

SHOULD  
WOMEN  
BE  
PRIESTS?

R. W. HOWARD

262.1  
H85

SHOULD WOMEN BE PRIESTS?

**ANNA HOWARD SHAW CENTER**

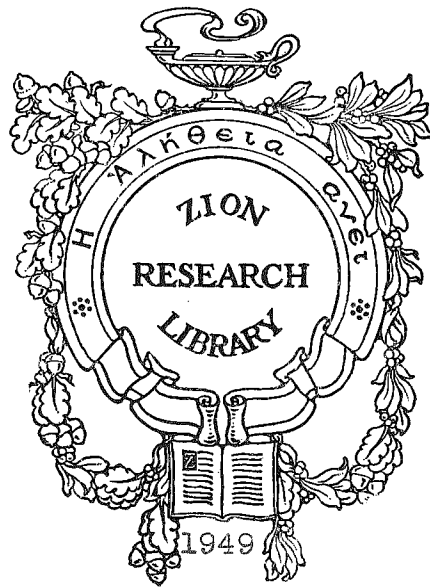
B.U.S. Th.  
745 Commonwealth Ave.  
Boston, MA

.ian

SHOULD WOMEN BE PRIESTS?

*ANNA HOWARD SHAW CE*

B.U.S. Th.  
745 Commonwealth A  
Boston, MA



ALMA LUTZ COLLECTION

*The Church and Woman*

'How shall it be done with me as Thou hast said? . . . For my sex is an obstacle as Thou knowest, Lord . . . because it is contemptible in men's eyes. . . . But the Lord answered, "I pour out the favour of My Spirit on whom I will. There is neither male nor female, plebeian or noble. All are equal before me. . . . Therefore, my daughter, it is My will that thou appear before the public."'

*From the diary of St. Catherine of Siena.*

# SHOULD WOMEN BE PRIESTS?

THREE SERMONS

*preached before the University of Oxford*

BY

CANON R. W. HOWARD

*Master of St. Peter's Hall, Oxford*

WITH A FOREWORD BY

CANON L. HODGSON, D.D.

*Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford*

262.1  
H85

## FOREWORD

I HEARD these three sermons preached before the university by the Master of St. Peter's Hall, and I have urged him to have them printed so that they may reach a wider public. I am myself one of those who hold with Canon Howard that the ordination of women to the priesthood and their consecration to the episcopate is a step forward which our Lord is urging upon His Church, and I believe that sooner or later the whole Church on earth—Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant—will hear and be obedient to His voice. Whether this will be sooner, later or never, depends upon the extent to which such arguments as are here brought forward win general acceptance or are shown to be mistaken.

To attempt immediate action without greater agreement than at present exists in the Church would, in my judgment, do more harm than good. If women are ever to be ordained priests in the Church of England, Churchmen in general must become so convinced of the rightness of the step that it can be taken without the disruption that would be caused to-day. This means that the way must be prepared by widespread and thorough discussion. Unfortunately the subject is so charged with emotional dynamite that dispassionate discussion is difficult to secure. I must confess that the coward in me, which shrinks from strife,

learned St. Timothy's lesson: he has put aside fear and faced the issue with power and love and a sound mind. He challenges us to do the same, and the challenge must be met.

Whether it will be sooner or later that the question is settled, time will show. The immediate necessity is that the discussion should be carried on at the scholarly and spiritual level to which it has been raised in these sermons.

LEONARD HODGSON

CHRIST CHURCH  
OXFORD

*March 26, 1949*

## PREFACE

LET me explain that I am no ardent feminist. Indeed, I have to confess, not without shame, that in the times of my ignorance (I can only hope that God winked at them) I twice voted as a younger Cambridge M.A. against the admission of women to degrees in my own university.

My repentance came about thus. In 1946 I was honoured by an invitation to preach the annual sermon of the Church of England Zenana Missionary Society. Choosing as my theme the emancipation of women through Christianity, I was horrified to discover, during my study of the subject, the mountainous barricades of obscurantism and prejudice, chiefly masculine, but partly feminine, over which the pioneers of that emancipation had been forced to climb, while winning for women those positions of liberty and of equal privilege with men which nobody questions to-day.

Honesty then thrust upon me a further question. Must the threefold ministry remain man's last, inviolable stronghold? Is that God's will? Emotional preference and respect for Church tradition led me at first, as I am sure they still lead a majority (now steadily decreasing) of Church people, to answer 'Yes'. But cold reason prevailed, imposing the clear duty of facing the facts of the case and the

me gave me an opportunity to share with Anglican and Free Church hearers the fruits of my findings. I owe the decision to seek publication for the three sermons entirely to the regius professor. Except for a few verbal corrections, they are here printed exactly as they were delivered.

R.W.H.

## CONTENTS

	PAGE
FOREWORD . . . . .	v
PREFACE . . . . .	vii
I. THE PRECEDENTS . . . . .	i
II. THE PRINCIPLES . . . . .	13
III. PRACTICAL PROBLEMS . . . . .	29
NOTES . . . . .	46
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	48

# SHOULD WOMEN BE PRIESTS?

I

(Nov. 2, 1947)

## THE PRECEDENTS

'And it came to pass soon afterwards, that He went about through cities and villages, preaching and bringing the good tidings of the kingdom of God, and with Him the twelve, and certain women which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary that was called Magdalene, from whom seven devils had gone out, and Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto them of their substance.'—ST. LUKE viii. 1-3 (R.V.)

TOWARDS the end of last month two important announcements in *The Times*, made within two days of each other, will have attracted the attention of all those who are interested in higher education, and especially the education of women.

October 21st saw the launching of an appeal for the raising of £25,000, to provide, as a memorial to a distinguished Oxford man, Archbishop Temple, a theological college for educated women, where they may be trained, by the study of theology and sociology, to give, under the auspices of the Church, intelligent service to men, women and



placed near one of the universities. May God prosper the plan.

Two days later, on October 23rd, just a month before her wedding, Princess Elizabeth laid the foundation-stone of the new and important St. Mary's College for women at Durham University, so fulfilling a hope fifty years old. The photograph in *The Times* showed a proposed group of noble buildings, of which any new foundation might be proud. When the President of Corpus Christi College introduced, last Tuesday, the decree by which St. Peter's Hall, to its own great happiness and, I hope, not without the prospect of increased usefulness to this university, was admitted to the privileges of a new foundation, he reminded Convocation that such a foundation must occupy buildings worthy of its aims. St. Mary's College, Durham, will amply satisfy that requirement.

Let me suppose it probable that in a few years, when these two important colleges for women are well into their stride; a woman student, possessing exceptional intellectual ability, depth of character and of spiritual life, and a strong desire for the service of her fellow men and women, might go to her principal, as a woman undergraduate might go here at Oxford, and say this: 'I feel strongly that God is calling me to devote my life to the exercise of a whole-time religious and spiritual ministry of service to others in the Church to which I myself owe so much. Can you then tell me whether the Church of England to-day can offer me the opportunity of such service; and, if so, upon what terms?'

answer that question, definitely and succinctly. For the proposed new book of Canon Law sets out, quite clearly, the functions of a deaconess; and it is only as a deaconess that an ordained woman can give such service to the Anglican Church to-day. In brief, here are the relevant terms of her service, as defined in the proposed new canons.

The candidate must be a communicant, over twenty-five years of age, physically fit and found, after due examination, to be of good life and to possess a sufficient knowledge of Holy Scripture and of the doctrine, discipline and worship of the Church of England. She must have been appointed to a cure of souls, or a teaching post in a college or school, or belong to a religious order. She must be able to prove that adequate provision has been made for her salary, insurance and pension. She may then be admitted by the bishop of a diocese to the order of deaconesses by prayer and the laying on of hands.

And her duties? I think it will be to this part of the catalogue that the inquirer will listen with the keenest attention. I will therefore quote the full and exact words of the proposed canon: 'It belongs to the office of a Deaconess, in the place where she is licensed to serve, to exercise a pastoral care over women, young people and children, to visit the sick and the whole, to instruct the people in the faith, and to prepare them for the reception of the sacraments.'

And if the candidate, after a moment of consideration, were to reply: 'But surely all the duties

school or 'college?'—the principal of her college, if honest, must answer: 'Yes, that is true'.

But if the principal is not merely honest, but has studied the facts of the case carefully, she ought, I think, to offer a further warning, and to say this: 'If you become a deaconess at the age of twenty-five, and are appointed to serve in a parish, you must be prepared for the following situation to arise. On any given Sunday morning, when Holy Communion is being administered, you may be obliged to watch a small boy of ten or twelve years old, whom you yourself have prepared for confirmation and for the reception of the Sacrament, and to whom, on the previous Sunday, you gave instruction in the faith from the pulpit—to watch that small boy acting as a server within the sanctuary rails, and preparing the bread and wine for the celebrant, while you yourself must remain outside the sanctuary; nor must you occupy the pulpit at that service. And this restriction will be imposed upon you, because you are a deaconess and not a deacon—in short, because you are a female and not a male; and for no other reason whatsoever.'

Such a situation as that would seem to many people, at first sight, to contain elements of glaring incongruity and anomaly—perhaps even of injustice. But it is not a situation that has been arrived at deliberately or suddenly. It embodies a tradition, an almost unbroken tradition, now centuries old, and one which is firmly held by the main episcopal branches of the Catholic Church: and I use the word

I have just recited. The tradition of restriction on the ministry of women rests, like the main arch of this university church, on two supporting pillars: on precedent and on principle. Both are important. Down the centuries they have acted and reacted on each other. But for the purpose of a clear understanding of this thorny problem they can, and must, be separated. It is a problem I could have wished to avoid. I may be accused, in approaching it to-day, of seeking to rush in where angels fear to tread. But the angels are soon to adorn the pathway. For I am given to understand that the status of women in the Church will be dealt with, next summer, by one group of bishops drawn from the world-wide Anglican Communion into their next assembly at Lambeth. I believe also that some of those leaders who will meet next year, as representatives of the World Council of Churches (that is, all Christian Churches except the Roman Catholic), are already considering this problem of the status of women in the Church. Perhaps, therefore, my invasion of the contested territory may not, after all, be as foolish as would at first appear.

Let me then to-day confine myself to the fairly firm ground of precedent, of history; in my second sermon here I shall try to walk warily on the much more slippery slope of principle.

What are the precedents which have created, in our own Church, the present status of women? Obviously I can only touch lightly on the main points of the story. But I believe the outline can be made to stand out, clearly and simply.

instinct, in primitive practice. You will recall the pre-Christian duties of Vestal virgins, Sibyls, pythonesses and the like. And to-day, in parts of Africa, for example, women priestesses carry out all the functions which a male priest might perform, without hindrance or inferiority.

In pre-Christian Judaism women, though present, apparently took no active part in the sacrifices but performed such subordinate duties—if it is a subordinate duty—as that of ‘sweet singing in the choir’. Deborah, Miriam and Huldah were notable prophetesses. But it seems that in the synagogue the sexes were segregated. And we never hear of Jewish women or girls being instructed in the Law—that is, given a normal education. They could not therefore be trained for appointment as rabbis. In general, the position of women in the Old Testament was one of emphatic subordination to men. In the words of one Old Testament scholar<sup>18</sup>: ‘The majority of Jewish women were entirely dependent on men, and became in religious matters a sort of appendix to their husbands’.

It is therefore not surprising to read, in St. John, chapter iv, that when the disciples returned from the town to the well at Samaria, they ‘marvelled that Jesus was talking with a woman’. But in that act, that conversation, and many others like it, between our Lord and women, what a refreshing new world of relationship we enter: a world of perfect naturalness, sympathy and understanding. Though verbal argument is never compelling, it is surely significant that the Greek verb from which

the verb *διακονέω*, is never used of the ministry of his male disciples to Christ, but is more than once used of the service which women rendered Him—as it is used in my texts. And yet—a point of great importance later as a precedent—Jesus appointed no woman an apostle—not even His own Mother.

St. Paul, to whom I next turn, seems to slip back into the old Jewish atmosphere of subordination; at least he does so in the directions for church order given in 1 Corinthians. He bases his arguments on the second creation story in Genesis. But in that epistle he is dealing with church order rather than with spiritual status. And it is from St. Paul that Christianity derives one of the most daring and revolutionary utterances of the New Testament, in Galatians iii: ‘There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.’

I pass to the Acts. There it appears that women were present in the upper room, and at Pentecost. Priscilla, we are told, taught Apollos. The four virgin daughters of Philip were prophetesses. We hear of Phoebe, the *διάκονος* of Cenchrææ. The Pastoral Epistles define the duties of women deacons.

We reach the post-Biblical period. In the year 112, in his famous dispatch from Bithynia to the Emperor Trajan, Pliny speaks of torturing ‘*duas ancillas quae vocantur ministræ*’. Were they Christian slave-girls, or deaconesses? We should give much to know that.

In the early centuries, it is in the Eastern Church

passages<sup>2</sup> in the *Syriac Didascalia*, a document probably dating from the second half of the third century. This book shows that deaconesses were greatly needed for missionary service. Being women, they could enter heathen homes and minister to the sick. At the sacrament of baptism, which then involved total immersion and the anointing of the body, deaconesses could not only preserve decency by assisting at the baptism of heathen women; they afterwards instructed those baptised. In a remarkable trio of similitudes in this book, Christians are commanded to reverence the bishop with the honour due to Almighty God; while the deacon is to be loved 'in the place of Christ', and the deaconess is to be 'honoured in the place of the Holy Spirit'.

Meanwhile, in the Church of the West, we hear nothing of deaconesses in the first four centuries. Perhaps the influence of Africa was too strongly against it. And the Western Church could never forget the ecclesiastical horrors perpetrated by the Montanists of the East; Prisca and Maximilla, the notorious Montanist prophetesses, who—it was alleged,<sup>3</sup> perhaps in a libellous slander—were sometimes adorned with dyed hair and painted eyelids, became a standing type of what the Church might expect to sink to if female ministry were encouraged. We may note here that in the dangerous wave of modern Montanism—or is it Donatism?—which at this moment is sweeping across East Africa, a grave problem for the Church, women play a prominent part. If women are restricted, it

from the fifth to the twelfth century. There is the beautiful epitaph, dated 539, on Theodora, the 'deaconess of blessed memory', who died at Pavia. In the tenth century, when St. Nilus Junior visited Capua, and the city came out to meet him, the welcoming party included, we are told, 'one deaconess, who was over the monastery there, and was accompanied by her chaplain, a young man in the full bloom of his manhood'. Those words 'over the monastery' are significant. For the menace of barbarism had driven men and women into monastic life. And Christian asceticism, as Dr. Burkitt has shown, tended towards the equalisation of the sexes. So, the deaconess died ecclesiastically, so to speak, in giving birth to the abbess—with her often remarkable power, liturgical and administrative—and to the consecrated nun.

For some centuries after the twelfth, the office of deaconess seems to have been defunct in episcopal Churches. The Byzantine Church, under Moslem influence, had already extinguished the order: hence it was not conveyed by that Church to the Russian Orthodox Church, though in that Church to-day there are many women doing duty as servers within the sanctuary. In the next succeeding centuries it was the erratic sects, like the Cathari and the Mennonites, who employed female ministers. Later, in the free Independent Churches, female ministry was often regarded as irregular, though the charismatic gift was evidently bestowed upon women. A *cause célèbre* was that of Anne Hutchinson in Boston, New England, in the early seventeenth

week, when they usually met at her house, three-score or fourscore persons'. 'After she had repeated the (Sunday) sermon, she would make her comment upon it . . . the custom was, for her Scholars to propound questions, and she (gravely sitting in the chaire) did make answers thereunto.' At her trial for not discontinuing these meetings, at which the doctrines taught were not acceptable to the authorities, she made a bold stand. 'If God give me a spirit of Prophecy,' she urged, 'I may use it'; and she pointed with some cogency to the mention of 'daughters' in the prophet Joel's prophecy of the outpouring of the Spirit, and also to the part taken by Priscilla in instructing Apollos. Her male opponents, not content with alleging that 'shee brought forth . . . thirty monstrous births or thereabouts at once', banished her, and six years later, to their evident satisfaction, she was murdered by Indians.<sup>5</sup>

But the Independent Church at Amsterdam, in the same period, possessed a deaconess among their 300 communicants. She was, it is said, 'an ancient widow, who was an ornament to the congregation. She usually sat in a convenient place in the congregation, with a little birchen rod in her hand, and kept little children in great awe from disturbing the congregation.' She did frequently visit the sick and weak, especially women, and if they were poor she would gather relief for them. She was obeyed as a mother in Israël and an officer of Christ.<sup>6</sup>

It was not till the nineteenth century that this office was to be revived in our own Anglican

Dean of Chester. He had been formerly, as it happens, my predecessor, as the second Principal of Liverpool College. He was a man of Christ-like and generous spirit, and greatly beloved, I am told, by all who knew him. He was attracted by the example of the deaconesses appointed by one Dr. Fliedner, of Kaiserworth, in the Rhineland. Dean Howson wanted the Church to be served by women who, without the supposed stigma of Popery, could act as sisters of mercy, and nurse the sick. Elizabeth Fry had already founded an institution for Quakers on similar lines. So, in 1862, Bishop Tait, of London, made history by laying hands on one Elizabeth Ferard as a titular deaconess. The idea soon appealed to Anglicans. Convocations discussed it, and the bishops, advancing cautiously, commended it. Lambeth, 1920, the post-war Conference, showed a spirit of adventure not only in the field of Church reunion but in this revival of an ancient order of female ministry. The Free Churches, here and in Europe and America, were soon to possess, as they do now, a limited number of female ministers, some in full orders. Advance and retreat followed, Convocations formulating schemes under which hundreds of devoted women, as deaconesses, have served the Church at home, and, often with great gallantry and devotion, in the Church overseas.

The main development of this century has been the definite and firm declaration by Anglican authority that women cannot be admitted to the historic threefold ministry of the Church. A

is *sui generis*. It cannot lead on to the priesthood. It is, as we saw in the terms set out by the new Canon Law, of extremely restricted scope. The modern deaconess is unable to find any rest for the sole of her foot; 'like Noah's dove, she flits between rough seas and stormy skies'.

Can such a work, such a status, offer a life worth while to a Christian woman of university education, like the candidate whose case I imagined at my beginning? Must she, as some of her ordained sisters recommend, be willing to demonstrate the power of a life of humble sacrifice and self-surrender, accepting, at the hands of men, the position of subordination in the spiritual realm which was once imposed upon her in almost all the secular activities which now she shares equally with men? Or is the sense of frustration which may result too big a price to pay for unquestioning obedience to her Church's apparently undeviating tradition? She may fairly ask, is that tradition to be fixed and eternal? It is based on precedent. But precedent itself is formed on principles. Surely a living and growing Church, which claims the continuous guidance of the Holy Spirit, should be willing at all times to re-examine its precedents in the light of principles—theological, psychological, social and practical principles? Believing that our own time calls loudly for such a re-examination, honestly and fairly made, I shall, in my next two sermons, address myself to that difficult and delicate task.

## II

(Oct. 17, 1948)

## THE PRINCIPLES

'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!'—ST. LUKE xiii. 34

THE year 1948, whatever may happen to human society before the year ends, will have proved to be a crucial year not only in the history of mankind but in the annals of the Christian Church. For during the past vacation two great conferences, at Amsterdam and at Lambeth, have drawn together the leaders of the Church from all corners of the earth, that they might seek, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the answer to some of the most urgent problems confronting men and women generally, and Christian men and women in particular.

I venture to select, for consideration to-day, one specially difficult problem which faced both our fathers in God at Lambeth and also the delegates from the world-wide Church at Amsterdam: the problem of the place of women in the service and ministry of the Church. There was a considerable contrast between the amounts of time and thought allotted to this subject at Amsterdam and at

co-operating Churches; and an immense volume of information and opinion had flowed in to Geneva in reply. After the discussion of this subject, so important was it felt to be that a commission, composed of men and women, was set up, to continue the work begun. Let me read you this statement of the facts as the committee had found them to exist in the world-wide Church.

'Some Churches, for theological reasons, are not prepared to consider the ministry of women; some find no objection in principle, but see administrative or social difficulties; some permit partial but not full participation in the work of the ministry; in others, women are eligible for all offices of the Church. Even in that last group, social custom and public opinion still create obstacles. In some countries a shortage of clergy raises urgent practical and spiritual problems. Those who desire the admission of women to the full ministry believe that until this is achieved the Church will not come to full health and power. We are agreed that this whole subject requires further careful and objective study.'

I turn to the Lambeth Report. On the last two of its 120 pages we have the findings of the sub-committee which had before it a specific question from the Chinese Holy Catholic Church; that is, the Reformed Episcopal Church in China. This Church had itself been requested by the Diocese of South China to settle this question: Could a deaconess be admitted to the priesthood, under certain strict conditions, during an experimental period of

whole asked the Lambeth Conference to decide whether such liberty to experiment within the framework of the Anglican Communion would be in accordance with Anglican tradition and order.

The answer given by the bishops through their committee at Lambeth was, of course, a clear and uncompromising negative. An experiment of so radical an order, it was said, could not properly be made without the fullest previous consideration by the Anglican Communion as a whole; for Anglican tradition and order have certainly not hitherto recognised, or contemplated, the ordination of any woman to the priesthood. The committee's statement continued: 'We are not asked to discuss the principles upon which that tradition and order rest. These principles will no doubt continue to be debated; but . . . we do not think that the time is ripe for a further formal consideration of them.'

'These principles will no doubt continue to be debated.' It is certain that they will. For there is one specially significant statement<sup>6</sup> in the interim report, on the life and work of women in the Church, presented at Amsterdam last August. It ran thus: 'Churches of the Anglican tradition, particularly in England, have had probably the most agitated minds, the most detailed study, and the greatest number of scholarly publications and commissions dealing with women's place and function'.

But why such agitation, such study, such a spate of publications, in the Anglican Church? I believe it is due to the love of freedom, of justice, of com-

tion or order, however venerable, should survive unchanged unless it can continue to justify itself afresh to each generation in its changed condition and demands.

And so I offer no excuse for doing in this second university sermon what I rashly promised to do at the end of my first sermon, now a year ago: for attempting to re-examine some, at least, of the principles on which our attitude to the ordination of women ought to rest. I hope that the outline sketch which I gave in my first sermon of the history of the ordination of women in the Christian Church made these two things plain. First, that from the earliest days women ministers had been appointed to serve the Church; though the term 'appointment', *κατάστασις*, the usual term for the setting apart of widows or virgins, is too weak a word; for there is clear evidence, down the centuries, of the ordination of deaconesses by *χειροτονία*, *χειροθεσία*, the laying on of hands with prayer for the grace of the Holy Spirit.<sup>7</sup> But secondly, it is crystal clear that never until quite recently, in the episcopal Churches (except the heretical), have any women been ordained to full priesthood: only to some kind of diaconate. The negative tradition is definite and unvaried.

The attitude to this subject of Anglicans to-day is very far from uniform. For the most part, conservative evangelical opinion here, as on the continent, interprets the veto of St. Paul on the Church activities of women at Corinth as a permanent prohibition of all female priesthood. The bulk

standing tradition; a tradition which it believes to have been formed under the direct and continuous guidance of the Holy Spirit of God.

But there is another body of opinion which cannot be ignored. A large, representative and steadily growing company of Anglicans, men and women, clerical and lay, feel that if, in the words of Socrates, in his last defence before his death, 'the unexamined life is not worth living,' so, too, the unexamined tradition is not worth living by. They remember the words of our 34th Article: 'It is not necessary that Traditions and Ceremonies be in all places one, and utterly like . . . [provided] that nothing be ordained against God's Word'.

Liberty, it may be claimed, is the watchword of Anglicanism. Liberty; but not licence to make dangerous experiments upon the firm structure of that Body, Christ's Church, to which we belong. Some words of Dr. Raven, now Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University, pleading for the full ordination of women, may help us here.<sup>8</sup> The Church, he shows, is an organism embodying the Spirit of Christ. Yet it is a living structure, not a skeleton. Continuity of structure is indeed necessary to the living organism. But only those organisms which can adapt themselves to new conditions by drastic changes of form can hope to survive. The structure is a means; the survival and welfare of the living creature is the end; and life depends upon appropriate adaptation to environment.

Now it is clear that the status of women, universally accepted as one of subjection until



adjusted its organisation in earlier centuries. But within the lifetime of many here present there has arisen in human society a change in the status of women so far-reaching, so creative, as to challenge the Church to inquire whether it must not reconsider its very structure, if it is to be worthy of the name of the living and growing 'Body of Christ'. Is this change less far-reaching, less creative, than the change which St. Paul recognised as making necessary a complete revolution in the structure of the people of God, that people hitherto consisting only of Jews but now called upon to include the Gentiles also? May it not be prophesied that a writer, generations hence, writing to Christian women of a new age, would feel justified in adapting St. Paul's great words in the Epistle to the Ephesians, and saying: 'By revelation God hath made known the mystery which, in other ages, was not made known unto the sons of men as it is now revealed by the Spirit; that women should be fellow-heirs with men, and partakers of God's promise in Christ by the Gospel; whereof they have been made full ministers, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto them by the effectual working of His power; that they should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ'. Perhaps those words will sound positively blasphemous to some! I hope that that is less likely to be their effect if we now re-examine, very briefly, the main reasons which hitherto have led our Church, in its tradition and order, to

that women are by nature subject and subordinate to men. St. Thomas Aquinas, that pillar of Catholic tradition, is explicit on this point. He says: 'Even though a woman were made the object of all that is done in conferring Orders, she would not receive Orders; for since a sacrament is a sign, not only the thing, but the signification of the thing, is required in all sacramental actions. Thus it was stated above (Q. XXXII, A. 2) that in Extreme Unction it is necessary to have a sick man, in order to signify the need of healing. Accordingly, since it is not possible in the female sex to signify eminence of degree, for a woman is in the state of subjection, it follows that she cannot receive the sacrament of Order.'<sup>9</sup>

But for the source of this tradition of subjection we must go much further back than St. Thomas: and first, to St. Paul the Apostle. On the slender foundation of his veto upon certain activities of women in the church at Corinth an unreasonably top-heavy superstructure has been raised. For St. Paul was surely only making local rules for a particularly volatile Christian community; rules, some of which the Anglican Church gaily and gladly ignores to-day. And he made those rules as a Jew. If his mother was a strict and careful Jewish mother, St. Paul must have been taught as a child to say, among his daily morning thanksgivings, these words: 'Blessed art Thou, O God, King of the Universe, Who hast not made me a woman'.

Yet it was this same St. Paul who, in a flash of amazing insight, proclaimed the great threefold

... There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither bond nor free; there is neither male nor female. For ye are all one in Christ Jesus.' Thus St. Paul recognised the great principle of liberty in its threefold aspect. But it was upon the first part of the principle, the right to racial freedom, and not upon the other two parts, that all his energies were concentrated. He was, supremely, the Apostle to the Gentiles; but he commanded the slaves to be obedient unto their masters; and he told the women to keep silence in the churches. How could it have been otherwise? No man could have broken the threefold shackles in a single lifetime. It took the Church many centuries to see the application of the principle, 'In Christ there is neither bond nor free,' and, as a result, to abolish slavery. It has taken an even longer time for the Church to admit the full social and political equality of women. If it is also a principle true to Holy Scripture, it will take much time yet for the universal Church to recognise that sex is no hindrance to a woman's dispensing the Word and holy sacraments. Obviously it would never mean that sex would be abolished, as among Christian people slavery has been abolished. Women priests would still be women, just as Christians may also be Jews or Greeks. But real oneness in Christ as children of God would involve a right relation of Christ's members one to another. In the case of slavery, bonds must be abolished. In the case of women, the old Jewish inhibitions must be outgrown.<sup>10</sup>

religious sentiment and the development of religious cultus in the history of mankind. We must go back even behind the Old Testament. Archaeology and anthropology provide clear and world-wide evidence that the earliest and most widespread form and content of religion were centred in the worship not of male but of female deities. The earth-mother; the mother-goddess; and later, Magna Mater; Rhea, Cybele, Isis, these are some of the names by which the deity was called. By primitive man, woman was considered to be the crucial link connecting the human and the divine, because of the mystery, and the majesty, belonging to woman by inalienable right as a potential or actual mother. Women, as a consequence, played an important part in primitive worship, as priestesses, or as magical queens or as impersonations of the goddess.

And what was the inevitable result of so lopsided a view of God and of the worship of God? It came, of course, with the physical, social and military rise to domination of man. The evidence again shows that women were slowly but steadily ousted from their leadership in worship and cultus—except in the home, where to this day they are the natural priestesses of family life. And yet clear traces also remain that man's conscience is not happy, nor his spirit at ease, in his unilateral management of religion. In certain South Indian villages there is a vivid example of this uneasiness, which shows that man knows himself to be a usurper. For in the religious rites there performed, the priestly functions are indeed carried out by

dressed in female attire, and dancing like a woman, with a waterpot balanced on his head: that true oriental symbol of femininity, as our Lord's direction to His messenger before the Last Supper makes plain. Similar evidence can be gathered from tribal religion and culture in Africa; and perhaps also from some of our own most ancient folk-dances in this country.<sup>11</sup>

I suggest that we see here simply the swing of a very long pendulum. If mankind thinks exclusively of God in terms of either sex, reaction must set in. In the Middle Ages, the picture of God as the stern, inexorable Judge must be compensated by the picture of Mary the tender, intervening mother. Six years ago this month, at the height of the war, His Holiness Pope Pius XII, in a broadcast, consecrated Russia and the whole world to the heart of Mary. Of this dedication Father Gerald Vann, in the Blackfriars monthly magazine,<sup>12</sup> has written thus: 'Perhaps in that dedication of the world to the heart of Mary the Mother it is this lesson' (that we must set the wisdom of the heart against the superficial science which neglects the deeper realities), it is this lesson 'that is being driven home to us with renewed emphasis; for we have seen the man-made world, the world of man-centred scientific humanism, come crashing down before our eyes; and yet it seems to be to the same self-sufficient science that built it, that we are looking to build it again. . . . It is through women that the deeper realities and the deeper sanities have been preserved or restored.' Those are words all

let the swing of the male-female pendulum in our time find its main fulfilment in veneration of the Virgin Mary? Is there not, in our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, both as man and as God, the perfect expression of all that is best both in man and in woman, so that to represent Him perfectly in human priesthood both men and women are needed? He held both aspects of humanity, the male and the female, in perfect balance. Neither can be over-emphasised in our worship of Him, without risk and loss, as two contrasted examples will show.

The history, in earlier Christian centuries, of the individual marriage with Christ of Church-virgins, a marriage of the soul, may have begun as a beautiful conception. But it led to a dangerously mawkish and unscriptural view of a woman's relationship to Christ: not as to the Bridegroom of the Church corporate, but as to a male human being capable of spiritual polygamy.<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, in our own epoch, we find our parish churches crowded with stained-glass pictures of an excessively effeminate Christ; and we instinctively dislike them. It is right that we should. For on the physical plane sex is, by God's appointment, a differentiating factor which must be jealously guarded and respected. That may be true also in the plane of emotion and temperament. But deep down, at the very basis of our being, is a common humanity, which may make one man differ from another man even more than he differs from a woman. That common humanity can only realise

full unity. 'God created man in His own image: male and female created He them.'

I find that double harmony in our Lord Jesus Christ, and abōve all in the words of my text for to-day; words which spring as from the heart not of a man but of a woman, a mother.

'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!' . . .

'But that is mere poetry,' it may be said. 'Mere poetry!' Can truth be more truthfully expressed than through poetry? The great mystics know this truth of which I speak. One of the greatest, a woman, Julian, the fourteenth-century anchoress of Norwich, writes page after page, in her book, *Revelations of Divine Love*, in such terms as these concerning the Trinity: 'As verily as God is our Father, so verily God is our Mother. Our Father willeth, [Christ] our Mother worketh, our good Lord the Holy Ghōst confirmeth. And therefore it longeth to us to love our God in Whom we have our being; Him reverently, thanking and praising for our making, mightily praying to our Mother for mercy and pity, and to our Lord the Holy Ghost for help and grace.' Chapter 60 is a classic exposition of this theme: truth, through poetry in prose.

'And yet,' it will be objected, 'Christ was, after all, a man. And He chose, as His Apostles, only men.' He was indeed a man. But He was also man, *homo*, ἀνθρωπος, as well as *vir*, ἀνήρ. It was a primary necessity of the Incarnation that Christ should be

economy, that Christ should be born of Jewish race, and of masculine sex. And if careful and honest consideration is given to the social and religious conditions of the first century, can anyone imagine it to have been possible for female travelling apostles to be appointed by our Lord? The dangers, the prejudices, the licentiousness of the age would have made such an action both unjust and futile. Most of all would such a position have been impossible for the Virgin Mary, at her age, and with her unique status as Θεοτόκος, Mother of God. Even so, there were women deacons—or, if you will, servants, like Phoebe; teachers, like Priscilla; prophetesses, like the daughters of Philip; pastors, like Dorcas. Through them, the risen Christ carried on His Messianic ministry, and gave gifts unto men and women.

All down the Christian centuries, despite the heavy subjection and limitation imposed on them by man, holy women have sought to minister to their fellows. To-day (though their number, I am sure, is not so alarmingly large as their opponents fear) some women believe, indeed they know, that they have received, through the Holy Ghost, a definite call, from Christ the heavenly High Priest, to carry on His full ministry here on earth. Our own Church offers them to-day ordination into a fourth or parallel order, as deaconesses; but it is a ministry less privileged and of less scope than is offered to unordained lay readers. Let women be pastoral—with limitations! Let them be prophetic—with limitations; but they must not touch the

This policy of compromise raises questions, disturbing questions. For is there not here something quite foreign to the true Anglican conception of ministry as illustrated in our ordinal? The service in our Prayer Book for the ordering of priests places carefully balanced and equal emphasis on three things: on the ministry of the Word; on the ministry of the sacraments; and on pastoral care. Is it true Anglicanism, is it true Christianity, to segregate these three elements of the ministry into watertight compartments, so that a minister may not pass naturally from one to the other in the full exercise of his or her function as a minister to the deep needs of others? Dare we thus separate sacraments from life? Can a priesthood be truly representative of Christ, of Christ's Body, when it excludes half mankind from its membership? Can the Church afford to hold at arm's length the willing offer of total service to Christ that comes to-day from those few but well-qualified women, who desire to devote all their talents and their special gifts, including their instinctive habit of treating human beings as persons, to the full ministry of Christ in His Church; women who plead, not for rights, but for unhindered opportunities of service?

And that brings me to my last point. As the present Dean of St. Paul's has argued, in this connection,<sup>14</sup> if sex alone is to be the bar, what is to become of the supreme value of personality? This value is not affected in its essence by social or

that some personalities are associated with masculine organisms and others with feminine is surely irrelevant here. In the purely spiritual sphere, as our Lord has told us, 'they neither marry nor are given in marriage'. But if the ministry of the priesthood is a function of personality, would it not be a neglect of God-given grace and power to debar those female persons who have the requisite qualifications from exercising that ministry? The ministry of the Church is so high and arduous a vocation that the full resources of humanity ought to be available for it. Should not we men who are priests say, after the example of St. Peter at Caesarea: 'Can any man forbid the grace of Holy Orders to these who seek it, who have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?'

Am I therefore pressing for immediate action by our Church: such action as has recently been taken by a bishop of the episcopal Church in Denmark, for example; with the risk of internal disruption and bitter controversy?

I am not advocating such a step as an immediate policy. I hope I have too clear an understanding of the immense practical difficulties which, as yet, would accompany or even prevent it. There is the effect on reunion with Rome and the Eastern Churches; there is the psychological problem; there is the problem of marriage in its relationship to parochial life; and many other such questions. It would be most unfair to ignore them. Accordingly I hope, in February, to address myself, in a

This policy of compromise raises questions, disturbing questions. For is there not here something quite foreign to the true Anglican conception of ministry as illustrated in our ordinal? The service in our Prayer Book for the ordering of priests places carefully balanced and equal emphasis on three things: on the ministry of the Word; on the ministry of the sacraments; and on pastoral care. Is it true Anglicanism, is it true Christianity, to segregate these three elements of the ministry into watertight compartments, so that a minister may not pass naturally from one to the other in the full exercise of his or her function as a minister to the deep needs of others? Dare we thus separate sacraments from life? Can a priesthood be truly representative of Christ, of Christ's Body, when it excludes half mankind from its membership? Can the Church afford to hold at arm's length the willing offer of total service to Christ that comes to-day from those few but well-qualified women, who desire to devote all their talents and their special gifts, including their instinctive habit of treating human beings as persons, to the full ministry of Christ in His Church; women who plead, not for rights, but for unhindered opportunities of service?

And that brings me to my last point. As the present Dean of St. Paul's has argued, in this connection,<sup>14</sup> if sex alone is to be the bar, what is to become of the supreme value of personality? This value is not affected in its essence by social or

that some personalities are associated with masculine organisms and others with feminine is surely irrelevant here. In the purely spiritual sphere, as our Lord has told us, 'they neither marry nor are given in marriage'. But if the ministry of the priesthood is a function of personality, would it not be a neglect of God-given grace and power to debar those female persons who have the requisite qualifications from exercising that ministry? The ministry of the Church is so high and arduous a vocation that the full resources of humanity ought to be available for it. Should not we men who are priests say, after the example of St. Peter at Caesarea: 'Can any man forbid the grace of Holy Orders to these who seek it, who have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?'

Am I therefore pressing for immediate action by our Church: such action as has recently been taken by a bishop of the episcopal Church in Denmark, for example; with the risk of internal disruption and bitter controversy?

I am not advocating such a step as an immediate policy. I hope I have too clear an understanding of the immense practical difficulties which, as yet, would accompany or even prevent it. There is the effect on reunion with Rome and the Eastern Churches; there is the psychological problem; there is the problem of marriage in its relationship to parochial life; and many other such questions. It would be most unfair to ignore them. Accordingly I hope, in February, to address myself, in a

sideration of the practical questions which, here as always, must govern the application to life of any principle, however desirable in itself that principle may seem to be; however probable its ultimate acceptance by the minds and consciences of Christian people.

## III

(Feb. 20, 1949)

## PRACTICAL PROBLEMS

'And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.'—GENESIS iii. 12  
(Part of the first lesson for to-day, Sexagesima Sunday)

'But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman.'—GALATIANS iv. 4

'SHE gave me . . . and I did eat.'

So it was a woman who spread the net into which man, the victim, fell, to his and her ruin. Thus primitive man, excusing himself, sees in woman the mysterious original cause of evil. Here Hebrew joins Greek. For according to the primitive Greek story it was when the lonely archetypal man, Epimetheus, was joined by the fascinating first woman, Pandora, whose curiosity unlocked the fatal box in which evil might have remained hidden—it was then that the world's troubles first began.

Thus begins the Old Testament: man sheltering himself behind the excuse of a woman's weakness.

And the New Testament?

That begins with another woman, to whom, in solitude, comes a call from God, conveying an inescapable challenge: 'Hail, thou that art highly favoured'. The voice was obeyed: 'Behold the

the beautiful metaphor of an early Abyssinian liturgy—'the new loom'<sup>15</sup>. She is to be the instrument which the Holy Spirit can employ to weave the spoiled web of life into a new and lovely pattern. That which was to be born of her was to be 'called holy, the Son of God'. He was 'made of a woman'.

So woman, the supposed source of man's ruin, becomes woman, the historic medium of man's redemption. With what veneration, then, and respect should women be regarded by men. How ready men should be to recognise the capacity, and the readiness, of women to hear from God a voice calling them to high and creative work. With what dignity and delicacy should men regard the mysterious processes of birth, and all the physiological accompaniments which, in woman, are bound up with childbirth; processes sanctified once for all in the Blessed Virgin Mary, when she gave herself to God to be the new loom of mankind; so removing for ever—one would have hoped—the unhappy associations lingering on from man's far-off story of Eden and the Fall.

'One would have hoped,' I say, that this might have been true. But it is not true. If it were, I could have dispensed with the beginning of this sermon; in which I fulfil the promise made in my second sermon in this place, and return for the third and last time to the difficult problem and question: Should women be ordained to the priesthood?

At present our Church rejects that claim. With

serious practical objections, which weigh so heavily in the minds of men and women not only in our own Church but in other Churches, like the Presbyterian and the Methodist,<sup>16</sup> that the full ordination of women seems likely to be very long delayed. With the chief of these practical difficulties I must now attempt to deal, as honestly and fairly as I can. They seem to have one quality in common: an element of fear. They may, I think, be grouped under three main heads: psychology, matrimony and reunion.

I begin with psychology. And I quote to you the careful and considered opinion of a woman who is well qualified to judge, because she has had access to reliable reports, testimonies, evidences, from all parts of Christendom throughout the world. Here is part of her summary, drawn up for the first World Council of Churches at Amsterdam, last August, as an interim report of the study on the 'Life and Work of Women in the Church'. She writes:

'One must note the continued existence of superstitions and taboos which bedevil many cultures in the world. . . . It was in the dim distant past when human beings were creatures of instinct, and life functions—especially of sex and childbirth—were mysteries to be controlled in occult ways, that we find developing those customs and sex taboos which, for example in the Jewish tradition, came to be legalised by rules, some of which are recorded in the Old Testament. To minds ridden by fear and mystery, the control of ceremonial unclean-



practical significance. In South India, for example, the problem is set before us as to how it would be possible for a woman to hold Church office, or to administer any of the Sacraments, when, at a certain period each month, in some Christian circles, women are not deemed worthy to partake of the Holy Communion. Not a few suspect that, at least subconsciously, the minds of some Christian leaders in the world are plagued by a sneaking suspicion that woman is indeed of a lower order of creation, and that physical manifestations related to her potential or actual functions as mother are designed to be a constant reminder of that fact.<sup>17</sup>

Subconscious prejudice, and fears arising from taboo,<sup>18</sup> die hard. But such taboo has always been liable to raise its ugly head in the life and worship of the Church, including the Church of England.

For example, in the year 597, as we read in the first book of the *Ecclesiastical History of Bede* (chap. xxvii), St. Augustine wrote from England to Pope Gregory, asking for advice on certain practical problems of worship, the answers to which were desired by 'the rude nation of the English'. Among these were questions concerning the times at which women might, and might not, attend Holy Communion. Pope Gregory replied in terms some of which will seem to us to express a morbid view of matrimony and its operations. But he nobly championed the cause of women, reminding Augustine of the story in the Gospels of the woman who, in the press and throng, ventured to touch the hem of our Lord's garment, and was

by Christ, may not the same liberty of conscience be granted to all women? For that which some regard as religious uncleanness, Christ regarded as misfortune or infirmity.

And yet I am afraid that it was with some kind of subconscious taboo at work in his mind, on physiological grounds, that an Anglican canon at York, in the year 1938, when the ordination of women was there being discussed in Convocation, declared that 'the very thought that the chalice should be administered by a woman made him shudder.'<sup>19</sup>

Let me conclude this part of my subject with a question. If an ordained deaconess of our Church to-day, on whom hands have been laid by a bishop, with prayer for her sanctification by the Holy Spirit, is, as I showed in my first sermon, strictly forbidden, during Holy Communion, to enter the sanctuary in which a small boy may move freely, should we not do well to ask ourselves whether those responsible for such a prohibition are not in danger of acting more in accordance with the regulations of primitive taboo and the ceremonial requirements of Leviticus than with the privileges won for womankind by the Virgin Mary? It was that blessed 'woman whom God gave to be with' us men; and who, by the divine control of physiological processes within her, 'gave unto' us that we 'might eat'; gave unto us the food of heaven, the very Body and Blood of our Lord. 'What God hath cleansed let no man,' or woman, 'make common or unclean.'

fear of man that consciousness of sex, the risk of sex attraction, may, if women co-operate with men in the services of God's house, be a disturbing and distracting hindrance to worship. Such fears are indeed not groundless. But they presuppose, on the part of men and women, the inability to rise, at worship, into a heavenly realm where sex is not merely sublimated but almost forgotten in the overwhelming consciousness of God. The risk must always be there. It is there now. For sex is not a deplorable monopoly of women. It is possible for men also, however involuntarily, to radiate sex atmosphere disturbing to women, as every hand-some curate knows. But women as doctors can work with men in close and impartial association; and in many other fields of service they co-operate without danger of embarrassment. Such embarrassment would surely disappear from worship more easily if men and women grew accustomed to joint ministrations?

One Anglican writer—now a bishop—describing his fear of the risks, in particular, of admitting women to the administration of Holy Communion, writes thus: "The whole service is so clearly arranged for members of the same sex that probably no one would tolerate a mixture of the sexes in this connection. We can hardly imagine the kiss of peace under such circumstances, to take the situation which would create the most obvious difficulties. . . . The ease with which an unseemliness might occur, through the mere raising of the eyes, or the accidental touching of hands, is enough to

But again I ask: Is there no such Christian virtue as sanctified self-control? It is found in abundance in Quaker worship, where men and women can minister together without any 'unseemliness'. Is sacramental worship to be less uplifting, less self-disciplined? As for the chief difficulty named—the kiss of peace—what is this 'kiss of peace'? I do not find it enjoined among the rubrics of my Anglican Prayer Book—not even in the 1549 edition. Surely it was eliminated then, in accordance with the wholesome reserve and simplicity which mark our Anglican rite, and which so truthfully express the English temperament at its best?

I continue to deal with psychological fears. Here is another: that if the door to the priesthood were once opened to women, there would be so great a spate, so serious a landslide, of female ordinations that, the ministry being swamped by a feminine invasion, men would increasingly refuse to enter it.

Such fears are surely based on ignorance, as a bare recital of the facts will show plainly enough? For the door has already been open into full ministry in the Congregational and Baptist Churches in this country for many years. But the number of female ministers ordained to the full ministry in these two Churches is infinitesimally small in proportion to the ministry as a whole. I am authoritatively informed that there are less than ten women in the Congregational and less than five in the Baptist Church actively engaged in full ministry at the present time; nor are such women coming forward for training in any considerable numbers.

here as they were when women were admitted to Parliament, law, medicine and many other such spheres of privilege hitherto monopolised by men. And why? Because a woman's chief function, her noblest privilege, must always be in the home, in the duties of wifehood and motherhood. Only a very small percentage, indeed, could be spared from that supreme task, though God will surely continue, as now, to call some to remain voluntarily outside it 'for the kingdom of heaven's sake', as Jesus said.

That fact brings me to my second main difficulty. Unless women seeking ordination are obliged by Church law to take vows of celibacy—in obviously undesirable contradiction to the rule for men—how can a woman priest fulfil her pastoral function if she marries? She may, we are told, be in charge of a parish and become married to a man engaged in secular duties. She cannot bring up children carefully and Christianly and be a true parochial pastor. There are also the problems of the tenure of benefices and of parsonage houses. Can the Churches allow intermittent incumbencies? And if a woman is ordained priest, while her husband remains a layman, what becomes of that headship of the family which, we are told, St. Paul claims for every Christian husband?

That these are serious problems no thoughtful person can deny. They add to the probability that in any case the number of women ministers will be very small. But I do not believe the difficulties, even here, are insuperable. The Church may think fit to establish, at least for an experimental period.

But is it not true that a married woman who has brought up children has an experience and sympathy which would greatly enrich her ministry not only to women and children but to men? Elizabeth Fry had already given birth to ten children before she began her great work of prison reform for men and women. Moreover, in the Church of England to-day there are scores of clergy performing no pastoral duties whatsoever, or only on such rare occasions as might equally employ a married woman; these men are teachers in colleges or schools; or secretaries of societies—ecclesiastical, missionary, charitable and the like—who are always tied to their desks; or retired men, living on their pensions or on private means. These men are not required to resign their orders. Would it not therefore be fair for women priests, in the very rare cases where they married after ordination, to be seconded for a time, with the Church's blessing, to family duty and the upbringing of children; and then to return, much enriched, to full or substantial pastoral work? Her very status, as a mother, would link such a woman to the Mother of our Lord more closely than any man could be.

As for the claim of the essential headship of man over woman in the family, there is, I think, little fear that a woman priest would wish to dominate her husband. Each Christian soul remains inalienably free. Yet how many husbands there are, here in this church to-day and elsewhere, who thankfully recognise the true spiritual leadership, over themselves and their families, of the one who is

complained that the head of the family, the father, and not a woman, must break the bread at the Sacrament, Miss Chacko, from India, replied that this was a lopsided Western picture. 'In India,' she said, 'we are used to the picture of the family where the mother cooks the food and serves the food. If you are thinking of family life, it is completely wrong to say that the father breaks the bread. Do not therefore,' she continued, 'look at this matter from the viewpoint of your custom and tradition. We are trying to see if the living Word of God can break through custom and tradition. It has done so in India; and that is why woman's emancipation has come about.'

'But', it will be objected, 'married or unmarried, women are unsuited to the charge and leadership of a mixed population of both sexes in a large town parish.' I think that in general this is true; despite the fact that women have been successful as cabinet ministers and heads of great government ministries, largely composed of men. But a woman would very seldom be needed for, or appointed to, the sole charge of a town parish. The example of the Free Churches proves that; though some of their women ministers, as I know, have been greatly used of God in the full charge of a town church. The first call, however, for the services of women will probably be in women's colleges and schools; though a woman, if ordained, should not receive an exclusive ordination for such work, but be ordained, as men are, 'in the Church of God'. There is great and recognised need in colleges and schools for the ministry of women; though it is also true, and

character will always prefer, and have the right to enjoy, the exclusive ministrations of a man priest.

There is great need also in the town parishes of England, especially in the north, for women who can give peculiarly valuable help in ways not open to men—for example, in factories; or to women and girls in moral trouble or perplexity. Women are, I believe, needed still more in the villages of our country. In one valley of Dorsetshire, for example, there are seven separate villages served by two clergy. Conservative as village folk are, they would come to gain much by the residence among them of a true mother in God, to whom her people would be a real family, and to whom she could offer the opportunity of Holy Communion at a time when they could profitably attend it, instead of at the dregs of a travelling clergyman's busy day.

The situation overseas—for example, in China, Canada and Australia—is one of even more desperate need. I know an Australian bishop who, after the Lambeth Conference, told me that into each of the long and lonely valleys of his far-flung diocese an excellent deaconess in her car can go, but only once in several months, no man being available. There, she can pray with the people, and offer counsel and sympathy, especially to the women. 'If only,' said the bishop, 'I were allowed to authorise her, by full ordination, to take the sacrament to these lonely folk, especially the housewives, how great their gain would be. But I am forbidden.' What is the alternative? In some such dioceses overseas the Church has encouraged a

people have become content with this non-sacramental communion; and their Catholic heritage of true sacramental worship is liable to be neglected, as something less spiritual.

Thirdly, and lastly, I must now face the Hindenburg Line at which all other arguments for the full ordination of women seem to break down and fall back in defeat. It is the fear that if the Anglican Church were to take this revolutionary step, it would postpone, perhaps 'till doomsday in the afternoon', any hope of our reunion with the Roman Catholic Church and with the Orthodox Churches.

That would indeed be a grievous price to pay. And this may seem a most unhappy moment at which even to suggest it: when Anglican and Free Church leaders on the one hand and Roman Catholic leaders on the other are exchanging fraternal expressions of sympathy and horror at the deadly attacks now being made by Communist governments, first in Hungary and then in Bulgaria, on Roman and Protestant leaders of the Church. All of us, whether Anglican or Free Church, who hope and pray for reunion, will welcome this *rapprochement*. But it should not be allowed to blind us to the quite immense gulf that still lies between hope and fulfilment. Let me quote the opinions of two Anglican bishops who are in the very forefront of the movement towards reunion. The Bishop of Derby, now a president of the joint committee of Anglicans and Free Churchmen which is so cordially exploring the possibilities of

Orthodox Churches constitutes a barrier little, if at all, less formidable than that of the infallibility claimed by the Church of Rome'. . . . On the side of Moscow, 'legitimate interpretation of doctrine is not enough' (for Anglicans to offer). 'What is demanded is an unambiguous affirmation of identity of doctrine. . . . Unity with Rome or with Orthodoxy, within any foreseeable period, is not to be had.'<sup>21</sup>

The Bishop of Chichester wrote last year: 'The Roman Catholic position admits of no compromise'. . . . The Roman Catholic Church is regarded as being 'beyond all doubt the "one Catholic Church of Christ"', and the condition of unity is submission to Rome. Is it possible, we may ask, for unity to be secured from the non-Roman side on such a condition? The only answer to a question, couched in these terms, which other Churches could give, is "No".<sup>22</sup>

But why must the answer be 'No'? Cannot we pay the price, heavy though it be: including the acceptance of papal primacy of jurisdiction and papal infallibility; the disuse of vernacular English speech in our liturgy<sup>23</sup>; the secondary place given to Holy Scripture; the celibacy of the clergy<sup>23</sup>; acceptance of such doctrines as Transubstantiation, the Immaculate Conception and many another; all of which things, precious to Rome, we abandoned at the Reformation? Was that price too great to pay? Or did our Anglican conscience, enlightened by the Holy Spirit and taught by free access to, and

contrary to God's will and God's truth; as a penalty for which rejection, Rome excommunicated us?

But if we were right then, shall we not be right now if, once again obeying that free, adventurous spirit which God has been pleased to make so characteristic of the English people and of the English Church, we allow our conscience, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, and taught by fair interpretation of the Holy Scripture, to recognise that God is calling women to the priesthood?

The answer may be made: 'Beware, lest thus you break down the one vital link remaining between the Roman and Orthodox Churches on the one hand and the Protestant Free Churches on the other. Remember that the Anglican Church is the great bridge Church. Its position is unique and indispensable.'

'The bridge Church': that is a tempting metaphor, but only partly true. It is also a dangerously flattering metaphor. It gives us the comfortable assurance that we Anglicans are *the* people of God, indispensable to the divine strategy of reunion. But a bridge is a very static thing. It does not live; it cannot move. It neither goes forward nor backward. To stand permanently on a bridge is perilously like sitting on a fence.

We must, however, recognise quite clearly that if the Church of England went forward, taking the step of which I speak, it could not hope, at present, to gain anything but severe disapproval from Rome or from Orthodoxy. By Rome, the doctrine of woman's subordination in this field of Order.

1930, in the beautiful and impressive Encyclical on Christian Marriage—*Casti Connubii*—given by His Holiness Pope Pius XI.<sup>24</sup>

As for the Orthodox Church, let me refer you to the horror with which the news was received, during the war, by the Patriarch of Alexandria, of the ordination of a woman priest by the Anglican bishop in Hong Kong. My informant, an Anglican senior chaplain with the Forces, was in personal touch with His Beatitude on this matter. He reports that with the patriarch tradition was paramount, inexorable, inviolable.

If then the Church of England, abandoning a policy of fear, should ever decide to move forward independently in this field, she must do so with her eyes wide open. But let her not look only to the right, to Rome and Orthodoxy. Let her look also to the left, to the great reformed Churches of Christendom—here, on the continent and in America; and let her look especially to the reformed Holy Catholic Church in China, already beating her wings against the bars of an Anglican tradition which hampers her free development.

A world-wide Reformed Catholic Church, united, revived, adventurous, free, obedient to God's will and basing its Catholicity on Scripture, would surely claim far more respect from Rome than our separated Churches can now command.

I conclude with a threefold plea. First, to our bishops I would appeal that they recognise the unwholesome and unjust nature of the present compromise, by which deaconesses, though gladly

given less scope than unordained male lay readers and excluded from the service of the sanctuary during Holy Communion. Secondly, I would beg our other clergy, and the rank and file of the laity, to take every opportunity of studying this difficult problem with an honest and open mind, free from prejudice for or against the full ordination of women, and asking only for light from God. I would ask them also to give such encouragement as they can to all women and girls who, in this day of our people's deep spiritual need, seek to answer God's call to fuller service for Him—in whatever capacity.

And lastly, I would remind any such women as feel and know that God is calling them to lifelong ordained ministry for Him, that in all great movements towards freedom it is only pioneers of the very highest quality of mind and spirit that can hope to move the mountains of prejudice and fear out of the way. It was so with the early pioneers who opened for women the doors into education, the franchise, Parliament, medicine and the law. Pioneers working for the future full ministry of women, who seek to blaze the trail to-day, must have the deep humility and love which will enable them to undertake lowly service that will often seem unworthy of their powers. They must cultivate an unquenchable sense of humour that will help them to smile at the outmoded prejudice of the men and women who will deride or hinder their work. Above all, they will need the spirit of true devotion to our Lord Jesus Christ, and to

It may be—surely, it must be—that if enough such women can be found to act as pioneers, our Church as a whole will one day come to recognise this devotion and service as a genuine answer to a genuine call from God; a call so clear and unmistakable that first the Church, and then the bishops, will not dare any longer to refuse to identify the call as being the clear command of the Holy Spirit, saying, as He said of old: 'Separate *Me* these women, for the work of full ministry, whereunto *I* have called them'.

If the day ever comes when, throughout Christendom, women have full freedom to exercise in the Church their modest but rightful ministries, ordained or lay, then it may be that the revival of religion, for which we long, will come to us from God; and then will be fulfilled at last the ancient prophecy of the Psalmist: 'Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful rain, Thou didst confirm Thine inheritance, when it was weary. . . . The Lord giveth the word: the women<sup>25</sup> that publish the tidings are a great host. . . . And she that tarrieth at home divideth the spoil.'

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Dr. S. Schechter, *Studies in Judaism*, p. 389.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ministry of Women*\* (1919), pp. 64 ff.
- <sup>3</sup> C. Bigg, *Origins of Christianity*, p. 193.
- <sup>4</sup> I am indebted for this story to Dr. G. F. Nuttall.
- <sup>5</sup> See also T. Weldé, *A short story of the Rise, reign and ruine of the Antinomians* (1644), Pref., pp. 31-7.
- <sup>6</sup> *Interim Report on Amsterdam*,\* p. 18.
- <sup>7</sup> *The Order of Deaconesses*\* (1948), pp. 7 and 11.
- <sup>8</sup> *Women and Holy Orders*,\* pp. 99-103.
- <sup>9</sup> *Summa Theologiae*, Part III, Supplement, Qq. xxxiv-lxviii (Q. xxxix, p. 52), Burns, Oates & Washbourne ed.
- <sup>10</sup> See Ursula Roberts, 'The Ordination of Women to the Priesthood,' *Church Quarterly Review*, Oct., 1933.
- <sup>11</sup> The subject of the above paragraph receives illuminating exposition in a D.Phil. (Oxon.) thesis (MS. D.Phil. 417, deposited in the Bodleian, July 14, 1942) on 'The psychological role of the Mother in the origin of the religious sentiment', by Dr. G. D. Boaz, an Indian Christian philosopher. It is also treated extensively in *The Mothers* (3 vols.), by the late R. S. Briffault (1927, Allen & Unwin). See esp. vol. II, chap. xvii, and vol. III, chaps. xxiii, xxiv.
- <sup>12</sup> Issue of June, 1945, *Blackfriars*, Oxford, p. 210.
- <sup>13</sup> J. M. Ludlow, *Woman's Work in the Church* (1865), pp. 77-84 (an exceptionally valuable study of female ministries, ancient and modern).
- <sup>14</sup> *Archbishops' Commission Report*\* (1935), pp. 77-8.
- <sup>15</sup> F. E. Brightman, *Liturgies, Eastern and Western* (1896), p. 206 (Liturgy of the Abyssinian Jacobites).
- <sup>16</sup> In the Methodist Church (in England) women are

of full ordination for women it also accepted; but practical administrative difficulties prevent its embodiment at present.

<sup>17</sup> *Revised Interim Report*\* (to Amsterdam), pp. 22-3.

<sup>18</sup> For the taboo mentioned see also Hastings, D.B., Art. 'Unclean, Uncleanness.'

<sup>19</sup> P. R. Smythe, *The Ordination of Women*,\* p. 146.

<sup>20</sup> Sir Thomas More in *Utopia* (section 'of the religions in Utopia') refers to 'women (for that kinde is not excluded from priesthoode, howbeit fewe be chosen, and none but widdowes and old women)'.

<sup>21</sup> Bishop A. E. J. Rawlinson, *The Future of Anglicanism (Gore Memorial Lecture)* (1948), S.P.C.K., p. 14.

<sup>22</sup> Bishop G. K. A. Bell, *Christian Unity* (1948), Hodder & Stoughton, pp. 175-6.

<sup>23</sup> I am informed, however, that Uniate Churches of the East in full communion with Rome are allowed married clergy and a Liturgy in the vernacular.

<sup>24</sup> *Catholic Truth Society* ed., 1943, sections 26-30.

<sup>25</sup> Thus the Revised Version correctly translates the Hebrew original of Psalm lxviii. 9-12.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- The Ministry of Women.* Report of Archbishop's Committee. S.P.C.K. 1919. 320 pp. (q.p.).  
(Articles on history; specimen ordination rites.)
- The Ordination of Women.* P. R. Smythe, M.A., B.D. Skeffington. 1939. 240 pp. 5s.  
(Weighs the evidence of Scripture and history; describes debates in Convocations; balances arguments pro and con.)
- Women in the Church.* F. D. Bacon. Lutterworth Press. 1946. 146 pp. 8s. 6d.  
(A general, popular sketch.)
- The Ministry of Women.* Report of Archbishops' Commission, 1935. 90 pp. Press and Publications Board of Church Assembly. 1s.  
(Summarises evidence and emphasises problems involved.)
- Women and Holy Orders.* Dr. Charles E. Raven, D.D. Hodder & Stoughton. 1928. 128 pp. 2s. 6d. (o.p.).  
(Strongly in favour of full ordination.)
- Women and the Liturgical Ministry.* K. D. Mackenzie. Mowbrays. 1934. 43 pp. 1s. 6d. (o.p.).  
(Strongly against full ordination.)
- The Order of Deaconesses.* Press and Publications Board of Church Assembly. 1948. 32 pp. 1s. 6d.  
(Brief but careful neutral sketch of history, and of present Anglican position.)
- Revised Interim Report of a study on the Life and Work of Women in the Church, prepared for 1st Assembly of World Council of Churches at Amsterdam, 1948.* 76 pp. 2s. 6d., post free, from World Council of Churches. 7 Kensington Church Court London.

- Churches throughout the world to full ordination of women and women's work in Church generally.)
- The Role of Women in the Church.* Dr. Cecilia M. Ady. Press and Publications Board of Church Assembly. 1948. 86 pp. 7s. 6d.  
(Against full ordination; useful account of opportunities for lay service.)
- The Cause: A short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain.* R. Strachey. G. Bell & Sons. 1928. 429 pp. (o.p.).  
(A clear and fair account.)
- Women.* Winifred Holtby. John Lane, the Bodley Head. 1934. 213 pp. 5s.  
(Ardently feminist; but a vivid and valuable sketch of women's emancipation.)
- Encyclopaedia Britannica.* 13th and later editions.  
Article on 'Women' (and their emancipation).