

REFLECTION ON ROMAN CATHOLIC/ANGLICAN COMMUNION
CONSULTATION ON ORDINATION OF WOMEN.

1. This Consultation took place from 27 February - 3 March 1978 at the hostel of the French/Protestant Deaconess Community at Versailles. Given that certain Anglican Churches have ordained women to the presbyterate, the question posed to this Consultation was not to discuss whether or not it was right to ordain women (though inevitably this could not be excluded from our dialogue) but rather to consider:

' to what extent and in what ways churches with women priests and churches without women priests can be reconciled in sacramental fellowship.'

A report was agreed and it is hoped that in due course it can be available, but it must await Anglican and Vatican clearance.

2. The membership was as follows:

Roman Catholic Father Yves Congar O.P. (Paris), Father E. Doyle OFM (Franciscan Study Centre, University of Kent, Canterbury), Father Pierre Duprey WF, (Secretariat for Unity), Father John Hotchkin, (Secretary of United States Bishops' Ecumenical Commission), and Mgr: William Purdey (Secretariat for Unity and Co-Secretary of ARCIC)

Anglican Bishop Donald Cameron (Assistant Bishop of Sydney), Bishop Barry Valentine (of Rupertsland, Canada), Professor Fashole-Luke (Fourah Bay College, Sierra Leone), Professor James Griffiss (Sub-Dean Washotah House USA), and myself with Christopher Hill (Assistant Chaplain Archbishop of Canterbury's Counsellors on Foreign Relations and Co-Secretary of ARCIC) as Secretary.

(Father Congar was far from well and only able to attend part of the Consultation and I missed half a day through sickness).

3. Members were sent beforehand:

- A summary of Anglican decisions and Reports on the issue 1968-77.
- A paper on the origins of the Consultation.
- My Ecumenical Review article on the ordination of women in the Anglican Communion and The Ecumenical Debate.
- Anglicans were also sent the Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood (interinsigniores) prepared by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and its accompanying commentary.

On arrival, we received two further papers:

- a paper by Mgr: Purdey on the Ordination of Women and Anglican/Roman Catholic Relations, using my paper as a framework for his comments and information.
- a short paper by Father Hotchkin (with massive attached documentation) being an American report on Anglicans and Roman Catholics on the Ordination of Women,

We were also given a book, published by the Council of the Laity at the Vatican on the Church and the International Women's Year (but this was recognised as peripheral to our main question).

4. It did not appear that any of those present were convinced that it was impossible for women to be priests. Of the Roman Catholics: Father Doyle and Father Hotchkin believed in the Ordination of Women: the other three were committed to the statement that the Roman Catholic Church believes that she has not the right to change the tradition unbroken throughout the history of the Church universal in the East and West and considered to conform to God's plan for his Church. Within this view, there were some variations of emphasis: Father Congar, for example, thought the question was not a clear one: there was no evidence that a male priesthood

was de jure divino and an Ecumenical Council was needed. (It would seem that Father Conger may himself have been responsible for keeping out of the Declaration any reference to the traditional position being de jure divino.) It was, incidentally, not wholly clear whether they thought that such a Council would consist of Roman Catholics, and Orthodox only or would also include Anglicans and Old Catholics: in discussion, I pointed out that some Anglicans would not be happy at this drawing of the line simply below the Anglican Communion, what, for example, of the Scandinavian Lutherans? Nor were the Roman Catholics certain whether it would need an ecumenical council to regard the exclusion of the ordination of women as de jure divino. Among the Anglicans, three of us were committed to the ordination of women: Bishop Valentine, who was responsible for a number of papers for the Canadian House of Bishops has not himself yet ordained a woman as he wishes to wait until after Lambeth; he said that, for many in the Canadian Church this issue was simply a step along the way of the far more important thorough re-examination of the christian ministry, ordained and lay. Professor Griffiss, who has been particularly interested in this as test case for understanding Anglican Authority, appears to regard this question as in large measure theological reflection on a pastoral problem: definition was subsequent to pastoral development: he reacted strongly, and defensively to any calling in question of the ordinations by the Episcopal Church (was this reaction particularly strong because of his own earlier personal reservations on their pastoral wisdom?) and to my mind rightly refused to allow the context of our debate to be that of Anglicans having to meet Roman Catholic objections. (I was the third Anglican in favour). Both Bishop Cameron and Professor Fashole-Luke have reservations. Bishop Cameron said that the issue had only come to the Australian agenda because of the ACC and he thought it raised questions of authority and God's purpose in the Church: What experiments were illegitimate? Professor Fashole-Luke, who is currently working on the concept of tradition, appeared to wish to place the tradition of a culture (e.g. African culture) on the same standing as the tradition, and to see both as liable to change. His position was not always easy to identify: on the one hand, he valued the ACC for the international support it afforded to African Churches e.g in Zaire, when under political pressure, but he also seemed somewhat resent the imposition by the ACC of this Western question on the African Churches: he dismissed the response of the Church of Kenya, implying, I think that it was done to please ACC. I am familiar with the great emphasis on the importance of the African cultural and religious tradition on the way that Africans do theology and it must be taken as seriously as black or liberation theology, but I am not at all sure that the West African educated women I know would agree with his reading of the cultural context (Father Hotchkin more or less said this from his Nairobi experience), and it contrasts oddly with the fact, told us by the Prior of the Deaconess Community that, alone in that community, Soeur Marie-Madeleine Mandy, a Camerounian, has been ordained pastor, because the situation in the Presbyterian Church in the Cameroun called for it!

5. It is clear that, behind this whole question lies a major distraction of style, possibly of doctrine between our two Communions. Magisterium is all important for Roman Catholics, and therefore it becomes important e.g. to examine the Declaration inter insigniores to discover its standing: Karl Rahner finds it an authentic declaration of the Roman magisterium but does not regard its arguments as supporting its conclusion; we were told that a Declaration is the lowest rank of Curial document, it does not end study and discussion; the accompanying commentary has no official standing. Hence also the importance felt that the Declaration had not said that the exclusion of women from the priesthood was de jure divino (though as one question raised put it: if a stand is taken on the position that the Church does not feel herself empowered to change, because the existing state of things is the will of Christ for his Church, what is the difference between that and saying it is de jure divino?)

The Anglican Communion, made up as it is of autonomous churches and provinces, does not operate through a central, binding authority. Not only are Anglican churches diverse in practice, but they believe that they are expressing their unity in and through legitimate diversity.

6. Two questions follow from this. Firstly, is the ordination of women part of legitimate diversity? It was noted that, at a recent meeting of ARCIC, it had been made clear that Anglicans did not see the ordination of women as a departure from the agreed statement of the ministry: those Anglican churches that ordain women believe that they are, being both faithful to tradition and expressing a legitimate new development. (In general, it can be noted that no Anglican Church/Province seems to have declared such ordination to be inherently impossible; though the arguments, e.g. of the Declaration, find echoes in our churches, no church or province has based an official decision on such arguments: negative decisions seem to imply: 'it is inopportune,' 'not yet', 'divisive,' rather than simply 'impossible'). The second question is, of course, given these two different styles, is there any hope that the goal of full communion can be attained between our churches unless either Roman Catholics themselves ordain women or Anglicans give up such ordinations? (It should be noted that it is part of the Anglican understanding of openness to the Spirit is that it must also mean a readiness to submit decisions to the experience of the Church: it might be found not to be of God).
7. Unlike the Orthodox (who seem to entertain some strange hope that Lambeth will simply tell the American, Canadian, New Zealand and Hong Kong Churches to stop ordaining women, and who appear to regard their action as meaning that Anglicans have lost their specificity over against Protestant churches) informed Roman Catholics recognise that, for the immediate future, the Anglican Communion will have women priests. It was noted that ARCIC itself had not, in the Statement on the Ministry, considered the question as to who was 'capax' of ordination. (There ~~was~~ some evidence from Mgr: Purdey's paper that, in spite of his frequent pressure, the Secretariat for Unity for long refused to take seriously the possibility of Anglican ordination of women to priesthood.)
8. It is clear that the Roman Catholics present were anxious that this matter should not finally prove an obstacle to full communion but the dilemma remains: if they believe it hazardous to ordain women, can they recognise it as legitimate for us to do so? It is clear that the whole Roman Catholic style and approach makes it difficult for them to say yes, but they are very anxious to keep the question open, in the hope that further work together, not simply on this issue, may keep the way forward.
9. One question raised by Mgr: Purdey, ought to be further considered. He pointed out that Limuru ACC had recommended Anglican churches and Provinces to consult with other Churches in their areas. He wondered whether, apart from the USA, this had been done. The fullest information available to me when I wrote my article related to the American Episcopal Church's consultation with Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches (and even they had found it difficult to mount consultation with non-Episcopal Churches.) At the Consultation we learned of similar Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue in Canada, (where of course the Anglican Church, through long negotiations with the United Church of Canada which has women ministers, would have been familiar with the arguments from their side). It does not appear that, apart from some joint study of the issue with the Methodists, (resulting in a small but useful report) at the time of Anglican-Methodist Unity discussions, we have done anything comparable in England. The question that rises in my mind is this: was such dialogue possible in North America precisely because the question is a live issue in the Roman Catholic Church

there, whereas in England, some Theologians and individuals apart, it is not a serious question for Roman Catholics?

10. What of the future? Though there ^{are} (largely unregarded) voices of Theologians raised in favour of Roman Catholic ordination of women, the present position has the support of the vast majority of the Bishops and it unlikely to change. Only in the United States does this appear to be a burning question and it is always possible (probably unfairly) to write this off as a yielding to secular and women's movement pressures. At the same time, it seems likely that, whatever the Church of England does or does not decide this November, the number of Anglican Churches/Provinces that ordain women will gradually increase. (Note that nothing comparable to the American schism seems to have taken place in Canada, which apparently remains peaceful and it seems clear that in ECUSA, though many remain unhappy, the actual size and importance of the schismatic group has been exaggerated here).
11. Is there then an impasse? Two possibilities: first of all Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue needs to pursue a whole number of matters which affect this issue: e.g. continued work on ministry, our understanding of tradition, creation, human sexuality etc. It may be that deeper understanding may throw light on this other issue. But I see one other possibility, (however remote and unlikely). On the face of it the Roman Catholic Church seems to be in a period of slightly conservative reaction after all the exuberance of the Council and post-Council period. But, if Vatican II was, at least in part, a response both to a serious situation within the Roman Catholic Church e.g. in Western Europe, and its need to meet quite different cultural conditions in Africa (where Christianity is growing faster than anywhere else in the world) then it may be that, far from settling down to a period of consolidation, the Roman Catholic Church may, once again, have to reset to very serious problems. For example, from both fairly traditional (but not Lefebvre type) Roman Catholic friends, and a shrewd French Protestant, I heard similar accounts of the current problems of the Roman Catholic Church in France. It is said that, not only did Frenchmen make the running at the Council, but that the French Bishops have continued to press forward, and that there is abandonment of Catechism, questioning of Celibacy (and even practise of concubinage), and general confusion leading to further desertions from the practice of catholicism (Lefebvre and all that apart). (My Protestant informants, however, also spoke in glowing terms of the magnificent renewal of the women's religious communities, and their radical redeployment of their considerable wealth in imaginative new ways for the service of the church and of people in general). Likewise, Bishop Valentine said that there would soon be no Roman Catholic work in Northern Canada because the church would have no priests to send: there has been a collapse of vocations. The situation in Africa again, varies, but it is at least possible that African Roman Catholics may, as certain African Anglicans and Protestants have already done, start to challenge the European-American dominance of the Church and Theology. If any of these things happen then, whether it wants to or not, the Roman Catholic Church may, once again, need to look radically at its situation: But would this involve considering the ordination of women? Several points to be noted: women religious of active communities have come to occupy a sociological role not unlike that of the clergy: to give work to them to do is 'safer' than giving it to laity. But, supposing they simply disappear and vocations (except perhaps to contemplative communities) dry up? (They never have really 'taken on' in Africa). The Church accustomed to women religious doing things (even if seen as a sort of 'third sex') might tolerate other women doing it. Indeed this is already happening: women, so Father Congar said, already do far more than the deaconesses of the early Church did. Indeed, in part of Latin America and Africa so great is the shortage of

priests that women religions not only run parishes but are the ministers of the Eucharist using the reserved sacrament to do so.

- 12. To return briefly to our own Communion. Maybe we have an experience to try, not only for our own sakes, but also for the sake of other Churches. Just as one Anglican Province will watch the experience that another has of women priests and ask what may be the learning from it, transferred to its own context, so, if we are neither fearful nor arrogant, perhaps we, (as many other churches have already done), may have something to offer by way of experience to the Church Catholic and Universal.

7 March 1978