

Divine Wisdom

In March of 2018, Catholic women around the world gathered on International Women's Day in Rome for the "Why Women Matter" Conference. Former Irish president Mary McAleese spoke on the inherent patriarchal system which continues to exist in the Catholic Church. McAleese explained that the Church has, "locked women out of any significant role in the Church's leadership, doctrinal development and authority structure" (Pullella, 2018). Catholicism was built upon foundations that not only excluded women from positions of leadership but reinforced male domination (Schenk, 2018). McAleese, frustrated by the outdated tradition of a male-only priesthood, posed the question: "How long can the hierarchy sustain the credibility of a God who wants things this way, who wants a Church where women are invisible and voiceless in Church leadership?" (Pullella, 2018).

Since there are so few leadership positions women can hold, Catholic women do not have strong female role models (BBC News, 2018), and therefore look to the Bible for feminine leadership in Mary Mother of Jesus, Ruth, and Esther. An often overlooked biblical feminine presence is Wisdom. *Chokmah*, wisdom in the Hebrew Bible, is a grammatically feminine term referenced throughout the Bible. Christian feminists have embraced the female presence of Divine Wisdom. Roman Catholic feminist theologian, Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza describes Divine Wisdom as, "a leader of people... she raises her voice in public and calls everyone who hears her... she breaks boundaries, celebrates life, and nourishes those who follow her (Fiorenza, 2014).

This design, *Divine Wisdom*, illustrates the "heavenly body" of wisdom as described in the Book of Proverbs, specifically Proverbs 31:25-26 and Proverbs 4:6-9. "She is clothed with strength and dignity...She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue." (See full translation in design notes.) She is clothed in vestments which women in the Catholic Church are barred from wearing: the chasuble and the stole. The chasuble is the outermost garment a priest wears when celebrating Mass (Holy Communion); and the stole marks one as an ordained recipient of Holy Orders, symbolizing the yoke of Christ and the responsibility to preach the Word.

In a dress made of stoles, *Divine Wisdom* proudly bears the Word of God across her chest. With each step she takes, the Word travels with her. The chasuble, also trimmed with Hebrew scripture, has been transformed into a piece which can be worn around the shoulders as a cape or around the waist as a skirt. The central color of the piece is a deep indigo blue symbolizing trust, power, integrity and wisdom. Embellished details decorate and define through embroidery and goldwork, a technique historically applied to ecclesiastical vestments. Clothed in strength and dignity, *Divine Wisdom* inspires all women to step into roles of leadership and to continue to speak out for the right to use their God-given wisdom and gifts in the church and in the world.

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