

From : CANON D. M. PATON

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The Revd C.J.Hill,  
Palace Court, Lambeth.

Dear Mr Hill,

Thank you very much for your letter about Limuru and all that. I was there as a consultant, and I had also been in the sub-committees before and at Lambeth which set up the ACC, so I understood the nature of the animal pretty well; but I am still not sure how to answer your question. I recall very little of any of the discussions; and indeed I suspect that what made the Limuru decision possible was a change that had already begun to take place in the way the thing was handled. (In this respect, the situation is not unlike Vatican II, which disclosed a very widespread but unsuspected change of a not totally dissimilar kind.)

1. At some point in the '60s the dynamics of the debate changed. Until this point, the opponents of the ordination of women to the priesthood had been able to keep those in favour on the defensive. There came a point when the balance of forces shifted, and the traditionalists were themselves forced on to the defensive. I would date this in the C of E to the Church Assembly debate on Women and Holy Order in 1967 (I think) and in particular to the speech of Geoffrey Lampe in which he demolished in particular the arguments of Demant in that report. No one in serious discussion has since been able to talk about women in that way. (That doesn't mean that many Orthodox and some Romans won't go on doing so.)

2. My recollection is that at Lambeth '68 it was felt that the forces in favour of ordination were stronger than those against but no one was quite certain enough to force the battle to a conclusion.

3. The ACC people at Limuru had (and I think felt they had) a legitimacy which was new. (1) They were bishops priests and laity and not only bishops (2) The thing had been set up not merely (like its wet predecessors) by bishops but by formal approving decision of the supreme courts of all the Provinces (bishops priests and laity again). (3) The Provinces had manifestly chosen to represent them at this new (and therefore unrepeatable) occasion solid citizens who might not be all scholars or whatever but were people who had the confidence of those who appointed them. (4) The meeting itself had a very good balance between worship, work, and friendship (Philip Potter and Newbigin were much impressed by this) and was of a sensible size and meeting in a sensible place.

4. It was the kind of body which would take seriously the considered repeated request of Hongkong; and would feel free to take a line if impressed.

/detailed/ I enclose a long piece about Hongkong, of which you may find in particular the last pages suggestive. I do not think that anybody at Limuru was in any depth aware of this history - I myself only discovered the connexion between Lei Tim-oi and RO on the one hand and Jane Wang and Joyce Bennett on the other about a year ago - but Limuru felt, I think, that these people were serious and should be taken seriously.

5. You will perceive in my paper that Geoffrey Fisher won round 1 by limiting the debate to the question of whether or not RO was ultra vires, and RO never found a way to establish his 'Cornelius' position against him. But in the end of course when it came to Limuru, it was the Cornelius doctrine that won. Dublin 1973's summary with its repeated emphasis on the Holy Spirit is revealing; and explains why the Dublin vote was nearly unanimous.

I think this suggests why the issue of communion between Anglican provinces which do ordain and those which don't was not (as I recall) either at Limuru or at Dublin the kind of major issue which (some kinds of) RCs think it should be. If the issue is discussed in the precedent/ultra vires way in which Temple and Fisher dealt with RO Hall, then it is a major question. If it is handled on the Cornelius kind of basis, it is not. Some provinces have recognized that the Spirit calls some women as some men to the priesthood and have acted; other provinces have not experienced this His action, or have not yet recognized it, but they recognize the integrity of one another in the Spirit.

6. This does involve a different perspective; but is it any more different than e.g. Canon B 15A on admission to communion compared with previous official Anglican ways of thinking, or some of the Roman changes, especially in the way that in some (NOT all!) quarters theology has ceased to be a branch of canon law, so to speak.

I hope this is of some use to you. If not, I am sorry. I should like the article back in due course please.

Yours sincerely,

*David Paton*