



NEWS

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ANGLICAN-CATHOLIC CONSULTATION ISSUES STATEMENT ON THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN

WASHINGTON--The Anglican-Roman Catholic Consultation, whose goal is to help the two churches arrive at full communion and organic unity, declared in a statement that possible future divergence in the teaching of the respective churches on the ordination of women would introduce "an important new element" into officially appointed dialogues, conversations and covenants at many levels.

"However," the statement continued, "the members of ARC are convinced that this difference would not lead to ARC's termination or to the abandonment of its declared goal."

The statement asserted that the question of ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate has become "an increasingly pressing issue in our churches," but the state of the question is not the same in both. The General Convention of the

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Episcopal Church is expected to consider the question at its meeting in September, 1976, the statement noted, while "the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church has recently reaffirmed its position that only men are to be ordained to the priesthood."

The Anglican-Roman Catholic Consultation in the U.S.A. has been meeting since 1965 under the auspices of the Joint Commission on Ecumenical Relations of the Episcopal Church and the Roman Catholic Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs. The co-chairmen of the Consultation are Rt. Reverend Arthur A. Vogel, Episcopal Bishop of West Missouri, and Most Reverend Charles H. Helmsing, Bishop of the Catholic diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, Mo.

The Consultation, whose membership includes Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops and theologians, has issued several studies and statements on matters of common concern to the churches in recent years, including an Agreed Statement on the Purpose of the Church, published last month. It also convened a special consultation of scholars to discuss the question of the ordination of women last June.

The Anglican-Roman Catholic Statement on the Ordination of Women was prepared at a meeting of the Consultation held in Erlanger, Kentucky, in late October and made public November 7. The statement

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alluded to the report of the June convocation which, in a section on the development of tradition, declared in part that "any decision, whether for or against the ordination of women, will in fact require the church to explain or develop its essential Tradition in an unprecedented way. The church, therefore, faces an issue which demands of it a new effort at self-understanding in regard to certain elements of the Gospel."

The present ARC statement says: "If the churches are to change their age-long practice...the claim that there is no strong reason against the ordination of women must be reinforced by strong arguments for it, since the desirability of change does not automatically follow from acceptance of its possibility. In any case, whether a change is advocated or a tradition affirmed, adequate theological reflection is necessary on the part of all concerned, because a decision of either sort would involve a response to a question never before raised in this way."

"The question of ordination of women presents problems within both the Roman Catholic and the Anglican communions; so also do the Marian dogmas," the Statement continued. "Both of these issues are relevant to a deep concern for womanhood in the life of the world and the economy of salvation. In both our churches there is a growing realization that women should have a more effective voice in all areas of church life,

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befitting their dignity as human persons made in the image and likeness of God."

"A difference in practice between our churches on ordination of women would inevitably raise the question of its effect upon the goal of full communion and organic unity," the ARC statement said. "If this goal is thought of as requiring uniformity in doctrine and discipline concerning candidates for ordination, the problem would indeed be a serious one," it acknowledged. "However," the Statement continued, "there is a development in theological thought about Church unity toward accepting diversity as a gift of the Holy Spirit who endows churches as well as individuals with varied gifts."

"The ecumenical task," the Statement declared, "is to inquire whether one church can fully recognize another in the midst of differences; whether both can discern a substantial unity in faithfulness to the Gospel amid varied expressions and understandings... Particular controverted issues of church life may represent different ways of manifesting God's grace, as the Spirit has guided us." The Statement further declared:

"There is a particular urgency for mutual consultation before important decisions are taken by either of the two churches which already share so much in common and which intend to persevere in seeking together that unity for which Christ prayed. This process of mutual consultation, however, must not interfere with the interacting roles of prophecy and authority within

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each church...It is the proper role of authority in the Church to encourage and promote discernment of such witness, thus fostering an authentic development while at the same time maintaining the integrity of a normative Christian life and tradition."

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