

Inter-church talks on woman priests

The full text of the findings of a joint consultation on the ordination of women, convened by the Anglican Consultative Council and the Vatican Secretariat for Christian Unity and held in Versailles, from February 27 to March 3 this year, is given below.

The consultation was under the joint chairmanship of the Right Rev Barry Valentine, Bishop of Rupert's Land in the Anglican Church of Canada, and Father John Hotchkin, secretary of the Ecumenical Commission of the Roman Catholic Bishops' Conference of the United States. The text is as follows:

Given that certain churches of the Anglican Communion have ordained women to the presbyterate, the question posed to the consultation was not to question whether or not it is right to ordain women, but to "consider to what extent and in what way churches with woman priests and churches without woman priests can be reconciled in sacramental fellowship".

A substantial majority in each Anglican Church accepts the possibility of ordaining women to the presbyterate. Some churches have already proceeded to such ordinations. At this time no Anglican church has officially stated that such ordinations are impossible, though some churches have not yet considered the question officially and others have for various reasons decided not to ordain women, at least for the present. 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 in the West", and considered to conform to God's plan for his Church.

Given these two positions, the question must be: is it still possible for our two churches to establish full communion between them and if so how, since the full communion presupposes the mutual recognition of ministry? On the one hand could the Roman Catholic Church, which judges it impossible, for theological reasons to ordain women, recognize such ordinations in the Anglican Communion? How could she hold such ordinations impossible for her yet possible for the Anglican Communion?

On the other hand, many Anglicans find it difficult to accept the official Roman Catholic position (as expressed for example in the declaration *Inter Insigniores*) that the ministry of the Church is not open to this development. Many Anglicans consider the ordination of women to be both faithful to tradition and to express a legitimate new development.

Within the tension and divergence which they are experiencing over this question the autonomous provinces of the Anglican Communion believe they are expressing their real sense of unity in diversity.

With the statements of the Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission and with the sharing and collaboration which are growing everywhere between Anglicans and Roman Catholics, we continue to discover new hopes of unity; hence it has seemed to us necessary to pose the problem in its clearest form. Because of their mutual esteem neither communion take lightly the fact that the other seems either to do something not warranted by the will of

Christ for his Church or to be lacking in sensitivity to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Two things may be seen as ground for hope. First there is the fact that those Anglican churches which have proceeded to ordain women to the presbyterate have done so in the conviction that they have not departed from the traditional understanding of apostolic ministry (expressed for example in the Canterbury statement of the Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission). In the second place there is the fact that the recent Roman Catholic declaration does not affirm explicitly that this matter is *De Jure Divino*. These facts would seem not to exclude the possibility of future developments. These developments might well be stimulated by deeper dialogue on those noticeable differences which have been emphasized by this new obstacle; matters such as human sexuality, cultural and tradition, freedom and authority, among others. Simultaneously, despite the difficulty in this issue, both Anglicans and Roman Catholics feels themselves committed to continue exploring the new shapes of ministry to which the Holy Spirit may be calling them, as well as to a new sense of unity with one another. The rapidity of change in our times, the great diversities of culture and circumstance in which the churches must minister and the growing characteristic contribution of the third world to theology, demand openness, flexibility and a readiness to accept and affirm differences in form and style. How this is to be achieved in fidelity to the tradition which we share is one of the challenges which face the Church in our time.

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