday readings

Thirtieth Tuesday in Ordinary Time, Year II

Ephesians 3:21-33 which exhorts wives to be subordinate is heard on the Thirtieth Tuesday in Ordinary Time on even years.

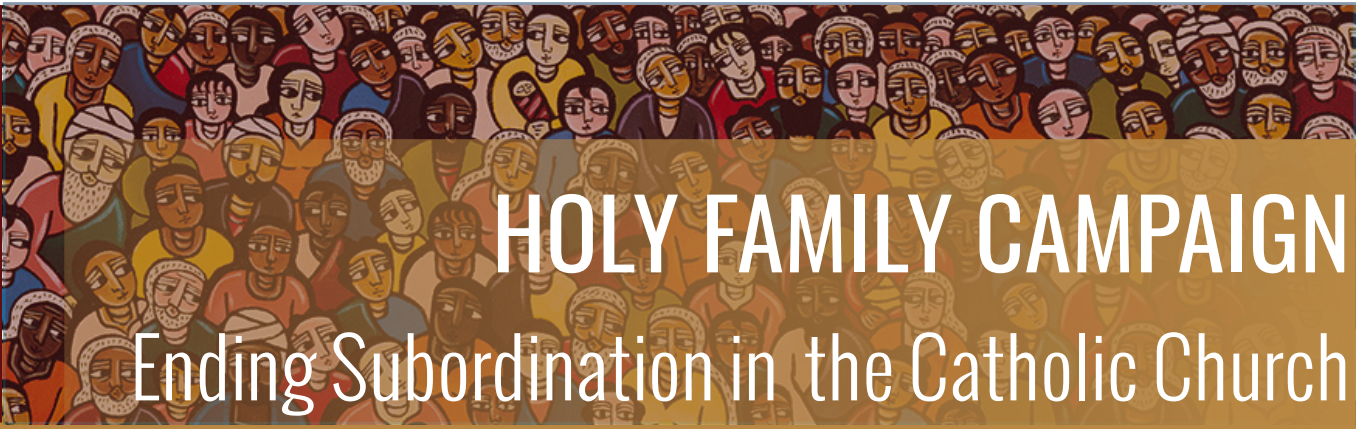
Thirtieth Wednesday, Ordinary Time, Year II

Ephesians 6: 1-9 which exhorts slaves to obey their masters is heard on the Thirtieth Wednesday in Ordinary Time on even years.

Thirty-Second Tuesday in Ordinary Time, Year II

Titus 2:1-8, 11-14 which exhorts older women to train younger women to be “under the control of their husbands” is heard on the Thirty-Second Tuesday in Ordinary Time on even years.

And while these troubling texts are heard on weekdays, and therefore to a more limited group of the faithful, it is clear that their presence in our lectionary is deeply problematic and even sinful given today’s understanding of the Gospel mandate for gender justice and racial justice.



HOLY FAMILY CAMPAIGN

Ending Subordination in the Catholic Church

When the Lectionary fails to be an instrument of the Gospel

The Sunday lectionary is the only canon heard, read, preached, or studied by most church-going Catholics. The Sunday lectionary is also the cornerstone for many Bible studies, catechetical programs, and spiritual guides.

When selections from the lectionary are proclaimed during the liturgy, they are concluded with the phrase “The Word of the Lord” or “The Gospel of the Lord” to which the assembly verbalizes its assent. The members of a worshipping assembly enter into a liturgical process that evokes remembrance, and by listening to and affirming the lectionary readings the Word becomes “real and present” in their minds and hearts. The liturgical process is designed to lead the assembly to internalize what is heard as a matter of faith.

The goal of the Second Vatican Council’s *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* was to cover as much of the Bible as possible. Thus many more books and passages of the Bible were made available to Catholics through the scripture readings at Sunday and daily Mass. The widely-held assumption has been that the lectionary faithfully presents the essence of the Bible, with the omission of only a few troubling or gory passages.

But, a lectionary, by its very nature, excludes some ancient traditions as it includes others, recasts its selections into designated collections, and assigns each collection to a particular context in the church

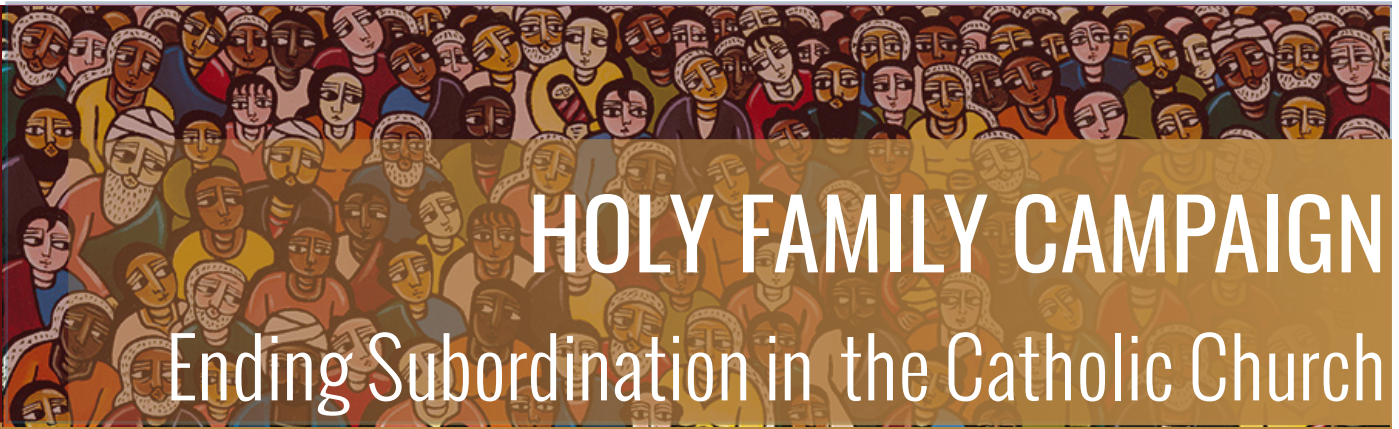
calendar. Thus, devising any lectionary produces a “canon within the canon” with the selections being under the control of ordained males.

Therefore, many scriptures left out of the lectionary including scriptures about women. Women’s books, women’s experiences and women’s accomplishments have been largely overlooked in the assigned scripture readings that are being proclaimed in our churches on Sundays and weekdays.

When women and female images are “erased” or distorted, it has real consequences for the entire Body of Christ, but especially for women.

The witness of women that is provided in an already androcentric Bible, is further narrowed in the lectionary canon. When females and female images are marginalized in the lectionary, women are interpreted as marginal. Furthermore, when androcentric, misogynistic, racist, and patriarchal texts are emphasized (as we note in the above section), Catholics internalize those messages and assume they are part of the divinely designed social order. This has disturbing, even dangerous consequences for marginalized groups and women.

Underlying these texts that explicitly promote the subordination of women or their erasure from the lectionary is patriarchal framework that reflects and reinscribes misogyny. Dr. Regina Boisclair shows how lectionary readings chosen from the Hebrew Scriptures are light on lessons that highlight positive, empowering female imagery for God, and heavy on lessons that frame women such as Eve and Sarah as dangerous, weak, submissive, or disposable. When these scriptures are paired with a



HOLY FAMILY CAMPAIGN

Ending Subordination in the Catholic Church

Gospel reading, another aspect of the unconscious androcentric interpretive framework is introduced into the lectionary by the compilers suggesting that women are “derivative of men, dangerous to men, and except as mothers of sons, they are disposable by men...”

In her book length study, **Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets**, womanist Biblical scholar Dr. Renita J. Weems traces the patriarchal foundations of the prophets in the Hebrew Bible to show how women bodies, as metaphor, reveal sacralized misogyny and even violence against women. The correlation repeatedly drawn between divine judgment and husbands battering their wives is “haunting and telling” according to Weems.

While much more can be written about “texts of terror” in the Bible, it is clear that androcentrism and misogyny serve as the foundation for the subordinating texts that Catholics hear at Mass.

Social Inequities Reinforced in the Lectionary and Black Catholic Voices

Catholics still hear Ephesians 6:1-9 which exhorts slaves to obey their masters. While this is read every other year on a Wednesday in Ordinary time, the proclamation of this text in any Catholic Church at any time runs counter to the prophetic voice of the Black Catholics, and especially the Black Catholic Clergy Caucus (BCCC), who, in 1968, called the Catholic Church out for its role in racism after the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.. They wrote, “the Catholic Church the United States, primarily a white racist institution, has addressed itself primarily to white society and is definitely a part of that society.” Further they noted that the Church was “not

cognizant of changing attitudes in the black community and is not making the necessary, realistic adjustments.”

Later in 1968, the National Black Sisters’ Conference (NBSC) pledged “unceasingly for the liberation of black people.” The sisters proclaimed “expressions of individual and institutional racism found in our society within our Church are declared by us to be categorically evil and inimical the freedom of all men everywhere, and particularly destructive of people in America.”

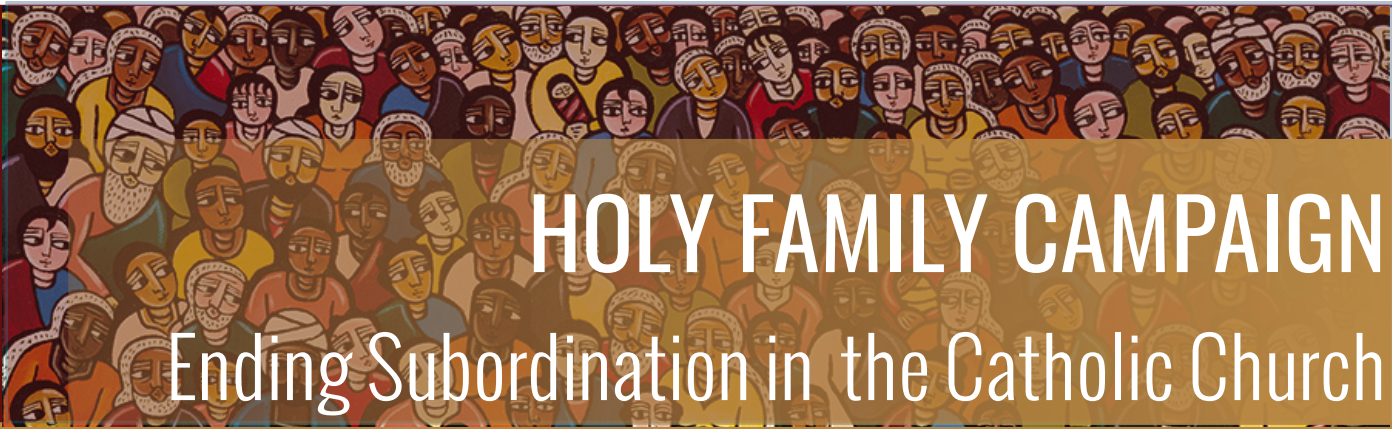
The ongoing proclamation of Ephesians 6:1-9 is an important example of how the sin of racism still plays out in the church running counter to the message of the Gospel.

Subordinating texts contradict Church Teaching

On Women

The subordination of women in the context of familial relationships contradicts Church teaching and pastoral practice.

- *The Church in the Modern World*, a constitution from the Second Vatican Council states, “Nevertheless, with respect to the fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God’s intent. For in truth it must still be regretted that fundamental personal rights are still not being universally honored. Such is the case of a woman



HOLY FAMILY CAMPAIGN

Ending Subordination in the Catholic Church

who is denied the right to choose a husband freely, to embrace a state of life or to acquire an education or cultural benefits equal to those recognized for men.”

- The Catholic Catechism refers to marriage as a partnership between a man and a woman and speaks of mutual love (1602, 1604).
- The nuptial blessing at the Catholic wedding ceremony prays, “May her husband entrust his heart to her ... acknowledging her as his equal and his joint heir in the life of grace.”
- In his apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis writes about married love as “a union possessing all the traits of a good friendship: concern for the good of the other, reciprocity, intimacy, warmth, stability and the resemblance born of a shared life. Marriage ... shares everything in constant mutual respect.” Pope Francis goes on to say “Love trusts. It sets free, it does not try to control, possess and dominate everything.”

Instructing women to be subordinate perpetuates the outdated idea that women are inferior to men and contributes to a culture of male dominance. It opens up a Pandora’s box to the subjugation of women on a broader scale. At best, it is an insult to all women, and at worse, it is a dangerous instruction for women in abusive relationships to hear because they are interpreted as the Church or even God affirming behavior that is morally reprehensible.

In “When I Call for Help: A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence Against Women,” the U.S. Catholic bishops criticize the use of scripture to justify the mistreatment of women. “A correct reading of Scripture,” the bishops write, “leads people to an understanding of the

equal dignity of men and women and to relationships based on mutuality and love.”

Catholic lectionary readings that promote the subordination of women reinforce an image of the Catholic Church as an institution that devalues and denigrates women. Those readings also contradict the claim of equal dignity that the bishops set forth in this pastoral message.

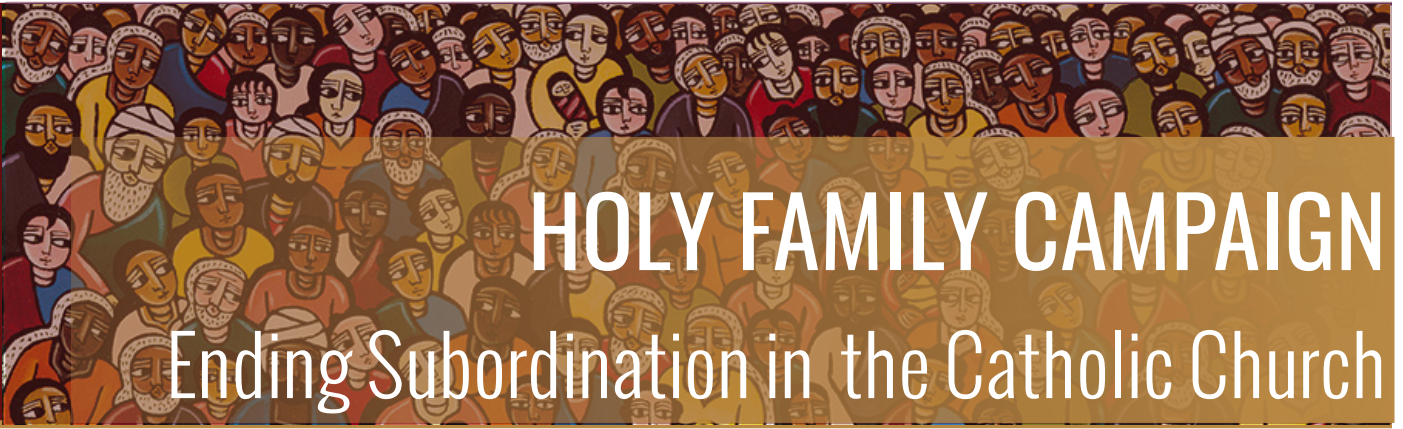
The Church has an important role to play in promoting a culture where women are treated as equals in their relationships, with dignity and respect. Removing lectionary texts that promote the subordination of women would be a step in this direction. It would be in keeping with the message promoted by the Catholic Catechism, the Catholic marriage rite, the teachings of the U.S. Catholic Bishops and Pope Francis.

On Racial Justice

While many of the texts that exhort slaves to be obedient to their masters have rightly been excluded from the lectionary, as we note above one explicit exhortation that slaves obey their masters “in fear and trembling” remains as a teaching Catholics hear in Ephesians 6: 1-9.

That this text still remains in any place in the Catholic lectionary is a disgrace. And Catholics must wonder what justification is used in keeping it.

On the one hand, Catholic Social Teaching confronts the evils of racism by recognizing that all people are created in the image of God and have equal dignity before God and each other. The claim against discrimination found in the Second Vatican Council’s pastoral constitution, *Gaudium Et Spes* is a centerpiece in the Catechism of the Catholic Church’s teaching on racial justice:



HOLY FAMILY CAMPAIGN

Ending Subordination in the Catholic Church

The equality of men [and women] rests essentially on their dignity as persons and the rights that flow from it: “Every form of social or cultural discrimination in fundamental personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, color, social conditions, language, or religion must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God’s design.

In 2018, the U.S. Bishops released a new document on racism, “Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love - A Pastoral Letter Against Racism.” It reminds Catholics that:

Racism comes in many forms. It can be seen in deliberate, sinful acts. In recent times, we have seen bold expressions of racism by groups as well as individuals. The re-appearance of symbols of hatred, such as nooses and swastikas in public spaces, is a tragic indicator of rising racial and ethnic animus.

One immediate way to help end racism, is for the institution to look within and eradicate all texts that subjugate and subordinate one people over another.

Finally, as some Womanist theologians who study the lectionary have pointed out, while the texts regarding slaves are generally not read, the instructions for wives to be subordinate and submissive in their familial relationships remain. They call for all subordinating texts to be removed in our liturgical, prayer, and catechetical settings.

Reclaiming the holy: Theological foundations for a “subordination-free” Lectionary

Theologian Fr. Gustavo Gutiérrez said, “to do theology

is to write a love letter to that God I believe in, to that community I belong to, and to that Church of which I am a part. A love that is no stranger to what is perplexing and even to what is bitter, but [a love] that is more than anything a source of profound joy.”

Along similar lines, theologian Cecilia Gonzales Andrieu believes that where Catholicism has failed to live up to the Gospel of justice and love, those symbols and sacraments must be “loved back into existence.”

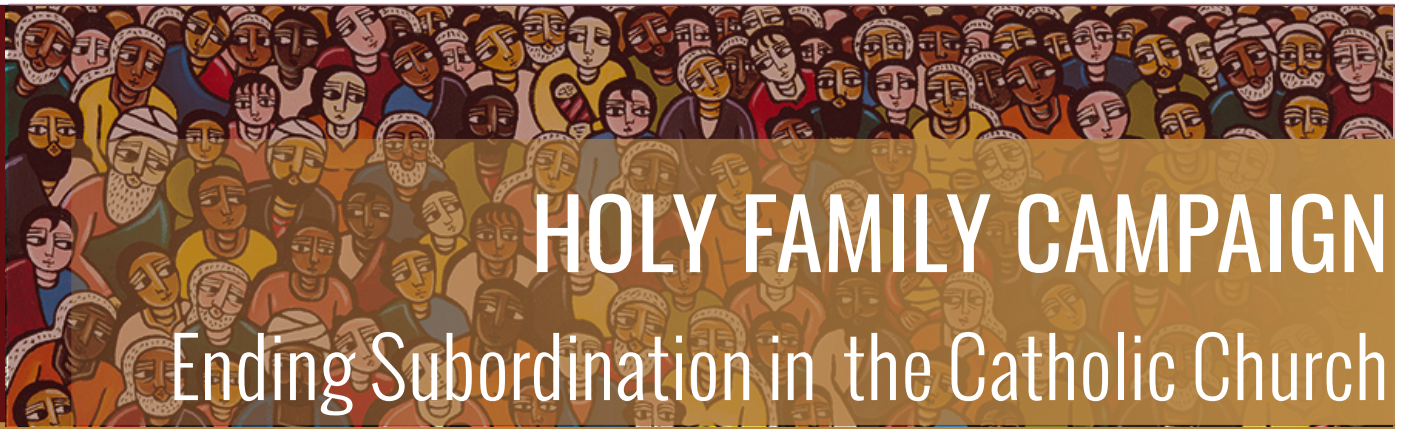
This is our starting point when those who have the authority to do so, promote scriptures that denigrate women’s dignity and equality, feed the sin of racism, and fail to promote true equality and mutuality in human relationships.

History and tradition

Christianity took shape in a patriarchal culture where a group of elite men held power over other men, and over women, slaves, and children. Within that culture, the radically liberating message of Jesus attracted women and slaves as disciples. Both women and men left their homes and responded to Jesus’ call. When he was arrested and murdered, it was the women who stayed and who were commissioned as apostles to “go and tell” the others, which they did, even in the face of ridicule and censure.

Yet, as the Church expanded its reach and became more established, patriarchal norms took greater hold. Under patriarchy, the roles of men and women, free and slave, were socially and economically and finally, religiously stratified.

Today, the Church reflects that inequality; in its leadership makeup; its sacred texts; its male, Eurocentric litur-



HOLY FAMILY CAMPAIGN

Ending Subordination in the Catholic Church

gical and religious language and symbols; its rituals, governance, and laws. And as a result, for most of the Church's history, women have been silenced, subordinated, and "erased" and slavery and racism have been fully functional within the tradition.

Thus, women are subordinated, in the ministry and governance of the Church and are reminded of their place in family and society with texts like Colossians 3:18 and Ephesians 5:22-23 which counsel wives to be subject and subordinate to their husbands and are heard by Catholics during Sunday liturgies.

The same is true for people of color. Slaves are counseled to obey their masters in more than a few Bible texts, most of which are not heard during the mass, yet, still today, Ephesians 6: 5-9, which counsels slaves to obey their masters "in fear and trembling" is heard by Catholics during a weekday Mass in Ordinary Time..

People of color have also been subordinated in the Church. Segregation in Catholic Churches was not dissimilar to segregation at lunch counters. Black women, who were excluded from participating in religious life began their own congregation in 1829. The first Black priest wasn't ordained until 1886, and that was only after he was turned away from seminaries in the United States and forced to go to Rome to get his seminary training. Only in October 2020, was Wilton Gregory, an African American, named a cardinal.

Even though the Church continues to participate in sexism, racism, and other institutional sins, Dr. Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ, argues that beyond patriarchy there is another strand running through the

Christian heritage -- the prophetic strand. And it is this strand -- found in scripture, in tradition, and in official teaching -- that challenges patriarchy.

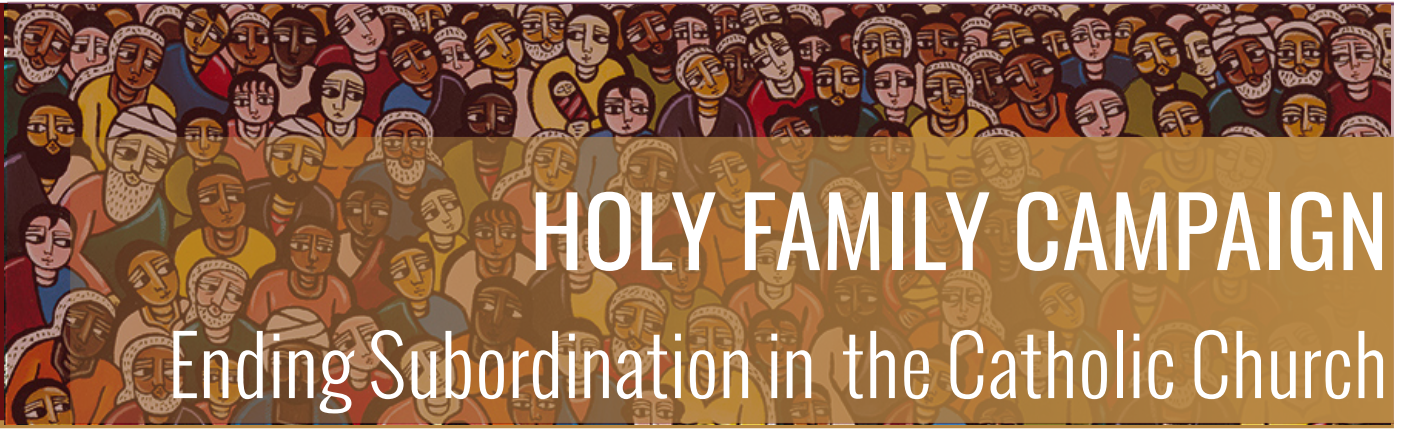
"Wherever they are found, the liberative, prophetic strands within Catholicism emphasize the solidarity of God with the poor and with other people of little worldly influence, women among them," writes Johnson.

This prophetic liberative strand is the foundation liberation theology, Black theology, feminist, womanist, and mujerista theologies. "Far from assigning dominance of one group over another, the prophetic worldview supposes a Christian community of mutual regard, a discipleship of equals," argues Johnson.

It is the prophetic vision that gives hope since it makes clear that while we have been living with under patriarchy, it is not all there is to Christianity. "Something more is possible," according to Johnson.

By way of example, the creation story opens the Bible with a description of women and men being created together in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26-28a). The creation vision we inherited from the Hebrew scriptures was a vision of equality and early Christians built on that Hebrew notion with an early baptismal formula. "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is no more Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female, but you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:27-28).

Thus, Paul refers to many women as co-workers, including Phoebe, Prisca, Junia, and others (Romans 16:1-15). Women are central to the mission of the early Church. But later New Testament writers who



HOLY FAMILY CAMPAIGN

Ending Subordination in the Catholic Church

wrote under the pseudonym of Paul, insisted that the equality in Christ due to baptism was solely spiritual and should not affect the social order. “Wives be subject to your husbands” (Eph 5:22) and “slaves be obedient to your masters” (Eph 6:5), were household codes rooted in Roman society, not in the earliest message of Jesus. The same is true of Colossians 3: 12-21 with its emphasis on women’s subordination as being “proper in the Lord.”

The letter to Timothy roots woman’s role in the original fall: “Let woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or have authority over men; she is to keep silent. For Adam was created first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet woman will be saved through bearing children” (1 Tim 2:11-15). The author of this letter believed women were created second, sinned first, and were left out of Christ’s redemptive act.

It was the Second Vatican Council that helped Catholics judge how to read scripture in light of the “signs of the times.” In its *Decree on Revelation*, science and critical historical insights sometimes contradict the Biblical text. When this occurs, the decree holds that we need to believe in scripture as “that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings for the sake of our salvation.” In other words, the way to salvation is inspired, but it is not dependent on outdated biblical texts, nor is it tied to cultural norms. As a matter of fact, the Gospel is often opposed to cultural norms and a means for transforming them. The Church has already made the judgment that the slavery reinforced in Ephesians and Colossians is evil. The same is also true of sexism, racism, and other forms of discriminatory ways

of relating to one another.

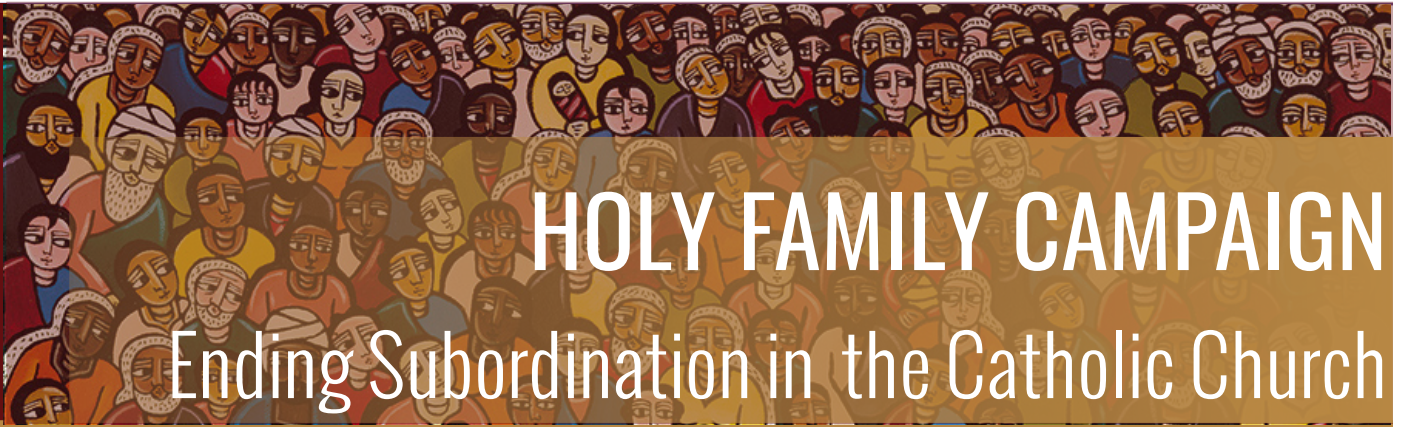
The Church in the Modern World makes clear that sexism and racism are sins stating, “With respect to the fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language, or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God’s intent.”

“Ultimately, the prophetic Spirit of God moves the church toward greater justice,” writes Johnson. “Even under the stern watch of leaders steeped in patriarchal values, new sociological realities have a bearing on church teaching and doctrine.”

Black Catholics are leading the Church toward greater racial justice. Catholics of color and women and are active now in fields of biblical research, Church history, systematic theology, ethics, and spirituality, teaching in seminaries and bringing new voices of wisdom to bear on the whole range of Christian doctrines, symbols, ethics, and rituals.

The immovable object of patriarchy continues to encounter the irresistible force of the desire of women and people of color for full participation in the Church. “Again and again, the institutional Church has failed and has become a collaborator in domination, within and without,” Johnson reminds us. “But the power of the Spirit, Holy Wisdom herself at work in the community, empowers the Church to rise ever again.”

Excerpts from “Women’s Place: Two Conflicting Views” by Dr. Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ. at https://bcm.bc.edu/issues/summer_2004/features.html



HOLY FAMILY CAMPAIGN

Ending Subordination in the Catholic Church

Catholics still hear ancient “household codes” subordinating women, slaves

Within the context of a patriarchal society, Jesus and the earliest Christians brought the Good News of God’s radical love to the poor. Jesus proclaimed release to the captives; recovery of sight to the blind and setting the oppressed free (Luke 4:18–19). His message attracted the downtrodden of society, including women and slaves, many who helped build up the Early Church.

Paul, too, brought this liberative message to the Gentile world. His letter to the Galatians contains a foundational baptismal formula which proclaims, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). And it is clear that Paul His letter to the Romans names the women who were co-workers, deacons, leaders, and apostles (Romans 16:1-3, 7)

Yet, the liberative message of Galatians, Romans and other Pauline writings stand in stark contrast to Colossians and Ephesians, where women are told to be subordinate to their husbands and slaves are told to obey their masters. The reason? The letters to the Colossians and Ephesians were not written by Paul but rather by those who sought to confer Paul’s authority on their less-than-liberating vision when it came to the roles of women and slaves within the community.

Colossians 3:28-4:1 is the first and oldest of a series on New Testament texts calling on wives to be subject to their husbands; slaves to be subject to their masters. The Colossian writers introduce, for the first time in Christian scriptures, the Household Code. Ephesians, written after Colossians, is dependent upon its literary structure and also contains the Household Code with its instructions for wives to be subordinate to their husbands, and slaves to be obedient to their masters (Eph 5:21- 6:9). These household codes represent assent from the Colossian and Ephesian communities of imperial codes that ordered the socio-economic hierarchy of the patriarchal family -- a system built on the subordination of women and slaves who were expected to obey male authority.

Whether the conformity found in the Household Codes represents a concession to outside pressure or agreement with the restrictions is a topic of debate. Yet, clearly, Colossians represents a step toward a Christianity that became increasingly restrictive and even abusive for women and slaves. According to Dr. Mary Rose D’Angelo, “The authority of the Household Codes long endorsed both slavery and battering and Colossian’s theology gave divine sanction to those patterns of domination and subordination.”

(This above is excerpted from “Colossians” by Mary Rose D’Angelo in Searching the Scriptures (1994), edited by Elisabeth Schussler-Fiorenza (pp. 313-324).

The Subordinating Texts

This educational resource and advocacy campaign helps Catholics recognize six highly troubling texts that are heard throughout the year and how to advocate for change.

The texts are:

- **Colossians 3:12-21** which exhorts wives to be subordinate to their husbands.
- **Ephesians 5:21-32** and its slightly longer version **Ephesians 5:21-33** which exhorts wives to be subordinate to their husbands.
- **Ephesians 6:1-9** which tells slaves to be obedient to their masters.
- **Titus 2:1-8, 11-14** which exhorts women to be under the control of their husbands.
- **1 Peter 3:1-9** which exhorts wives to be subordinate to their husbands.

FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY (Christmas season)

- **Colossians 3: 12-21** which exhorts wives to be subordinate to their husbands is heard on the the **Feast of the Holy Family**. (Lectionary # 17 which is listed for all three cycles falling in December every year)

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Wives, be subordinate to your husbands, as is proper in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and avoid any bitterness toward them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, so they may not become discouraged.

There is an optional reading (Colossians 3: 12 - 17) which excises the subordinating texts but because it is optional, the longer reading is, too often, proclaimed. There are also optional readings for Year B (Hebrews 11:8, 11-12, 17-19) and Year C (1 John 3:1-2, 21-24) which can be read instead of Colossians 3:12-21.

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY (Ordinary Time)

- **Ephesians 5:21-32** which exhorts wives to be subordinate to their husbands is heard on **Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time** (Lectionary# 122, Year B which falls in August 2021, 2024, 2027, etc.)

Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is head of his wife just as Christ is head of the church, he himself the savior of the body. As the church is subordinate to Christ, so wives should be subordinate to their husbands in

everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word, that he might present to himself the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. So [also] husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one hates his own flesh but rather nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.

“For this reason a man shall leave [his] father and [his] mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the church.

There is an optional reading (Ephesians 5: 25-32) which excises the offending texts, but the longer text is listed first and can be chosen because the shorter version is optional.

THIRTIETH TUESDAY (Ordinary Time)

- **Ephesians 5:21-33, the slightly longer version exhorts wives to be subordinate to their husbands and is heard on Tuesday of the 30th week in Ordinary Time (Lectionary #480, Year II which falls in October 2020, 2022, 2024, etc.)**

Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is head of his wife just as Christ is head of the church, he himself the savior of the body. As the church is subordinate to Christ, so wives should be subordinate to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word, that he might present to himself the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. So [also] husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one hates his own flesh but rather nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.

“For this reason a man shall leave [his] father and [his] mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the church.

This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the Church. In any case, each one of you should love his wife as himself, and the wife should respect her husband.

There is an optional reading (Ephesians 5: 25-33) which excises the offending texts, but the longer text can be chosen because the shorter version is optional.

THIRTIETH WEDNESDAY (Ordinary Time)

- **Ephesians 6: 1-9 which tells slaves to be obedient to their masters is heard on Wednesday of the 30th week in Ordinary Time (Lectionary #481, Year II which falls in October 2020, 2022, 2024, etc.).**

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother.

This is the first commandment with a promise, that it may go well with you and that you may have a long life on earth. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up with the training and instruction of the Lord.

Slaves, be obedient to your human masters with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ, not only when being watched, as currying favor, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, willingly serving the Lord and not men, knowing that each will be requited from the Lord for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free. Masters, act in the same way towards them, and stop bullying, knowing that both they and you have a Master in heaven and that with him there is no partiality.

THIRTY-SECOND TUESDAY (Ordinary Time)

- **Titus 2:1-8, 11-14** which exhorts women to be under the control of their husbands is heard on **Tuesday of the 32nd Week in Ordinary Time** (Lectionary #492, Year II which falls in November 2020, 2022, 2024, etc.)

*Beloved: You must say what is consistent with sound doctrine, namely, that older men should be temperate, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, love, and endurance. Similarly, **older women should be reverent in their behavior, not slanderers, not addicted to drink, teaching what is good, so that they may train younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, chaste, good homemakers, under the control of their husbands**, so that the word of God may not be discredited.*

Urge the younger men, similarly, to control themselves, showing yourself as a model of good deeds in every respect, with integrity in your teaching, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be criticized, so that the opponent will be put to shame without anything bad to say about us.

For the grace of God has appeared, saving all and training us to reject godless ways and worldly desires and to live temperately, justly, and devoutly in this age, as we await the blessed hope, the appearance of the glory of the great God and of our savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to deliver us from all lawlessness and to cleanse for himself a people as his own, eager to do what is good.

Weddings (Subordinating optional readings)

- **Ephesians 5:21-32 or Ephesians 5:21-33**, both exhorting wives to be subordinate to their husbands are options for weddings.

*Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ. **Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is head of his wife just as Christ is head of the church, he himself the savior of the body. As the church is subordinate to Christ, so wives should be subordinate to their husbands in everything.** Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word, that he might present to himself the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. So [also] husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one hates his own flesh but rather nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ does the church, because we are*

members of his body.

“For this reason a man shall leave [his] father and [his] mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the church.

(Verse 33)

In any case, each one of you should love his wife as himself, and the wife should respect her husband.

There are shorter options, either Ephesians 5:2a, 23-33 or 5:2a, 25-32 that excise the subordinating language. (Lectionary #802, option 6)

- **1 Peter 3:1-9** which exhorts wives to be subordinate to their husbands is also currently included as one of several options for “Ritual Masses: Weddings” (Lectionary #802, option 10) as well as the “Common of Holy Men & Women” (Lectionary #740, option 14).

Likewise, you wives should be subordinate to your husbands so that, even if some disobey the word, they may be won over without a word by their wives’ conduct when they observe your reverent and chaste behavior. Your adornment should not be an external one: braiding the hair, wearing gold jewelry, or dressing in fine clothes, but rather the hidden character of the heart, expressed in the imperishable beauty of a gentle and calm disposition, which is precious in the sight of God. For this is also how the holy women who hoped in God once used to adorn themselves and were subordinate to their husbands; thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him “lord.” You are her children when you do what is good and fear no intimidation. Likewise, you husbands should live with your wives in understanding, showing honor to the weaker female sex, since we are joint heirs of the gift of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered. Finally, all of you, be of one mind, sympathetic, loving toward one another, compassionate, humble. Do not return evil for evil, or insult for insult; but, on the contrary, a blessing, because to this you were called, that you might inherit a blessing.

The Lectionary: A Short History

Scripture is proclaimed on Sunday, weekdays, and holy days according to a schedule of passages called a lectionary. A lectionary does not contain the entire Bible, but is a collection of selections that are meant to be lessons and teachings proclaimed during the liturgy. The entire Lectionary for Mass, issued by Rome in 1981 and in the United States beginning in 1998, contains about ninety percent of the Gospel accounts, fifty-five percent of Acts, the Epistles, and Revelation, and thirteen and a half percent of the Hebrew Scriptures (aka Old Testament).

Jesus and the earliest Christian communities embraced the scriptures that were sacred to Israel. The first-century church soon came to favor the Greek translation of those texts, known as the Septuagint. Over the following two centuries, the Church recognized that certain Christian writings were also inspired by God. By the fourth century the Church had developed the authoritative two-testament canon we call the Bible.

The first lectionaries appeared by the fifth or sixth century and were actually just Bibles with notes in the margins telling the reader which passage to read on a particular Sunday. By the seventh century Mass readings began to appear in books of their own. With the 16th-century Council of Trent, all the readings and prayers for Mass were collected in a single book called the Roman Missal.

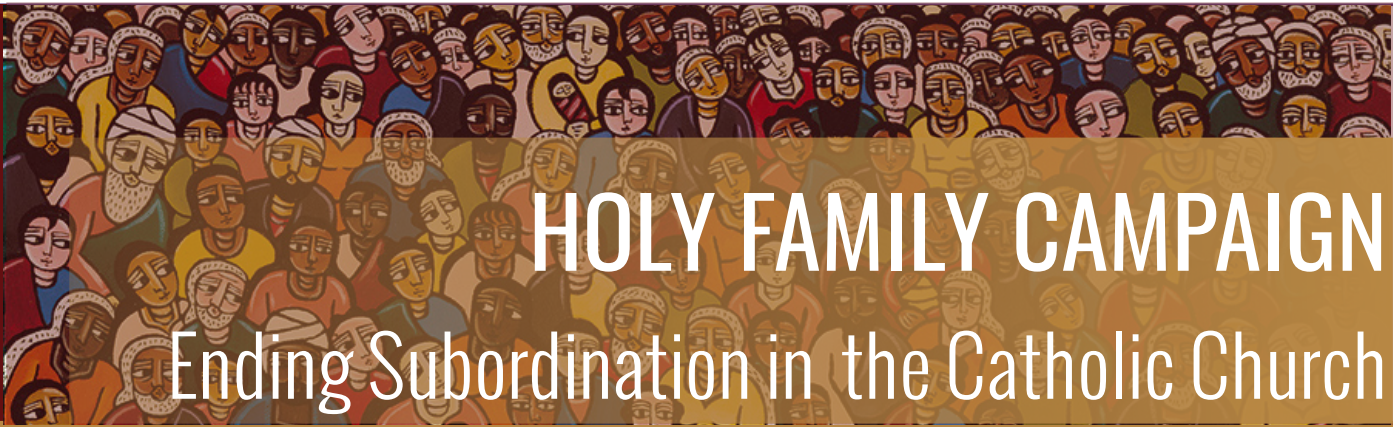
The Second Vatican Council brought remarkable changes to every aspect of the liturgy. Along with all of the rites and ritual books of the liturgy, the Lectionary which had been part of the Roman Missal used in the Roman Rite of the Catholic Church since 1570 was revised and translated into vernacular languages so as to include more Scripture in the liturgy. The first document of the Council, the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, mandated that “the treasures of the Bible ... be opened up more lavishly, so that a richer share in God’s word may be provided for the faithful.”

The result was an order of readings published in Latin in 1969 as biblical citations only, with accompanying instructions for the episcopal conferences to develop their own vernacular language translations of the readings.

In the United States, the Lectionary for Mass, including the English Scripture texts, was published in 1970.

The new Lectionary had three major innovations: (1) it replaced a one-year cycle of readings with a three-year cycle; (2) it provided for three biblical selections as well as a psalm or canticle for each Sunday and solemnity instead of a Gospel passage preceded by a short segment of a New Testament letter called the Epistle; and (3) it included regular readings from the Old Testament that were rarely found in the 1570 order of readings.

In 1981 a second edition of the three-year Lectionary for Sundays and Solemnities became available. An English Lectionary following the 1981 edition was published in Canada in 1992, but due to difficulties in arriving at an English translation satisfactory both to Rome and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the second edition did not make its way to use in the United States until Advent of 1998. The 1998 publication is the one in use today in the United States.



HOLY FAMILY CAMPAIGN

Ending Subordination in the Catholic Church

Can the Lectionary be Changed? Yes, it can!

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy emphasizes liturgical practices that promote the good of the entire community, stating “Even in the liturgy, the Church has no wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters which do not implicate the faith or the good of the whole community,” (37). This document allows provisions to be made for “legitimate variations and adaptations to different groups,” as long as these adaptations preserve the “substantial unity of the Roman rite”(38).

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops (now the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops) approved a new lectionary that began to be used in 1970. Further changes were made in 1992, 1998 and 2002.

In 1992, an important change was made to the lectionary regarding the readings we hear on the Feast of the Holy Family (Colossians 3: 12-21) and on the Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time in Year B (Ephesians 5:21-32).

The bishops of the United States requested permission from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (at the Vatican) to include an optional shorter version of these readings (Colossians 3: 12 - 17 and Ephesians 5: 25-32). The shorter versions omit the instruction for wives to be subordinate. An acknowledgement that these texts are problematic, these changes help overturn the most objectional aspects of thelections.

While the Vatican gave U.S. bishops permission to omit from public reading any scriptures admonishing

women to be submissive as long ago as 1992, many clergy and others are either unaware of that change or consciously or unconsciously support such lessons in subordination. While many egregious scriptural verses have been excluded from the lectionary, these subordinating texts were not.

Still, changes like the 1992 modifications to the lectionary are incomplete. The current lectionary still includes the longer version of these readings with the instruction for wives to be subordinate. Parish leaders can choose the long version of the epistle reading, thereby promoting an outdated and unjust view of familial relations that regards women as inferior to men.

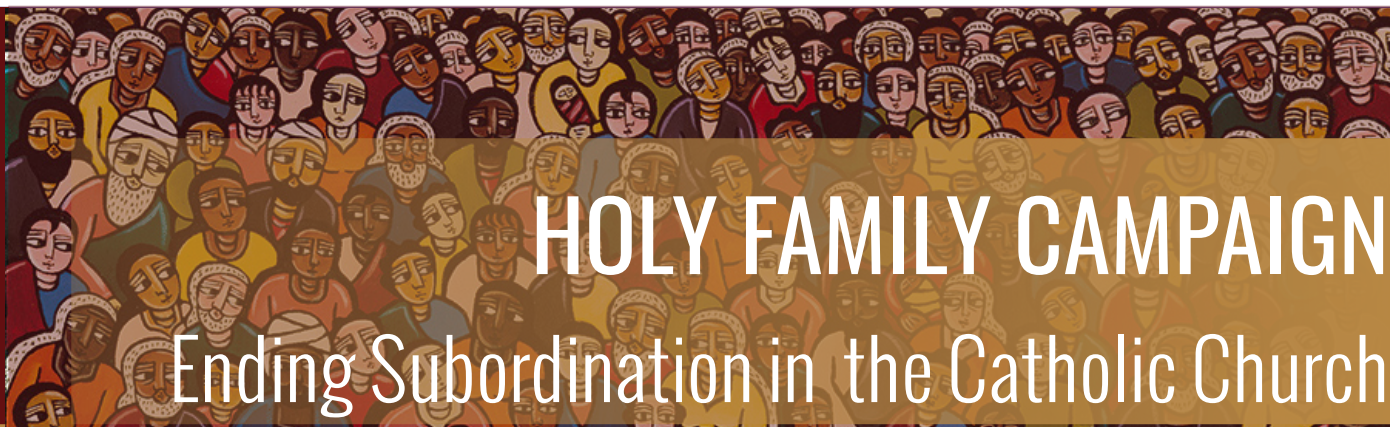
Further, other texts that subordinate including Ephesians 6:1-9, Titus 2:1-8, 11-14, and 1 Peter 3:1-9 must be modified if the mission of the Gospel is to be proclaimed.

A significant lectionary update is necessary.

The change we are advocating supports the instruction that the lectionary provide “richer fare” rather than repressive fare. It would be a natural next step for the U.S. Catholic bishops to omit an oppressive scripture reading rather than making it optional. It would be an important step toward liberating the Catholic lectionary from texts that demean women and people of color who daily fight for the right to exist in a world where white privilege and white supremacy threatens their very existence.

Notes

In 1992, then committee chair Bishop Wilton D. Gregory and the U.S. Bishops’ Committee on Liturgy made Colossians 3:12-21 and Ephesians 5:21-32 optional offering shorter versions of the texts that omitted the offensive language of wifely



HOLY FAMILY CAMPAIGN

Ending Subordination in the Catholic Church

subordination. The Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments approved the shorter readings. Thus in many Catholic parishes, the faithful are not subjected to texts that condone subordination.

Advocating for Changes to the Lectionary

Because scripture readings that subordinate are an affront to human dignity, join us in calling on the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops modify the lectionary:

1. Instead of Colossians 3:12-21, we recommend that the reading for the Feast of the Holy Family always only be the designated short form, Colossians 3:12-17. This shorter form of the reading is already also prescribed on Thursday of the Twenty-third Week in Ordinary time (Year I) and in quite a few special Masses.
2. Instead of Ephesians 5:21-32, we recommend always only using the designated short form, Ephesians 5: 25-32. Similarly, instead of Ephesians 5:21-33, we recommend the short form, Ephesians 5:25-33. The same is true when Ephesians 5:21-32 or 5:21-33 is included as options for weddings. Instead of these longer forms, we recommend always only using the designated short forms Ephesians 5:2a, 25-32 or Ephesians 5:2a, 25-33.
3. For Titus 2:1-8, 11-14, there are several possible options. Verse 5 could be omitted, or verses 4-8 could be omitted, or all of verses 1-8 could be omitted. Thus the new reading could be either Titus 2:1-4, 6-8, 11-14, Titus 2:1-3, 11-14, or just Titus 2:11-14.
4. Instead of 1 Peter 3:1-9, we recommend using 1 Peter 3:8-12, which applies to all people, not just to slaves or married people. Or, since 1 Peter 3:1-9 is only one of

several other options, it could also simply be dropped.

5. Finally, instead of Ephesians 6: 1-9, we call on the bishops to permanently remove verses 5 - 9 which addresses slaves and masters and instead offer a shortened version, 1 Peter 3:1-4.

The Gospel calls us to work for justice and to build God's kingdom. In the context of this campaign, that means advocating for change that eliminates Lectionary texts that can be perceived as promoting domination of one group over another. That means we work for women's full equality and racial justice. That means eliminating texts that call for the subordination of women and enslaved peoples.

Please do all you can to make sure these texts are not heard in your parish and in your diocese.

Here is a list of actions you can take!

Take Action

1. Find out what reading is in your missal for the Feast of the Holy Family. If Colossians 3: 12-21 is being proclaimed, talk to your pastor and/or those who serve on the liturgy committee. Ask them to ensure that parishioners hear the shorter versions of Colossians which eliminates the text telling wives to be subordinate to their husbands. Discuss the other subordinating texts and ways to undo the damage.
2. Write letters to the members of the USCCB Committee on Divine Worship. They oversee all aspects of liturgy in the United States. Ask them to finish what was begun in 1992 and eliminate texts that sub-

ordinate women and exhort slaves to obey their masters. Ask them to eliminate all texts that subordinate women or promote racism.

3. Write to your diocesan bishop and your local priest. Ask them to eliminate texts that subordinate and, when that is not possible, to preach on the damaging effects of those texts and how they should be assimilated by Catholics today.

4. Write a Letter to the Editor of your diocesan newspaper. Or write a Letter to the Editor of your local newspaper.

Sample letters are below and available for download when you download the Holy Family Campaign resource. They can be found at www.futurechurch.org/

Sample Letter for Members and Consultants Who Serve on the USCCB Committee on Divine Worship

Dear Bishop/Archbishop/Rev/Sr/Dr/Ms (Name)

Greetings of peace.

Thank you for your service on the USCCB Committee for Divine Worship which has the responsibility for all matters relating to the Sacred Liturgy for Latin Rite Dioceses in the United States.

I'm writing with a request regarding Catholic lectionary readings that impact women adversely and contribute to racism.

As you know, the U.S. Catholic Lectionary includes scripture readings that instruct wives to be subordinate to their husbands and slaves to be obedient to their masters. I am writing to ask you to ensure these texts are no longer proclaimed during the liturgy in any parish, in any diocese in the United States.

Here is the list of the six Lectionary readings used in various Sunday, weekday and ritual liturgies that exhort women to be subordinate to their husbands or slaves to obey their masters:

Sunday Readings and Ritual Celebrations

On the Feast of the Holy Family, Colossians 3: 12-21 exhorts women to be subordinate to their husbands, "as is proper in the Lord." It is proclaimed every year. Instead of Colossians 3:12-21, we recommend that the reading for the Feast of the Holy Family always only be the designated short form, Colossians 3:12-17. This shorter form of the reading excludes the subordinating language and is already also prescribed on Thursday of the Twenty-third Week in Ordinary time (Year I) and in quite a few special Masses. Also, in Year B, Hebrews 11:8, 11-12, 17-19 is an option and in Year C, 1 John 3:1-2, 21-24 is an option. I ask that you ensure that the optional readings are proclaimed in the short run and that you advocate that the longer reading be dropped from the Lectionary and that the shorter reading, Colossians 3:12-17, be made the permanent reading.

On the Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time in Year B, Ephesians 5:21-32 exhorts "wives to be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord." There is an approved optional shorter reading, Ephesians 5: 25-32 which excludes the subordinating language. I ask that you ensure that the shorter reading be chosen in all parishes and that you work to make that a permanent change.

Wedding celebrations offer Ephesians 5:21-32, Ephesians 5:21-33, or 1 Peter 3:1-9 as options for readings. All three

texts admonish women to be subordinate to their husbands. We ask that you ensure that the approved shorter readings -- Ephesians 5:2a, 23-33 or 5:2a, 25-32 be used and that you work to exclude all texts promoting women's subordination from the Lectionary. Instead of 1 Peter 3:1-9, we recommend using 1 Peter 3:8-12, which applies to all people, not just to slaves or married people. Or, since 1 Peter 3:1-9 is only one of several other options, it could also simply be dropped.

Weekday texts that contain messages of subordination of wives and slaves are as follows:

On the Thirtieth Tuesday in Ordinary Time in Year II Ephesians 3:21-33 which exhorts wives to be subordinate. I ask that Ephesians 5:25-33 be used instead.

On the Thirtieth Wednesday, Ordinary Time, Year II, Ephesians 6: 1-9 which exhorts slaves to obey their masters. I call on you to drop this disturbing text and use Ephesians 6:1-4 instead.

On the Thirty-Second Tuesday in Ordinary Time, Year II, Titus 2:1-8, 11-14 which exhorts older women to train younger women to be "under the control of their husbands." Verse 5 could be omitted, or verses 4-8 could be omitted, or all of verses 1-8 could be omitted. Thus the new reading could be either Titus 2:1-4, 6-8, 11-14, Titus 2:1-3, 11-14, or just Titus 2:11-14.

I believe it is unjust and immoral for the Catholic lectionary to include scripture readings that promote the subordination of women and the enslavement of people and for parishes to include these readings at liturgies. By doing so, the Church gives authority to these readings which are an affront to human dignity and an affront to the Church's efforts to end the sin of racism.

It is dangerous for women in abusive marriages to hear these scripture readings proclaimed. Too often these readings are interpreted as God and the Church affirming abusive behavior. In "When I Call for Help: A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence Against Women," the U.S. Catholic bishops speak about the misinterpretation of scripture to justify the mistreatment of women. "A correct reading of Scripture," the bishops write, "leads people to an understanding of the equal dignity of men and women and to relationships based on mutuality and love."

It is dangerous for people of color to hear racist ideologies being confirmed in our Lectionary readings. Too often these readings are interpreted as God and the Church affirming white supremacy. In "Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call To Love, the U.S. Catholic bishops wrote, "Within the walls of the Church, many people of color have experienced discrimination and outright racism. Leadership has been lacking. All too often, leaders of the Church have remained silent about the horrific violence and other racial injustices perpetuated against African Americans and others."

In 1992, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops requested and received permission from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments to include an optional shorter version of the Colossians and Ephesians readings as well as an alternate reading. The shorter version omits the instruction for wives to be subordinate. This action acknowledged these readings as problematic and offered an alternative that expressed pastoral sensitivity.

There is no moral justification for continuing to proclaim Lectionary readings that instruct wives to be subordinate to their husbands or slaves to be obedient to their masters. Doing so advances the image of the Church as an institution that devalues and denigrates women and promotes racism.

The Church has an important role to play in promoting a culture where women and people of color are treated with dignity and respect.

First, I am asking you and the Committee on Divine Worship permanently eliminate the proclamation of the long version of the Ephesians and Colossians readings which are heard by a greater number of Catholics on Sundays and already has approved shorter readings.

Secondly, I ask that you work diligently to eliminate all other subordinating Lectionary texts.

Finally, I request that the USCCB Committee on Divine Worship and all bishops encourage all priests to counter the damaging effects of these texts in their homilies.

Thank you for your consideration of my request. I assure you of my prayers as I await your reply.

Sincerely,

Sample Letter for Diocesan Bishop

Dear Bishop/Archbishop (Name)

Greetings of peace.

I'm writing with a request regarding Catholic lectionary readings that impact women adversely and contribute to racism.

As you know, the U.S. Catholic Lectionary includes scripture readings that instruct wives to be subordinate to their husbands and slaves to be obedient to their masters. I am writing to ask you to ensure these texts are no longer proclaimed during the liturgy in any parish, in any diocese in the United States.

Here is the list of the six Lectionary readings used in various Sunday, weekday and ritual liturgies that exhort women to be subordinate to their husbands or slaves to obey their masters:

Sunday Readings and Ritual Celebrations

On the Feast of the Holy Family, Colossians 3: 12-21 exhorts women to be subordinate to their husbands, "as is proper in the Lord." It is proclaimed every year. Instead of Colossians 3:12-21, we recommend that the reading for the Feast of the Holy Family always only be the designated short form, Colossians 3:12-17. This shorter form of the reading excludes the subordinating language and is already also prescribed on Thursday of the Twenty-third Week in Ordinary time (Year I) and in quite a few special Masses. Also, in Year B, Hebrews 11:8, 11-12, 17-19 is an option and in Year C, 1 John 3:1-2, 21-24 is an option. I ask that you ensure that the optional readings are proclaimed in the short run and that you advocate that the longer reading be dropped from the Lectionary and that the shorter reading, Colossians 3:12-17, be made the permanent reading.

On the Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time in Year B, Ephesians 5:21-32 exhorts "wives to be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord." There is an approved optional shorter reading, Ephesians 5: 25-32 which excludes the subordinating language. I ask that you ensure that the shorter reading be chosen in all parishes and that you work to make that a permanent change.

Wedding celebrations offer Ephesians 5:21-32, Ephesians 5:21-33, or 1 Peter 3:1-9 as options for readings. All three texts admonish women to be subordinate to their husbands. We ask that you ensure that the approved shorter readings -- Ephesians 5:2a, 23-33 or 5:2a, 25-32 be used and that you work to exclude all texts promoting women's

subordination from the Lectionary. Instead of 1 Peter 3:1-9, we recommend using 1 Peter 3:8-12, which applies to all people, not just to slaves or married people. Or, since 1 Peter 3:1-9 is only one of several other options, it could also simply be dropped.

Weekday texts that contain messages of subordination of wives and slaves are as follows:

On the Thirtieth Tuesday in Ordinary Time in Year II Ephesians 3:21-33 which exhorts wives to be subordinate. I ask that Ephesians 5:25-33 be used instead.

On the Thirtieth Wednesday, Ordinary Time, Year II, Ephesians 6: 1-9 which exhorts slaves to obey their masters. I call on you to drop this disturbing text and use Ephesians 6:1-4 instead.

On the Thirty-Second Tuesday in Ordinary Time, Year II, Titus 2:1-8, 11-14 which exhorts older women to train younger women to be “under the control of their husbands.” Verse 5 could be omitted, or verses 4-8 could be omitted, or all of verses 1-8 could be omitted. Thus the new reading could be either Titus 2:1-4, 6-8, 11-14, Titus 2:1-3, 11-14, or just Titus 2:11-14.

I believe it is unjust and immoral for the Catholic lectionary to include scripture readings that promote the subordination of women and the enslavement of people and for parishes to include these readings at liturgies. By doing so, the Church gives authority to these readings which are an affront to human dignity and an affront to the Church’s efforts to end the sin of racism.

It is dangerous for women in abusive marriages to hear these scripture readings proclaimed. Too often these readings are interpreted as God and the Church affirming abusive behavior. In “When I Call for Help: A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence Against Women,” the U.S. Catholic bishops speak about the misinterpretation of scripture to justify the mistreatment of women. “A correct reading of Scripture,” the bishops write, “leads people to an understanding of the equal dignity of men and women and to relationships based on mutuality and love.”

It is dangerous for people of color to hear racist ideologies being confirmed in our Lectionary readings. Too often these readings are interpreted as God and the Church affirming white supremacy. In “Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call To Love, the U.S. Catholic bishops wrote, “Within the walls of the Church, many people of color have experienced discrimination and outright racism. Leadership has been lacking. All too often, leaders of the Church have remained silent about the horrific violence and other racial injustices perpetuated against African Americans and others.”

In 1992, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops requested and received permission from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments to include an optional shorter version of the Colossians and Ephesians readings, as well as an alternate reading. The shorter version omits the instruction for wives to be subordinate. This action acknowledged these readings as problematic and offered an alternative that expressed pastoral sensitivity.

There is no moral justification for continuing to proclaim Lectionary readings that instruct wives to be subordinate to their husbands or slaves to be obedient to their masters. Doing so advances the image of the Church as an institution that devalues and denigrates women and promotes racism.

The Church has an important role to play in promoting a culture where women and people of color are treated with dignity and respect.

First, I am asking you to advocate for the elimination of the long version of the Ephesians and Colossians readings which are heard by a greater number of Catholics on Sundays and already has approved shorter readings.

Secondly, I ask that you work to eliminate all other subordinating Lectionary texts.

Finally, I request that you encourage all priests in your diocese to counter the damaging effects of these texts in their homilies.

Thank you for your consideration of my request. I assure you of my prayers as I await your reply.

Sincerely,

Sample Letter for Priests

Dear Father (Name)

Greetings of peace.

I'm writing with a request regarding Catholic lectionary readings that impact women adversely and contribute to racism.

As you know, the U.S. Catholic Lectionary includes scripture readings that instruct wives to be subordinate to their husbands and slaves to be obedient to their masters. I am writing to ask you to ensure these texts are not proclaimed during the liturgy in our parish, or if there is no alternative yet, that the homily alert Catholics to the flaws in these readings.

Colossians 3:12-21 and Ephesians 5: 21-32, readings that contain exhortations for wives to be subordinate to their husbands, are heard by more Catholics than the other readings because they are proclaimed on Sundays. I request that the optional shortened versions that exclude the admonitions for wives to be subordinate are always only used.

But there are six Lectionary readings in all that exhort women to be subordinate or slaves to obey their masters. Here is the full list of texts that I request you address:

On the Feast of the Holy Family, Colossians 3: 12-21 exhorts women to be subordinate to their husbands, "as is proper in the Lord." It is proclaimed every year. Instead of Colossians 3:12-21, we recommend that the reading for the Feast of the Holy Family always only be the designated short form, Colossians 3:12-17. This shorter form of the reading excludes the subordinating language and is already also prescribed on Thursday of the Twenty-third Week in Ordinary time (Year I) and in quite a few special Masses. Also, in Year B, Hebrews 11:8, 11-12, 17-19 is an option and in Year C, 1 John 3:1-2, 21-24 is an option. I ask that you ensure that the optional readings are proclaimed in the short run and that you advocate that the longer reading be dropped from the Lectionary and that the shorter reading, Colossians 3:12-17, be made the permanent reading.

On the Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time in Year B, Ephesians 5:21-32 exhorts "wives to be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord." There is an approved optional shorter reading. Ephesians 5: 25-32 excludes the subordinating language. I ask that you ensure that the shorter reading be chosen in all parishes in your diocese and that you advocate for that to become a permanent change.

Wedding celebrations offer Ephesians 5:21-32, Ephesians 5:21-33, or 1 Peter 3:1-9 as options for readings. All three texts admonish women to be subordinate to their husbands. We ask that you ensure that the approved shorter readings --

Ephesians 5:2a, 23-33 or 5:2a, 25-32 be used and that you advocate that all texts promoting women's subordination be excluded from the Lectionary. Instead of 1 Peter 3:1-9, we recommend using 1 Peter 3:8-12, which applies to all people, not just to slaves or married people. Or, since 1 Peter 3:1-9 is only one of several other options, it could also simply be dropped.

Other weekday texts that contain messages of subordination of wives and slaves are as follows:

On the Thirtieth Tuesday in Ordinary Time in Year II Ephesians 3:21-33 which exhorts wives to be subordinate.

On the Thirtieth Wednesday, Ordinary Time, Year II, Ephesians 6: 1-9 which exhorts slaves to obey their masters.

On the Thirty-Second Tuesday in Ordinary Time, Year II, Titus 2:1-8, 11-14 which exhorts older women to train younger women to be "under the control of their husbands."

I believe it is unjust and immoral for the Catholic lectionary to include scripture readings that promote the subordination of women and racism and for parishes to include these readings at liturgies. By doing so, the Church gives authority to these readings which are an affront to human dignity and the Church's efforts to end the sin of racism.

It is dangerous for women in abusive marriages to hear these scripture readings proclaimed. Too often these readings are interpreted as God and the Church affirming abusive behavior. In "When I Call for Help: A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence Against Women," the U.S. Catholic bishops speak about the misinterpretation of scripture to justify the mistreatment of women. "A correct reading of Scripture," the bishops write, "leads people to an understanding of the equal dignity of men and women and to relationships based on mutuality and love."

It is dangerous for people of color to hear racist ideology being confirmed in our Lectionary readings. Too often these readings are interpreted as God and the Church affirming white supremacy. In "Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call To Love, the U.S. Catholic bishops wrote, "Within the walls of the Church, many people of color have experienced discrimination and outright racism. Leadership has been lacking. All too often, leaders of the Church have remained silent about the horrific violence and other racial injustices perpetuated against African Americans and others."

In 1992, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops requested and received permission from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments to include an optional shorter version of the Colossians and Ephesians readings as well as an alternate reading. The shorter version omits the instruction for wives to be subordinate. This action acknowledged these readings as problematic and offered an alternative that expressed pastoral sensitivity.

There is no moral justification for continuing to proclaim Lectionary readings that instruct wives to be subordinate to their husbands or slaves to be obedient to their masters.. Doing so advances the image of the Church as an outdated institution that devalues and denigrates women and people of color.

The Church has an important role to play in promoting a culture where women and people of color are treated with dignity and respect. I am asking you to eliminate the proclamation of the long version of the Ephesians and Colossians readings which are heard by a greater number of Catholics on Sundays and already have an approved shorter reading. Secondly, I ask that you work to eliminate all other subordinating Lectionary texts and when that is not possible, I request that you counter the damaging effects of these texts in your homilies.

*Thank you for your consideration of my request. I assure you of my prayers as I await your reply.
Sincerely,*

Sample Letter to the Editor Regarding The Feast of the Holy Family Readings Only (suggested for Catholic diocesan newspapers)

To the Editor:

The Catholic Lectionary offers a choice of epistle readings for the Feast of the Holy Family. Parish leaders can choose Colossians 3:12-21 that states, “Wives, be subordinate to your husbands, as is proper in the Lord.” They can choose a shorter version of the Colossians reading that omits the instruction to be subordinate. Or they can choose an alternate reading altogether.

Instructing wives to be subordinate to their husbands contradicts Church teaching and pastoral practice. The Catholic Catechism refers to marriage as a partnership between a man and a woman and speaks of mutual love (1602, 1604). The nuptial blessing offered during the Catholic wedding ceremony speaks of a husband “... acknowledging [his wife] as his equal and his joint heir in the life of grace.” Pope Francis writes, “Marriage ... shares everything in constant mutual respect” (Amoris Laetitia).

The Church’s understanding of married love holds no place for subordination.

I urge parish leaders to choose the short version of the Colossians reading or the alternate reading for the Feast of the Holy Family. It’s time to stop promoting outdated notions of women’s roles and give women the dignity and respect they deserve.

Sincerely,

Sample Letter To the Editor Regarding the Feast of the Holy Family Readings Only (suggested for local newspapers)

The Catholic Lectionary offers a choice of epistle readings for the Feast of the Holy Family. Parish leaders can choose Colossians 3:12-21 that states, “Wives, be subordinate to your husbands, as is proper in the Lord.” They can choose a shorter version of the Colossians reading that omits the instruction to be subordinate. Or they can choose an alternate reading instead.

Instructing wives to be subordinate to their husbands perpetuates an outdated understanding of marriage that is inconsistent with Church teaching, which refers to marriage as a partnership and speaks of mutual love (1602, 1604).

It is difficult for women in healthy marriages to hear scripture readings instructing women to be subordinate to their husbands. It is dangerous for women in submissive or abusive marriages to hear these scripture readings proclaimed. They may interpret the instruction as the Church or God affirming immoral behavior.

The Church must stop proclaiming scripture that denigrates women. I urge parish leaders to choose the short version of the Colossians reading or the alternate reading for the Feast of the Holy Family. It’s time to stop promoting outdated notions of women’s roles and give women the dignity and respect they deserve.

Sincerely,

Where to send your letters

The Committee on Divine Worship, a standing committee of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, has the responsibility for all matters relating to the Sacred Liturgy for Latin Rite Dioceses in the United States.

Committee on Divine Worship

*Most Rev. Leonard P. Blair
Archbishop of Hartford
Catholic Archdiocese of Hartford
134 Farmington Ave
Hartford, CT 06105
860-541-6491
860-541-6309 fax
Email contact form: <https://archdioceseofhartford.org/contact/>
Twitter @ArchbishopBlair*

*Committee Chairman
Most Rev. Paul S. Coakley
Archbishop of Oklahoma City
Catholic Archdiocese of Oklahoma City
7501 Northwest Expressway
Oklahoma City, OK 73132
(405)721-5651, Ext. 157
(800)721-5651
Email: rlewis@archokc.org
Twitter @ArchbishopOKC*

*Most Rev. Samuel J. Aquila
Archbishop of Denver
Catholic Archdiocese of Denver
1300 S Steele St.
Denver, CO 80210
(303) 722-4687
Email contact form: <https://archden.org/contact/>
Twitter @ArchbishopDen*

*Most Rev. Joseph M. Siegel
Bishop of Evansville
Catholic Diocese of Evansville
4200 N. Kentucky Avenue
Evansville, IN 47711
(812) 424-5536*

*Most Rev. Christopher J. Coyne
Bishop of Burlington
55 Joy Drive
South Burlington, VT 05403
(802) 658-6110 x 1255
Email: kkunkel@vermontcatholic.org
Twitter @bishopcoyne*

*Most Rev. John T. Folda
Bishop of Fargo
Diocese of Fargo
5201 Bishops Blvd. S., Suite A
Fargo, ND 58104-7605
(701) 356-7944
Rev. Jayson Miller, Secretary to Bishop and Director of Liturgy email: jayson.miller@fargodiocese.org*

*Most Rev. Daniel E. Garcia
Bishop of Monterey
The Roman Catholic Diocese of Monterey
425 Church Street
P.O. Box 2048
Monterey, CA 93942
831 373-4345
831 373-1175 (fax)
Email: bjohnson@dioceseofmonterey.org
Twitter @MontereyDiocese*

*Chairman, Subcommittee on Divine Worship in Spanish
Most Rev. Timothy C. Senior
Rector of St. Charles Borromeo Seminary
Auxiliary Bishop of Philadelphia
Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia
Office of the Auxiliary Bishop
215-587-4507
222 North 17th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103
bsenior@scs.edu
(610) 785-6200
Twitter @StCharlesSem*

*Most Rev. Daniel H. Mueggenborg
Auxiliary Bishop of Seattle
Archdiocese of Seattle
710 9th Avenue
Seattle, WA 98104
Phone: 206-382-4560*

Email contact form: <https://donate.seattlearchdiocese.org/contact-us>

Consultants

Right Rev. Gregory J. Polan, OSB
Abbot Primate of the Benedictine Confederation
Badia Primaziale Sant'Anselmo
Piazza dei Cavalieri di Malta, 5
I-00153 Roma, Italia
Tel: +39 065 791.267
Fax: +39 065 791.374
Email: curiaosb@anselmianum.com

Right Rev. Jeremy Driscoll, OSB
Abbot of Mount Angel Abbey, Oregon
1 Abbey Drive
Saint Benedict, OR 97373
503.845.3030
info@mtangel.edu

Rev. James W. Bessert
Chairman, Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions
Catholic Diocese of Saginaw
5800 Weiss St.
Saginaw, MI 48603
989-797-6665
St. Catherine of Siena Parish of Bay City
989.684.1203

Rev. Ryan T. Ruiz
Professor of Liturgy,
Mount St. Mary's Seminary and School of Theology,
Cincinnati, Ohio
6616 Beechmont Avenue
Cincinnati, OH 45230
Email: rruiz@athenaeum.edu

Sr. Marilú Covani, SP
Vice President, National Hispanic Institute of Liturgy
(909) 475-5336
Email: mcovani@sbdioocese.org

Christopher J. Carstens
Director of Sacred Worship, Diocese of La Crosse
Office for Sacred Worship
608.791.0161
Fax: 608.791.2675
Email contact form: <https://diolc.org/sacredworship/>

Dr. Jennifer Donelson-Nowicka
Director of Sacred Music,
St. Joseph's Seminary, Yonkers, New York

Rita A. Thiron
Executive Director, Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions
415 Michigan Avenue, NE
Suite 70
Washington, DC 20017
202-635-6990
Email: nationaloffice@fdlc.org

A Prayer for Liberation by Nancy Small

*O Liberating Spirit,
You stir in our hearts
with a longing for freedom.
You groan in our souls
with labor pangs of justice.*

*Give us your grace
as we seek an end
to a church and a society
that promotes the subordination of women.*

*Sophia, Wisdom of God,
who passes into holy souls
to make them friends of God and prophets,
prophesy through us
with words that loosen fetters of injustice.
and articulate a vision
of women rising up to claim their rightful place.*

*Ruah, Breath of God,
who swept the Red Sea into walls of water
to create a path of deliverance for a people oppressed,
Stir up the water of our souls
with your breath of life
and make us passageways of your liberating love.*

*Shekinah, Presence of God,
who accompanied the Israelites through the wilderness
as a sacred cloud and pillar of holy fire,
burn in us with the flame of your steadfast presence
as we press on with promise.
Overshadow us with strength enough
to overcome any obstacles that come our way.*

*Emancipating God,
give us the persistence of the widow
whose relentless pleas secured justice from the unjust
judge.
Give us the courage of the Canaanite woman
who demanded she be recognized and refused to be
dismissed.*

*Bless us, Sophia, with your ageless wisdom.
Bless us, Ruah, with your transformative power.
Bless us, Shekinah, with your abiding grace.
Amen.*

A Prayer for Racial Justice

*We give you thanks, O God,
That you speak to us
in ways that often surprise.
And so we pause once more
to remind ourselves to listen for your voice
and to ask for your grace.*

*Open our eyes to read the signs of the times.
Open our ears to hear the voices of the poor and op-
pressed;
the voices of our Black siblings who are enduring the
violence and dehumanization
of white supremacy and white privilege in our communi-
ties and in our institutions.*

*Open our hearts that we might see anew and work
together for a new way of being church.
We ask this in the name of Jesus
and the communion of Black saints who are with us and
who have gone before us,
that we, your church, might be transformed.
Amen.*

Sources

“Amnesia in the Catholic Sunday Lectionary: Women-Silenced from the Memories of Salvation History” by Regina A. Boisclair in **Women and Theology**, Edited by Mary Ann Hinsdale and Phyllis H. Kaminski in *The Annual Publication of the College Theology Society*, 1994, Volume 40 by Orbis Books.

Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets by Renita Weems, 1995, Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis, MN.

“Colossians” by Mary Rose D’ Angelo in *Searching the Scriptures* (1994), edited by Elisabeth Schussler-Fiorenza (pp. 313-324).

Women in the Bible and the Lectionary by Ruth Fox, OSB. Reprinted with permission from the May/June issue of *LITURGY* 90, © 1996, Archdiocese of Chicago. All rights reserved. Liturgy Training Publications, 1800 N. Hermitage Ave., Chicago IL 60622-1101.

Women’s Place: Two Conflicting Views” by Dr. Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ. at https://bcm.bc.edu/issues/summer_2004/features.html

<https://uscatholic.org/articles/201805/how-are-the-sunday-readings-cho-sen/>