

Views on the
Ordination of
Women

There is no consensus as yet in the Roman Catholic community on the question of women's ordination, says the Rev. Herve-Marie Legrand, O.P. Pope Paul VI has expressed his opposition to the ordination of women. But the "doctrinal authority of the church has not pronounced definitively on the subject," Legrand says, "and so the Catholic debate remains an open one." Legrand, as a member of the Anglican-Roman Catholic Working Group for Western Europe, developed a paper reviewing the state of the question in the Catholic community on women's ordination. The paper was originally presented in Nov. 1975. Does scripture rule out the ordination of women? What are the positions of contemporary theologians regarding women's ordination? What are the ecumenical dimensions of the question? What are some problems that might arise from the ordination of women? What role should pastoral considerations play? Those are among questions Legrand explores in his discussion. For many people, Legrand notes, the ordination of women would be a welcome event. For others, however, "this whole question causes concern and a certain amount of disquiet." He adds: there are women on both sides of the question. Legrand is a theologian at Le Saulchoir — the Dominican house of studies at the Institut Catholique in Paris. His paper follows.

Is the Catholic Church some day going to ordain women as well as men to the priesthood and episcopate? Without any doubt, our church is now faced with this question. This paper, however, has no intention of giving a forecast on the matter nor of adopting a militant position one way or the other. It is equally not going to give new theological insight into, nor even a new presentation of this question. The reasons are quite simple: our Anglican colleagues have been studying this question much longer than we Catholics; and in the Catholic Church the debate is fairly recent.¹

Since the question of the ordination of women to the presbyteral ministry is being discussed at the moment in large circles of the western Catholic Church, our first steps will consist mainly in recording this reconsideration in order to try both to account for and give a theological appraisal of it. The arguments usually put forward to dismiss such a prospect have, indeed, lost some of their cogency for part of the Christian people, a number of theologians and even some bishops. So whatever the future of the present discipline, its foundations will have to be reconsidered. And because such seems to us the situation in the areas of the Catholic Church concerned in

the question, we will mainly give to our report an exploratory turn.

To take up such an attitude can have both advantages and disadvantages. The disadvantages are obvious: the risk of clouding the issue, where in many people's judgment dogmatic questions are at stake. On the other hand, in a meeting such as ours, where we do not have to make any decisions or produce any statements, there is the advantage of being able to direct all our attention to solely understanding the different points of view. These, as we all know, do not coincide exactly with our confessional differences.

At the same time, the official attitudes of our two churches are at variance with each other. That no new obstacle be created on the road to unity, our most urgent task is to understand each other as profoundly and as objectively as possible. So that whatever our personal position may be, we are willing to carry each other's burdens, and so accomplish the will of Christ.

Since the question of the ordination of women is a discussed one for us Catholics, it is in this spirit that I want to treat it. Although the question is discussed, however, it is not yet at the point — nor will it be in the immediate future — where decisions can be made.

For many people, and not just for women, this represents a great hope: the hope of a church more in conformity with the spirit of Jesus. No longer subordinate to man, woman could become his partner and take her place in the spreading of the gospel and the building up of the church. With such a profound change in attitude, the church could surely be to the world that eschatological sign, where "in Christ there is neither male nor female" (Gal. 3.28), the more so, because in our western society relationships between men and women remain perturbed and influenced by sexism.

For many other people, however, amongst whom not a few women, this whole question causes concern and a certain amount of disquiet. Would it not be going against the mind of Christ who chose no woman to be amongst the twelve? And what about the unanimous and universal practice of the church throughout all its history? Are we going to have to say that not only has the church misinterpreted the mind of Christ over all this period, but also that in a quite unwarranted manner, it has practiced a discriminatory policy with regard to half of its members? And how

29
QUOTE FROM A PAST
TEXT OF CURRENT
INTEREST

"In such a spirit of candor and trust you allude in your letter of greeting to a problem which has recently loomed large: the likelihood, already very strong it seems in some places, that the Anglican Churches will proceed to admit women to the ordained priesthood. We had already exchanged letters with you on this subject, and we were able to express the Catholic conviction more fully to Bishop John Howe when he brought your greetings.

"Our affection for the Anglican Communion has for many years been strong and we have always nourished and often expressed hopes that the Holy Spirit would lead us, in love and in obedience to God's will, along the path of reconciliation. This must be the measure of the sadness with which we encounter to grave a new obstacle and threat on that path.

"But it is no part of corresponding to the promptings of the Holy Spirit to fail in the virtue of hope. With all the force of the love which moves us we pray that at this crucial time the Spirit of God may shed his light abundantly on all of us, and that his guiding hand may keep us in the way of reconciliation according to his will."

(From a letter of Pope Paul VI to the Archbishop of Canterbury, in the current volume, quote on p. 112.)

Last week's issue of *Origins* carried the text of two *motu proprio*s of Pope Paul VI, those issued Dec. 10, 1976 establishing the Pontifical Council for the Laity and the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace as permanent Vatican agencies.

The *motu proprio* on the laity council, discussing membership in that body, noted: "The members of this pontifical council are mostly lay people, selected from different parts of the world, and involved in different forms of the apostolate of the laity, with a suitable proportion between men and women. Among the members are also some bishops and priests." Consultors to the council should also include a suitable proportion of women, the *motu proprio* states.

could people accept a woman presiding over the eucharist, representing Christ, and saying: "This is my body"? Or a woman as the representative of the bridegroom of the church in the eucharistic covenant between God and his people? These are some of the objections. Many see in this movement within the church an unnecessary concession to the secular mentality of our age and to the pressure groups of "women's lib," at the expense of the teaching of Christ, scripture and tradition.

In certain sectors of the Catholic Church then, the question of the call of women to orders is a topic of discussion. Whereas Vatican II paid little attention to the place of women in the church and in society,² the topic has been well established especially during the last ten years.³ One might say that a certain sentence taken from the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* seems to have had an unexpected favorable reception, such as the exhortation in n. 9: "Since in our days, women have a more and more active part in the entire life of society, it is very important to also increase their participation in different sectors of the church's apostolate."

Concerning the place given to women in the church, in less than ten years, a representative number of bishops, theologians and some lay people have changed their minds. While the road they have traversed is probably known least of all to Catholicism, I feel it might be useful to trace its development in the first part of this paper.

The People of God

Beginning with the movement among the people of God, from as early as 1967, the Third World Congress of the Lay Apostolate, meeting at Rome, issued the following statement: "We are convinced that the position of women in the church up until now has been due to social and cultural factors. We are also convinced that the research being done on women's role in society is leading towards perfect equality for men and women. Thus, this Third World Congress of the Lay Apostolate asks the Catholic Church to give women all the rights and responsibilities of a Christian in the world, and that a serious doctrinal study be undertaken on the place of women in the sacramental order and in the church."⁴

Several national synods in Europe would go still further. For example, in 1969, the fifth plenary assembly of the Dutch pastoral synod passed the following resolution: "Future development must be based on the principle that women can exercise all the ecclesiastical functions, including presiding at the eucharist."⁵ In 1974, the synod of the church in Austria requested "that all the services, ministries and functions open to lay men should also be open to women," and in the same year, the synod of the church in West Germany, which was dissuaded by its chairman from entering into the question of the priestly

ordination of women, asked for their ordination to the diaconate.⁶

In 1975, the synods of the three Swiss dioceses of Basel, Coire and St. Gall adopted the following resolution: "The Swiss Episcopal conference should pledge itself to accelerate the study of the eventual ordination of women."⁷ The final text of the national Swiss synod is the following: "Today the question is being asked here and there about the priestly ordination of women. The reactions to this hypothesis are still hesitant, and in fact contradictory. That does not prevent the question from being asked and studied. The Swiss synod hopes...that this research will be pursued. The synod asks the episcopal conference to transmit this wish to the competent Roman authorities."⁸

Referring once more to the people of God, several significant groups of sisters have officially asked for the ordination of women. This is especially the case in America. There, five organizations (Leadership Conference of Women Religious, National Coalition of American Nuns, Sisters' Vocation Conference, National Assembly of Women Religious, and Sisters' Formation Conference) arranged a three-day conference in Detroit in November 1975, entitled "Women in Future Priesthood Now: A Call for Action."⁹

But it is not only in the United States that such groups exist. There are other groups of Catholic women, not solely composed of sisters who aspire to the priestly ministry; e.g. The Association of Women Aspiring to the Presbyteral Ministry (an international organization with a significant French-speaking group); the *Aktionsgemeinschaft für verantwortliche Mitarbeit der Frau in der Katholischen Kirche* (in the German-speaking countries); St. Joan's International Alliance — the oldest of these groups, which began in England at the beginning of the century. Other groups, like *Femmes et Hommes dans l'Eglise*, uphold this perspective, but see as most important the collaboration of men and women acting as partners in the whole sphere of the church's life. (The International Secretariat is in Brussels.)

Theologians

On now to the theologians. Unlike the American religious, their statements are, for the most part, of a personal nature. However we might begin by looking at the motion adopted by a group of theologians invited to Brussels in 1970 by the periodical *Concilium*: "We feel that we, have to denounce the discrimination which is practiced in the church with regard to women — a practice which still exists often in society. It is time to envisage seriously the place of women in the ministry."¹⁰

Different individual and well known theologians have explicitly stated and written that they see no dogmatic obstacle to the ordination of women. Such is the case with

German-speaking theologians such as K. Rahner, H. Kung, B. Haring and F. Klostermann. In a "Letter to Pastor Bogdam of the Lutheran Synod of Bavaria," K. Rahner writes: "The practice which the Catholic Church has of not ordaining women to the priesthood has no binding theological character...the actual practice is not a dogma; it is purely and simply based on a human and historic reflection which was valid in the past in cultural and social conditions which are presently changing rapidly."¹¹

Among the French-speaking theologians the most celebrated supporter was J. Danielou — a fact which did not prevent Pope Paul VI from making him a cardinal. Nor did he give up his opinion after accepting the red hat.¹² In addition one can also add Th. Maertens and Professors R. Metz and J.M. Aubert of the University of Strasbourg.¹³

Even though Y. Congar is favorable to the ordination of women to the diaconate, he still hesitates with regard to their ordination to the priesthood, at the same time realizing that the negative reasons do not have the force that people used to give them, and that it is not at all certain that the exclusion of women from the ministry is of divine law.¹⁴ The real reason for his hesitation — a negative one for the moment — is that Christ did not choose a woman in his twelve.

In Spain, a Dominican Father from Salamanca, J. L. Acebal, published an article favorable to the ordination of women in *La Ciencia Tomista* in 1971.¹⁵

The Bishops

To the best of my knowledge, no bishop up to now has intervened to stop this discussion, either among lay people or theologians. And, while it is not easy to interpret this silence, what we can say is that several episcopal conferences seem to have considered the question as being legitimately open for discussion.

This is certainly the case with the Canadian episcopate — whose voice was heard in Cardinal Flahiff's address to the Roman Synod of 1971¹⁶ — and also a section of the Dutch hierarchy. Dr. Stein, bishop of Trier (Germany) and president of the liturgical commission of the German episcopal conference "sanctions the possibility of women admitted to the priesthood, his only doubts being the appropriate timing of such an action."¹⁷ Dr. A. Hanggi, bishop of Basel (Switzerland) and a very well known liturgist, declares: "I do not see a single argument in the gospel which is either for or against the ordination of women. On the other hand, we have to take into consideration a long-standing tradition. Here, in my opinion, we must make our way step by step."¹⁸

In general, bishops who speak on the subject are simply content in observing that the traditional arguments put forward against the

ordination of women are no longer convincing, without concluding that they favor the idea. A typical expression of this kind is that of the American Archbishop Byrne of St. Paul and Minneapolis, in a declaration made in the Roman Synod in 1971: "Women ought not to be excluded from any service in the church where the exclusion is based on inconclusive scriptural argument, or on male prejudice, or on a blind attachment to merely human tradition based, perhaps, on the social status of women in time past."¹⁹

This would also seem to be the position of the present presidents of the Belgian, French and Spanish episcopal conferences, which, on each occasion, have only spoken from a personal point of view. Thus in 1971, Cardinal Suenens declared: "There is need to pursue our research in order to establish whether the, up to this time, constant exclusion of women from the priesthood is based on sociological or theological reasons."²⁰ And in 1974 he added: "I don't believe that there is any theological obstacle which would prevent women from becoming priests."²¹

This year (1975), Cardinal Tarancon, archbishop of Madrid, has written to the people of his diocese asking them "to rise above their ideas of the past which are no more than prejudices," and affirms that "the church is composed equally of men and women, possessing identical rights, and must utilize all her forces for the evangelization of the world today."²²

For his part, the archbishop of Marseilles, R. Etchegaray, president of the Council of European Episcopal Conferences, and recently elected president of the Church Episcopal Conference, has also stated this year that: "The evolution of woman's status renders more urgent today the revision of the place given (or better, refused) to her in the ecclesial community. The church has much to do to conquer within herself the prejudice and sociocultural reflexes which impede a true collaboration of men and women, and the realization of the special qualities which each one can bring to the work of evangelization. Theological study must also be undertaken in order to clarify the tradition of the church, and to orientate research along new avenues on the question of opening up to women both ministerial and ecclesial responsibilities."²³

I thought it would be useful to open with this information because it shows that in the year 1975 — in the Catholic Church of the west at least — the idea of women being ordained to the priesthood is a possibility to be considered by official groups of Christians, by sisters, by theologians of repute, and by bishops who, in the eyes of all, are conscious of their pastoral responsibilities. In the Catholic Church today, then, the idea of ordaining women is no longer a novel one emanating from marginal groups.

The question is now being discussed by

41

For a few recent texts in *Origins* discussing the role of women in the church, see:

**Women Disciples and Co-workers*, address by Pope Paul VI to the Vatican Commission on the UN Women's Year, Vol. 4, p. 718.

**The Voices of Women*, by Sister Elizabeth Carroll, Vol. 4, p. 55.

**Women Intrepid and Loving*, by Bishop Carroll T. Dozier, Vol. 4, p. 481.

**Women in the New World*, by Bishop Leo Maher, Vol. 4, p. 113.

**The Role of Women in the Church*, by Sr. Margaret Farley, Vol. 5, p. 89.

**Women's Liberation: Men's Liberation*, by Sr. Margaret Brennan, Vol. 5, p. 97.

**Report of the Canon Law Society of America Committee on the Status of Women in the Church*, Vol. 5, p. 260.

**The Role of Women in Evangelization*, by the Pastoral Commission of the Vatican Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, Vol. 5, p. 702.

**Identifying Women's Concerns*, USCC Task Force Report, Vol. 6, p. 69.

**Can Women Be Priests?*, Pontifical Biblical Commission Report, Vol. 6, p. 92.

**Letters Exchanged by Pope and Anglican Leader*, Vol. 6, p. 129.

"As society has grown more sensitive to some new or newly recognized issues and needs (while at the same time growing tragically less sensitive to others), the movement to claim equal rights for women makes it clear that they ought now to assume their rightful place as partners in family, institutional and public life. The development of these roles can and should be enriching for both women and men," said the U.S. Catholic bishops in their Nov. 1976 pastoral letter on moral values. The bishops continued:

"Even today some still consider women to be men's inferiors, almost their property. It is un-Christian and inhuman for husbands to regard their wives this way....

"Efforts to win recognition that women have the same dignity and fundamental rights as men are praiseworthy and good," the bishops said.

"But the same cannot be said of views which would ignore or deny significant differences between the sexes, undermine marriage and motherhood, and erode family life and the bases of society itself. Liberation does not lie in espousing new modes of dehumanization, nor in enslavement to an ideology which ignores the facts of human sexuality and the requirements of human dignity.

"There is much to be done in the church in identifying appropriate ways of recognizing women's equality and dignity. We have every reason and pre-

(continued in the following margin)

the people of God, but to what extent is it ripe? It is this point, by far the most important, that I would like to discuss in the second part of my paper. For such a perspective raises in Catholic thought, symbol and practice, a series of questions to which as yet no satisfactory answer has been given even amongst the theologians. It would be even more hazardous for the moment to speak of any sort of consensus on the part of the bishops, the people of God, and therefore of a probable agreement by the Holy See. It is known, in any case, that, without it in any way bringing the authority of the See of Peter into play, the present Pope, conscious that this is the case, has on several occasions expressed opposition with regard to such a possibility.²⁴

We will try to look into the difficulties which Catholics experience. It is because there are difficulties that this question — although open to discussion — is not yet ripe. By each of us exploring the other's difficulties, we open the way to a better understanding of each other; and, as a consequence, we will be probably better equipped to remove from the middle of the path an obstacle which we can only ignore at the risk of slowing down our progress towards unity. Perhaps, on the contrary, at the end of this encounter we might widen the road.

Theological Reflections

Faced with the question of the ordination of women to the ministries, the Catholic is confronted with a number of different kinds of problems — not all of equal importance. Personally, I think that these problems can be grouped under five headings. First, the external difficulties. They create a context in which request for ordination can more than once appear as a simple transposition of a secular claim.

(I) The most serious difficulties come from scripture and tradition considered as a norm, (II) and also from the symbolism in which revelation and sacramental activity find their expression. (III) In any case, there is no real possibility of change without taking into account a certain number of theological and pastoral reconsiderations which are in the process of being made in other sectors of theology for other reasons. (IV) Finally, the whole question has an ecumenical dimension — not just with regard to the Reformed Churches, but also with regard to the Orthodox Church(es). (V) These points are dealt with in this order, trying in each case to bring out as clearly as possible the theological problems involved.

For this question of admitting women to the priesthood — or the episcopacy, for the question of degree does not affect the core of the problem! — to have any real chance of getting an effective hearing, and therefore to have any chance of success in the Catholic world, the first essential is that it should not try

to base itself on theological suppositions which are open to criticism. On more than one occasion, the approach has been based on a theology of vocation, ordination or of the ordained ministry itself which is far from universally accepted. These points will now be considered in more detail.

When speaking of vocation in Catholic theology it is impossible to use the expression "woman's right to ordination" for the simple reason that such a right does not exist for men. This is not splitting hairs. We are dealing here with a firm theological insight. The vocation to the ministry does not consist in the desire that an individual might have to become a priest, but essentially in the call of the church to a Christian who possesses the necessary qualities — even if the desire for the priesthood is

"When speaking of vocation in Catholic theology it is impossible to use the expression 'woman's right to ordination' for the simple reason that such a right does not exist for men."

absent.

The Holy Office, during the pontificate of St. Pius X made this point quite clear in one of its declarations.²⁵ The point is, moreover, well illustrated in the practice of the early church to oblige and force certain Christians to accept ordination.²⁶ No Christian has the right to be ordained. He has only the right to ratify the call to enter the ministry which God addresses to him through the intermediary of the church and, principally, through the bishop.

To speak of a right to ordination, then, is to use an unsound argument. Equally unsound is the following argument in favor of the ordination of women, viz. that the church should ratify by ordination the gifts (charisms) of service which the Holy Spirit has already bestowed upon them. Indeed, in Catholic (or Orthodox) theology, the force of ordination is not simply declaratory, but constitutive. Without ordination the ministerial charism is not given. Moreover, this charism is not given simply for the proper exercise of the charge; without it, there is no access to the office.

It goes without saying that any form of argument whatever which would present the question of the ordination of women in the context of a power struggle in the church, or the promotion of "women's lib," would prejudice the true meaning of ecclesial ministry. For the real purpose of the call to the priesthood is the proclamation of the gospel

and the collegial overseeing of the building up of the church in the societies of today. If this call were to be sidetracked from its proper end to serve other causes, no matter how noble, then one would no longer be in a position to ask for a hearing.

(My personal opinion is that the complaint of injustice with regard to women would be verified, however, if the church — no longer having any doctrinal or pastoral objections to the ordination of women — would abstain from such ordinations anyway; for then she would implicitly confirm the prejudices of inferiority which society has about women.)

By the same token, if the request for the ordination of women to the priesthood formed part of a theology of ministry which was unacceptable, then no outcome could be envisaged. Let us take an example of the kind of reasoning which would be difficult to accept: "As long as the president of the eucharistic assembly was considered as the representative of God in the assembly of the faithful, it was understandable that this position be reserved exclusively to a man, representing God as Father. But today the idea of presiding denotes, before all else, representing the assembly before God, and seen from this point of view, there is nothing to hinder a woman from fulfilling this role."

This kind of argument appears unacceptable because it destroys one of the essential elements which maintains the balance of the theology of the ordained ministry in which the Christological and pneumatological lines must of necessity meet. If the price to be paid for the ordination of women involves such distortion in the meaning of presiding over the eucharist, then it is too high a price for the Catholic Church to pay.

Finally, it would come to the same thing if all theological consistency were to disintegrate in the consideration of the question. If Msgr. Athenagoras was writing accurately in the *Orthodox Herald*,²⁷ when he noted that "it is the same people who preach the ordination of women, and who cast doubts on, deny, or ignore the mystery of the holy eucharist, the apostolic succession, and the infallibility of the church," then, in such a climate, the ordination of women would be vigorously rejected. But what he assumes is far from being generally ascertained. The only case which interests us is when women who are ordained would be "female priests," whose vocation, ordination and ministry would correspond to the norms which apply to male, Catholic priests.

Can women be bearers of the ordained ministry such as it has always existed? On the dogmatic level, such a question has not yet been answered definitively in the Catholic Church despite the weight of scripture and tradition, such as they have been interpreted up to the present.

How Normative Are Scripture and Tradition?

A. Scripture

Jesus: The attitude of Jesus towards women constituted a clear break with tradition to the point of shocking even his disciples. At a time when Jewish women had no part to play in the activity of the rabbis (and were rigidly excluded from temple worship), Jesus of his own free choice surrounded himself with women, discussed with them, considered them as persons in their own right — especially when they were despised (the Samaritan woman, the public sinner) — and involved them in his preaching: "And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means."²⁸ It is women who will remain faithful at the foot of the cross, with John the one man present. They will also be the first witnesses of the resurrection, a point upon which all four gospel accounts of the resurrection are in agreement.

In all this it can be shown that Jesus was well in advance of the customs of his own time; and the proclamation of the equality of both spouses in marriage manifests this yet again. (See Mt. 19.1-9 and Mk. 10.1-9.) But it can be seen that no woman is numbered among the twelve chosen by Jesus: By this abstention, has he created a divine and irreversible precedent? One has to proceed here with caution since scripture *never* bases itself on this "example" of the Lord when it is restrictive with regard to the ministry of women, as is the case with I Cor. 14.34 and I Tim. 2.11-14.

Another argument which could allow a different interpretation of the action of Jesus is the following: What gives full meaning to the choice of the twelve by Jesus is the relationship with the twelve tribes. They represent the twelve sons of Jacob, and are concerned with Israel alone. We know, in any case, that the testimony of women had no juridical value.²⁹ That would make even more difficult their choice as members of the apostolic group after Pentecost. Surely, the question can be asked whether the reason for excluding women from the group of twelve was the same as the reason for excluding all pagans and Samaritans...

It is possible, then, that the decision of Jesus is not to be taken in a literal sense; of an exclusion to which we are bound, but that one should be much more sensitive to the mind and spirit of Christ: the proclamation of the kingdom of God to the whole people, and then to every creature. If Jesus had lived in a society in which the cultural status of the two sexes had differed from that of his own time, would he not have made a different choice? A choice that was already beginning to show itself in the completely new approach which he adopted

Continued from the previous margin

erent for doing so since our tradition has always honored the mother of God and recognized Mary as the one in whom, next to Jesus himself, human nature is expressed most perfectly... Thus, the bishops said, "we fully support constructive efforts to remove demeaning attitudes and customs with respect to women, however subtle and unconscious they may be." (The personal letter on moral values appended in the current volume of Origins on pp. 117ff; this quote on p. 385.)

The Call to Action justice conference sponsored in Detroit during Oct. 1976 by the U.S. Bishops' Ad Hoc Committee for the Bicentennial approved resolutions on women's ordination. The justice conference participants included some 1340 delegates—members of delegations from most U.S. dioceses. The resolutions on women's ordination were recorded as controversial actions by some observers. One resolution on women's ordination urges (see Origins, current volume, p. 112): "That the National Conference (continued in the following margin)

and the collegial overseeing of the building up of the church in the societies of today. If this call were to be sidetracked from its proper end to serve other causes, no matter how noble, then one would no longer be in a position to ask for a hearing.

(My personal opinion is that the complaint of injustice with regard to women would be verified, however, if the church — no longer having any doctrinal or pastoral objections to the ordination of women — would abstain from such ordinations anyway; for then she would implicitly confirm the prejudices of inferiority which society has about women.)

By the same token, if the request for the ordination of women to the priesthood formed part of a theology of ministry which was unacceptable, then no outcome could be envisaged. Let us take an example of the kind of reasoning which would be difficult to accept: "As long as the president of the eucharistic assembly was considered as the representative of God in the assembly of the faithful, it was understandable that this position be reserved exclusively to a man, representing God as Father. But today the idea of presiding denotes, before all else, representing the assembly before God, and seen from this point of view, there is nothing to hinder a woman from fulfilling this role."

This kind of argument appears unacceptable because it destroys one of the essential elements which maintains the balance of the theology of the ordained ministry in which the Christological and pneumatological lines must of necessity meet. If the price to be paid for the ordination of women involves such distortion in the meaning of presiding over the eucharist, then it is too high a price for the Catholic Church to pay.

Finally, it would come to the same thing if all theological consistency were to disintegrate in the consideration of the question. If Msgr. Athenagoras was writing accurately in the *Orthodox Herald*,²⁷ when he noted that "it is the same people who preach the ordination of women, and who cast doubts on, deny, or ignore the mystery of the holy eucharist, the apostolic succession, and the infallibility of the church," then, in such a climate, the ordination of women would be vigorously rejected. But what he assumes is far from being generally ascertained. The only case which interests us is when women who are ordained would be "female priests," whose vocation, ordination and ministry would correspond to the norms which apply to male, Catholic priests.

Can women be bearers of the ordained ministry such as it has always existed? On the dogmatic level, such a question has not yet been answered definitively in the Catholic Church despite the weight of scripture and tradition, such as they have been interpreted up to the present.

How Normative Are Scripture and Tradition?

A. Scripture

Jesus: The attitude of Jesus towards women constituted a clear break with tradition to the point of shocking even his disciples. At a time when Jewish women had no part to play in the activity of the rabbis (and were rigidly excluded from temple worship), Jesus of his own free choice surrounded himself with women, discussed with them, considered them as persons in their own right — especially when they were despised (the Samaritan woman, the public sinner) — and involved them in his preaching: "And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means."²⁸ It is women who will remain faithful at the foot of the cross, with John the one man present. They will also be the first witnesses of the resurrection, a point upon which all four gospel accounts of the resurrection are in agreement.

In all this it can be shown that Jesus was well in advance of the customs of his own time; and the proclamation of the equality of both spouses in marriage manifests this yet again. (See Mt. 19:1-9 and Mk. 10:1-9.) But it can be seen that no woman is numbered among the twelve chosen by Jesus. By this abstention, has he created a divine and irreversible precedent? One has to proceed here with caution since scripture never bases itself on this "example" of the Lord when it is restrictive with regard to the ministry of women, as is the case with I Cor. 14:34 and I Tim. 2:11-14.

Another argument which could allow a different interpretation of the action of Jesus is the following: What gives full meaning to the choice of the twelve by Jesus is the relationship with the twelve tribes. They represent the twelve sons of Jacob, and are concerned with Israel alone. We know, in any case, that the testimony of women had no juridical value.²⁹ That would make even more difficult their choice as members of the apostolic group after Pentecost. Surely, the question can be asked whether the reason for excluding women from the group of twelve was the same as the reason for excluding all pagans and Samaritans...

It is possible, then, that the decision of Jesus is not to be taken in a literal sense: of an exclusion to which we are bound, but that one should be much more sensitive to the mind and spirit of Christ: the proclamation of the kingdom of God to the whole people, and then to every creature. If Jesus had lived in a society in which the cultural status of the two sexes had differed from that of his own time, would he not have made a different choice? A choice that was already beginning to show itself in the completely new approach which he adopted

(continued from the previous margin)

cedent for doing so since our tradition has always honored the mother of God and recognized Mary as the one in whom next to Jesus himself, human nature is expressed most perfectly.... Thus, the bishops said, "we fully support constructive efforts to remove demeaning attitudes and customs with respect to women, however subtle and unconscious in origin they may be." (The pastoral letter on moral values appeared in the current volume of Origins on pp. 157ff; this quote on p. 165.)

The Call to Action justice conference sponsored in Detroit during Oct. 1976 by the U.S. Bishops' Ad Hoc Committee for the Bicentennial approved resolutions on women's ordination. The justice conference participants included some 1340 delegates—members of delegations from most U.S. dioceses. The resolutions on women's ordination were regarded as controversial actions by some observers. One resolution on women's ordination urges (see Origins, current volume, p. 312):

"That the National Conference (continued in the following margin)

(continued from the previous margin)

Catholic Bishops initiate dialogue with Rome to change the present discipline in the western rite of the Roman Catholic Church to allow women to be ordained to the diaconate and priesthood."

At another point the delegates urged labor in Origins current volume, on p. 112):

"That the National Conference of Catholic Bishops offer leadership in justice to the universal church by providing a process which facilitates the formation of a more fully developed position on the ordination of women to sacred orders.

To be credible, this position must evolve from an open exploration of the rights and needs of persons and of the Holy Spirit in the church, and a collative and interpretive study of the human sciences, of the experiences of other Christian churches, of contemporary biblical exegesis of theological insights as well as of pontifical and episcopal statements. The study should involve appropriate organizations of scholars, lay and religious women, especially women who believe themselves called to the priesthood."

toward women in a patriarchal society? This question puts all the more stress on the literalism applied to sexual determination, given that a great deal of freedom has been exercised with regard to the rest of the institution (admission of non-Jews; sacerdotalization of the ordained ministry; setting up of a hierarchy).

Nowadays, precisely in rediscovering the spirit of the word of Jesus — and true to his spirit — would not the church be able to modify this custom of reserving ordination to men — when men and women live as partners and the patriarchal, androcentric form of society has largely ceased to exist? This is a question that many Catholics are asking.

But, one might object on the basis of the symbolic value which scripture gives to sexual differentiation in translating the realities of the covenant, as on the basis of unanimous and universal tradition. We must return to this (below).

The Pauline Corpus. Two passages in the Pauline corpus have played a very big role in the exclusion of women from priestly and episcopal ministry. First of all, I Cor. 14,34f. Today, however, the majority of Catholic exegetes consider this passage as an interpolation on the basis of both external criteria (important manuscripts omit verses at this point), and internal criteria (it has lexicographical and syntactical peculiarities foreign to Paul — for example, the formula "as even the law says"). In addition to this, Paul clearly sees women praying and prophesying in the assembly, his one proviso being that they have their heads covered (I Cor. 11,15). It is also relevant that this interpolation is probably late, since these verses were never cited before Origen, when their role would have been decisive in the Montanist controversy.¹⁰

The second passage, I Tim. 2,11-14, probably represents another interpolation. It will show itself to be thoroughly decisive. St. Thomas uses it as his authority: "I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men." This will be interpreted as the exclusion of juridical power and the exercise of ministry. The arguments put forward by the author are interesting because they are not based on any of the Lord's precepts, nor on his example, but on an exegesis which will remain with us for 19 centuries: (1) because woman was created after man; (2) because she was primarily responsible for original sin (vv. 13 and 14).

These interpolations do not permit Paul to be made out as a misogynist. Nonetheless, it is true that he shared the religious ideas of the Jews of his time on the place of woman in relation to man, the center of the universe. But his letters show a very remarkable acknowledgment of the apostolic activity of several women in his group whom he treated with great affection (Rom. 16,1-16). He permitted women to pray and prophesy in public (I Cor. 11,4-5). He held Priscilla,

Apollo's catechist, in high esteem. He gave the title of apostle to Junie, and the title of *diacaney* to Phebe at a time when this latter title was in the process of becoming institutionalized.

Later tradition would be much more restrictive, first of all, under the influence of Judaism. For, if Christianity borrowed heavily from paganism in the sphere of worship, it could only repulse the pagan priestesses if it was to continue the cult of the *Venus Israel* faced with idolatrous cults. A yet again more fundamental influence to which to attribute this, right to our time, is the androcentrism of the whole Jewish, Greek and Latin civilization.

B. Tradition

In the early church, women were only admitted to the diaconal ministry. This was especially the case in the East. This was not because over there women had more freedom, but because they were less free and it was necessary to have an intermediary between priests and women. The sacramental character of this diaconate lasted in Byzantium up to the 12th century and in Syria up to the 15th. This fact is well attested by Catholic theologians. (With the exception of Msgr. Martimort.) This, then, is evidence enough for a revision, conforming to tradition, of the present abrupt form of canon 968 of the Code of Canon Law.

But, to understand the history of the tradition which has excluded women from ordination, a study of anthropology will be seen to be much more helpful than a study of morality, especially if it is measured against the tenor of contemporary criteria.

The manner in which the Western Christian understood the relation between man and woman has been masterfully and scrupulously dealt with in the study of Kari E. Boressen entitled, *Subordination et equivalence. Nature et role de la femme d'apres Augustin et Thomas d'Aquin.* E.g. "The whole doctrine of the nature and role of woman has been evolved from an exclusively androcentric point of view. The foundation of this doctrine is in the equation, man equals human being. Man, that is the male, is the exemplar of human being, and woman is considered as being different from him. With Augustine and Thomas, the motive of subordination is linked to the fact of itself, and woman is thus distinguished from man. She is subordinate by the very fact that she is a woman, even though equivalent as human, and thus created after the image of God."¹¹

And again: "As for Augustine, so for Thomas, the starting point of his reflection is the subordination of woman, considered as normal and 'a priori.' The androcentric structure of their particular civilization leads them to an interpretation of scripture, which identifies this relation of the sexes with the order of creation itself. This sociological element is found in the presuppositions on

which they work, as is the case also with the texts of Paul."³²

When the prince of canonists, Gratian, and the prince of theologians, Thomas Aquinas, reason to the exclusion of women from priestly ordination, they begin immediately with an appeal to the nature or condition of women. Gratian: "Woman cannot receive sacred orders because by her nature she is found in a condition of servitude."³³ This point has been well made by Ida Raming in her fine canonical study devoted to the history of the whole of Western canonical tradition.³⁴

Thomas says: "Woman is incapable of any order since her status is that of subject."³⁵ To the impediment of status, Thomas also adds the force of precept. It is not, however, the example of the Lord that he cites, but I Tim 2.11-14.

The *status subjectionis*, it should be remembered, is based in this culture on an androcentric exegesis of scripture; woman, drawn from the first man, depends on him. The first woman was responsible for the fall of the human race, having been the intermediary between the devil and man. Easy to seduce, she is, moreover, a temptation for man. When the medieval West adopted the Aristotelian biology transmitted to it by the Arabs, woman saw herself described as a *mas occasionatum* (a male of which something is lacking). If her soul is equal to that of a man — St. Thomas insists on the fact that it can be superior — woman nevertheless lacks the qualities of intelligence and will to live as an autonomous being and to fulfill a public function.

Essentially, then, the opinion of these two authorities, Gratian and Thomas, is the basis of the present canon 968 of the Code of Canon Law: "Only a baptized male can validly receive sacred orders." However, the tradition is not altogether unanimous. There are a few rare canonists of the Middle Ages who reckoned, not with any great effect, that women could receive ordination; and, among the theologians there were a few who attributed women's incapacity not to their nature, but rather to the express exclusion by Christ, as witness Christ's attitude towards his mother, the supreme creature, who yet was no priest — proof positive that only the male sex had the capacity for ordination. For, who would have been more worthy in soul than Mary? This is a form of reasoning that is not at all

convincing to the modern spirit, which sees no fittingness whatsoever in the notion that Mary should have been a priest.³⁶

How does the Catholic magisterium interpret this tradition? Catholic theologians are unanimous in their agreement that there is no solemn declaration of the extraordinary magisterium on the matter. But they are equally in agreement that the ordinary magisterium has, up to now, remained opposed to the ordination of women. Dogmatically, there is perhaps nothing binding about this tradition. There may, in fact, be a dogmatic content in the tradition, but it is not demonstrated.³⁷

For the moment, then, the doctrinal authority of the church has not pronounced definitively on the subject, and so the Catholic debate remains an open one. Faced with what could be a "non-tradition," a measure of prudence is called for, as Fr. Congar remarks in a similar context: "From the fact that the church has acted in a certain manner (in the realm of sacramental theology) it can be concluded that she could and can so act. But, from the fact that she has not acted in a certain manner it is not always prudent to conclude that she cannot or will not ever so act."³⁸

So far the dogmatic position. But this is not the only one. Among them, the symbolic aspect of the matter is one which has a major part to play. Despite the great difficulty in the matter, we will attempt to describe how this is perceived by the Catholic world in general.

The Symbolic Dimension of the Problem

As we see it, the symbolic dimension of the problem creates for many a greater difficulty than dogmatic or traditional objections.³⁹ In that area, one is touching on extremely profound realities where personal and social psychology, sexuality, religious experience and symbols so affect one another and condition one another to such a point that any discussion speedily becomes emotional.

To make this clearer, we really need joint interdisciplinary work in the fields of exegesis, sociology, economics, psychoanalysis and philosophy by women and men who would be able to apply themselves to an understanding of the symbolic dimension of human existence which has been suppressed only superficially

in our rationalized societies. In conformity with a healthy epistemology, it would be best to call upon these disciplines, because reflection upon the faith cannot take place outside the world in which it lives itself.

There are, indeed, some people who would prefer an exclusively dogmatic answer to the question (as we have already touched upon in our second section, above), to the complete exclusion of every anthropological, historical, psychological and sociological consideration. These would be making a dangerous theological choice because their understanding of the Christian life carries with it two dangers: (1) that of uprooting the Christian faith from the very environment in which it lives and grows; because it cannot exist in some abstract area outside the man-woman relationship, life in society and the depths of our psyche; and (2) along with this, the danger of a fundamentalistic and therefore superficial approach to holy scripture.

Having pointed out this methodological procedure, it must now be admitted that due to lack of time and the necessary competence, we can only highlight the problems without intending to solve them.

The Biblical Symbolism of the Covenant

According to the Book of Genesis, the creation of God gives to masculinity and femininity a definite symbolic meaning. This symbolism of man and woman in the Old and New Testament was taken to express salvation. This belongs to the category of covenant symbols which are expressed in the image of God's espousals with his people (Hos. 1-3; Jer. 3.2; Ezek. 16.1-43; 59-63; Is. 54.4-8 and 62.4ff.) in such a way that in the New Testament the church is the bride of Christ and he her spouse (Eph. 5.21-32 and Rev. 19.7-8).

This symbol presupposes the physical reality of the man/woman duality, but also transcends it. However its meaning is expressed in the fact that God is called Father, and Christ is truly a man, presented as the spouse of the church. This role in which Christ is presented is readily acceptable as long as it is attributed to the ministry of a man. But wouldn't this way of presenting Christ and what it stands for be rendered void by the substitution of a feminine image, especially in the sacrament of the new

covenant?—These are fears which many share.

The difficulty here, first of all, arises from the nature of symbolic thought itself. The difficulty is on the level of the sensible representation: is there not a risk that the reality symbolized will be blurred?

The question is, therefore, to discover whether or not the Christian people may easily refashion the way in which they symbolize religious reality or not, if they can accept its limits and if the vast majority of them is prepared to recognize that some of our attitudes are formed more by feeling than by reasoning.

The fact is, that at the level of dogma the question is not insoluble. It is necessary to point out first of all the exact meaning of the phrase, "the priest acts *in persona Christi*." This means that precisely Christ and not the priest is the real celebrant of the sacraments. Furthermore, the priest does not represent Christ immediately. He represents Christ only because he represents the church: first of all by the very fact of his ordination.

This is the dogmatic basis of his representation; it is not the fact that he is of the same sex as Christ. To reason in this way would involve the danger of heresy because it is impossible to attribute a privileged role to sexuality in the hypostatic union. Ever since the time of the Cappadocian Fathers, Catholic doctrine has always insisted on the fact that the human nature was assumed prescinding from individual differences.

Finally, a further point against the priest's immediate representation of Christ is the fact that all sacraments are celebrated corporately in the communion of the Holy Spirit, the church gathered together being itself the total subject of their celebration.⁴⁰ To hold otherwise would be to fall into christomonism.

Authority in the Bible

The second difficulty arises from the Bible's granting authority to men. This conceding of authority to men is found in the Book of Genesis, in the customs of the Jewish people and in Paul. I Cor. II,3 is clear: "The head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God." We have here a reservation of authority to man for a sacred reason, which we find expressed just as clearly in I Cor. II,8-10, Eph. 5,22-24, and I Tim. 2,11-14. The

power of this symbolism is increased by the vast amount of Catholic literature on such themes as "the eternal feminine" and "wearing the veil" (Gertrud von Le Fort) and on Mary the model of womanhood.

In both cases, roles of passivity and self-effacement are attributed to women. Thus, Paul Claudel writes in *L'annonce faite a Marie*: "The man is the priest, but the privilege of the woman is the sacrifice."

The power of this symbolism is further increased by the bad popularization of scientific discoveries which appear to cast woman in a secondary role. Thus it is that biology teaches that "woman as a female is given to reproduction; as a breasted animal to suckle the children and as a primate to be subordinate to the male."⁴¹ The same kind of teaching is found in modern anthropology insisting on the prohibition of incest as the basis of human society, which shows us, according to Levi-Strauss, that it is always men who exchange women, and never the reverse!

Thus, it is not the very symbolic structure of the covenant, but the structure of authority in creation itself which would exclude women from the exercise of authority. However, a number of serious criticisms may be levelled against such a view. First, the human sciences (see above) are not neutral. They represent a social construction of reality. One can question them seriously on the relationship they establish between nature and culture.

Second, the very structure of the symbol which in scripture attributes authority to the men deserves detailed examination. Let us analyze the structure of Eph. 5,22-24: "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, and he is the savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything."

There is found here an inversion of a typology which, in our own culture, can have its meaning twisted. Paul takes the marriage allegory of his own time in order to explain better the love of Christ for the church. But when the typology is inverted, the divine reality becomes the model of the human reality. This remains helpful as long as it is a question of what is common to the two terms, namely: (a) the love of Christ

for the church; and (b) the love of husband for his wife. But the typology ceases to have any value when the allegory of marriage absolutizes a contingent element in the human reality, namely the subordination of the wife in everything to her husband. The reason is because her love is also according to the image of Christ's love for the church.

In brief, therefore, the superiority of the man is not the theological conclusion of the mystery. Rather, it is culturally accepted *a priori* by St. Paul, and merely serves to explain the superiority of Christ.

Third, if we continue to make Mary the model of womanhood and not the model of every believer (man and woman), we shall not escape the charge of antifeminism. In this case, we set up a dialectic overestimation and underestimation of women, of which traces are to be found in Catholic literature. One should not overlook here the desired redressing of the balance by Pope Paul in his exhortation *Marialis Cultus* of 1974. He treats of these anthropological details and presents Mary clearly as "model of all the faithful, men and women."⁴²

Fourth, a truly eschatological vision of the Christian life can solve these problems in terms of the future (Gal. 3,28), by tying in the free determination of men and women as human beings, as partners in the building up of the church (as they are already in human society) according to the diversity of their respective gifts and functions and thus neutralizing a latent sexism. Perhaps here one could find a positive reason to favor the ordination of women as an expression of the real and, at the same time, eschatological partnership of women and men putting together their gifts to make the house of God a house for all his children alike.

A final difficulty is felt by a few theologians (A.M. Henry and Ph. Delhaye) who are of the opinion that the historical nature of Christianity demands that the episcopal-presbyteral ministry must remain in the hands of men for the same reasons that the church must always use bread and wine as the matter of the eucharist.⁴³

Other Theological Developments

In the first three points, we have briefly expounded the actual state of theological discussion on the question of the ordination of women. It is certain, however, that the solution

of this problem, whatever it may be — positive or negative — is closely linked with a certain number of other theological reflections going on at the moment which we can only list here. Whatever solution may be given, it will involve of necessity a particular view about tradition, of sexuality, of the relationship between man and woman, of mariology, of the *sensus fidelium*, of catholicity and, of course, but to a much lesser degree, of the ministry.

Theology of tradition: History teaches us today that we must distinguish between tradition and traditions. It has also led us to a much more nuanced interpretation of the decisions of the magisterium. But this is not the key issue. This is, rather, to discover if tradition is simply repetition or if it has no meaning other than to face the future, a future specifically eschatological where there will be neither male nor female.

The idea of tradition as repetition has already proved itself to be theologically untenable. (One has only to recall — with due respect to Vincent of Lerins' *quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus* — how many unanimous and universal traditions maintained for so long by the teaching authority of the church have already been abandoned. For example: the impossibility of a second reconciliation through penance in the early church; the paying of interest authorized after 18 centuries of having been forbidden; or, again, slavery, which was forbidden only in the last century. Formal unanimity is not the guarantee of tradition because tradition does not lie in the letter, but is guided by the Spirit of Christ.)

Tradition presupposes a reference to the work of Christ — a critical function, namely the duty of discernment in regard to this reference, and finally a creativity whereby the radical newness of the gospel becomes known in our midst today.

Sexuality and the man-woman relationship. It could be the case, as has been said by J. M. Aubert, that the question of the ordination of women is but the tip of an iceberg, which in fact is the status attributed to women by a church immersed in the structure of a male-centered society.⁴⁴ Not everybody, of course, shares this view. But, whatever the view may be, the question remains.

It is not outside the limits of possibility that a teaching body made

up exclusively of celibate males does have its influence and plays its role in the Catholic position on this question, without having to hold that this possibility has a decisive role. Other critics find it somewhat paradoxical to see this same group preoccupied with protecting femininity as they see it, but not, apparently, as women themselves see it.⁴⁵

But that is not the essential point. Many women have come to discover that they are human persons in their own right, as partners with men in the whole process of launching their children into the world, and, therefore, as partners with men also for the entire political, economical and cultural structure of our world. Much is owed to the gospel for this discovery. It is for them a matter of sheer incomprehensibility to see themselves kept in a state of subordination in the church. For them, therefore, the question of the ordination of women is secondary. What matters most of all is that we have a more evangelical (i.e. gospel-based) and, therefore, a more human church, where men and women are partners. In this area, the Catholic Church has a long way to go.⁴⁶ Can one talk about the ordination of women without going forward in this direction? Can we not be helped by other churches?

Mariology: Experience teaches us that it is not enough for a church to have a developed Mariology in order to deal satisfactorily with the feminist or the antifeminist complex. It could also be said that the exaltation of Mary goes hand in hand with an overestimation/underestimation of real women. Paul VI, as has been seen, pointed out that this kind of ambivalence must not be fed on Marian devotion.

The *sensus fidelium*: The Holy Spirit is at work in the whole people of God made up of women and men. In this, as in everything else which concerns faith and morals, he must be given the opportunity to speak. A pedagogical method ought to be found with him where it is needed to promote necessary changes — which are required in any case whether women are to be ordained or not.

The catholicity of the church: The question with which we are concerned is not being treated at the same pace in all local churches of the Catholic Church. This simply makes it clear that the uniform model of Latin Catholicism cannot be an adequate model for the Catholic unity of the

church. This diversity of pace in the perception of the problem is also one of the sources of the rather negative attitude of the Holy See with respect to whatever concerns the ordination of women, in our opinion.

The status of the ministry: It is difficult to imagine what would be the consequences of the ordination of women with regard to the concept and the practice of the ministry. Dogmatically, there is no change to be expected. Pastorally such an innovation would certainly demand that the collegiality of the ministry and its insertion in concrete communities be taken more seriously. Furthermore, as a sociologist remarked: "The feminization of the profession (of the ministry) would associate religion still more with the weak values of our societies." So, it would be important not to reinforce one *Ein-Mann-System* (the inconveniences of which are patent: a pastor omniscient before a silent community) with an *Ein-Weib-System*. What is desired, therefore, is that we have pastoral teams made up of men and women since men and women make up the church just as in human society. This is something to be striven for whether women are ordained or not.

The Ecumenical Dimension

In the rather reserved prudence expressed in official circles by the Catholic Church, an ecumenical concern is certainly to be found. The Holy See is very conscious of the attitude of the Orthodox Church and of the non-Chalcedonian Churches, where the question of the call of women to the ministry has not yet occurred. This attitude of reserve is not without foundation. It expresses the ancient understanding of what was reception: that is, that in the church of God the faith and the formulations of faith, traditions and ministries are the object of a reciprocal reception among the local churches. No church is believed to make decisions about it unilaterally without seeking the approval of the others.

The essence of reception is that it is based on a relationship of reciprocity among sister churches.⁴⁷ Even in the case where a church was not disposed to receive a decision, and even more when a church had refused to receive a decision, nevertheless, it would always feel itself called into question by the decision of a sister-church. It is necessary to answer clearly and to the actual point at issue. Such

which be the challenge already made by the Reformed Churches to the Catholic Church. Now that the challenge has been made by the Anglican Communion it cannot be ignored. What will be the answer? So, at the end of my paper, I will repeat what I said at the beginning: I am not in a position to be able to foretell the future. All the same, I have attempted to provide the chief reasons why I cannot do this.

Finally, however, I would think personally that it is not so much the materiality of the answer (i.e. yes/no) which is important, as the ecclesiological structure of how it is arrived at. If a basic discussion could be organized sometime in which questions and solutions could be shared, I believe that the question of the ordination of women, far from being a cause of crisis, would be rather an occasion of progress along the road towards unity. And, as we have seen, this question is part of a concatenation of other theological questions which the ecumenical movement has led us to reconsider together. □

FOOTNOTES:

1. Pope Paul VI, one knows, formed a special commission for the study of women in society and in the church. This commission was composed of 25 members (15 women and 10 men) and the chairman was Archbishop Bartolotti. A note from the Secretariat of State specified from the beginning that it was not their job to study "the possibility of the ordination of women" (*La Documentation Catholique*, 1971), 508-509). Abgr. Bartolotti gave a glimpse of the work of this commission on the occasion of the Synod of Bishops on October 23, 1974 (*La Documentation Catholique* 70, 1974, 1016-1047).

2. A first balance sheet of the teaching of Vatican II on the place of women in the church is found in H. Alabrecht, "Die Aussagen des II. Vatikanischen Konzils in ihrer Bedeutung für die heilige Mitarbeit der Frau in der Kirche," in *Maria, Leitura, Doksina* (Geschichtl. H. Volk), hrsg. v. O. Semmelroth, Mainz, 1968, 411-450.

3. Thus, less than 10 years ago, F. Poulat, a sociologist well versed in contemporary Catholicism, could write: "On the Catholic side, the attention given to the ordination of women leads to the judgment it is theologically unacceptable and ecumenically harmful." Foreword to E. R. Wickham & J. Rowe, *Mission indistincte au presbytérat-évêché?*, Paris, 1967, p. 19.

4. Third World Congress of the Lay Apostolate, *La Documentation Catholique* 64 (1967) 1883.

5. *La Documentation Catholique* 67 (1970) 176. Final bulletins: 72 in favor (1 bishop), 8 against 14 bishops, 24 abstentions (3 bishops).

6. *Heidelberger Korrespondenz* 28 (1974) 322.

7. *Orientierung* 39 (1975) 152.

8. *La Documentation Catholique* 71 (1975) 942.

9. The proceedings of the Conference have been published A. M. Gardner, *Women and Catholic Priesthood: An Expanding Circle* (New York, Putnam, Toronto, 1976), Paulist Press. (Add. Note).

10. See *Concilium* suppl. Et. ed., p. 162.

11. *La Croix*, 20 Avril 1974. For F. Klostermann, cf. his last work, *Gemeinde Kirche der Zukunft* (Freiburg-Basel-Wien, 1974) I, p. 269-270.

12. J. Daniélou's position was already expressed in "Le ministère des femmes dans l'Eglise ancienne," in *La Documentation Catholique* 61 (1968) 70-96. He takes it again in the widely circulated magazine *L'Espresso*, June 16-22, 1969. When he had become caelid he commented on

13. Human Synod of 1971: "Nothing decisive has been said in the priesthood of women, the study of the problem can continue." Quoted in C. Lebrun, "Not le point de presbytérat féminin," *Revue Théologique* 72 (1972) 204.

14. Th. Maertens, in his book *La prouesse de la femme dans l'Eglise: Une application au ministère ecclésiastique*, Paris-Toronto, 1967, is cautiously open to the prospect of the ordination of women, particularly on pp. 194-195. Cf. also R. Metz, "L'accession des femmes au ministère ordonné," in *Etudes théologiques* (June 1974) 21-30, J. M. Aubert, "La femme, la communion et l'ordination," Paris 1975, esp. pp. 158-161.

15. Y. Congar, "Eclaircissements sur la question des ministères," in *La Mission Dieu* 163 (1970) 116. "Can one go as far as the priesthood of women? I hesitate a great deal, while at the same time recognizing that the negative reasons do not have all the weight that used to be given to them and that it is not certain that the exclusion of women is of divine law. On the other hand, I would admit the discernible ordination of women."

16. J. L. Aubert, "El sacerdotio femenino: Misiones y ministerios," in *Concilium* 98 (1971) 55-11.

17. Text in *La Documentation Catholique* 68 (1971) 988-989.

18. Declaration taken up in *Deutsche Tagespost*, Nov. 17-18, 1972, p. 14, quoted by G. May in *Zeitschrift für R.G.K.A.* 60 (1974) 184-185.

19. Quoted in *Orientierung* 39 (1975) 152.

20. Declaration to the Roman Synod of 1971 in *La Documentation Catholique* 68 (1971) 1041.

21. *Paroisse* (June-July 1974), taken up again in *La Documentation Catholique* 71 (1974) 948, complete citation reads: "I remain reserved with regard to the presbyteral ministry of women. I don't think that there is any theological obstacle of women being ordained, but the arguments in favor are too often made in a way which claims it as a right and which has nothing to do with the vocation which is fundamental."

22. The source is a Sunday pamphlet addressed by the archbishop of Madrid to his diocese; it is quoted in *Bulletin de l'Annuaire des femmes apostolat au ministère presbytéral* 12 (Jan. 1975) 7-8.

23. In *L'Espresso* mentioned, diocesan bulletin of Marseilles of Feb. 23, 1975.

24. As far as we know, Paul VI has expressed himself at least three times in an unfavorable way on the subject of the ordination of women.

25. In a letter to Cardinal Alfrink of Dec. 24, 1969: "Permit that we, in our turn, offer some (anonymous) to your pastoral intention: 'one critiques the thesis that only a man can become a priest.'" AAS 62 (1970) 67.

26. At the time of the declaration of St. Teresa of Avila and St. Catherine of Siena as doctors of the church: "Molestes in eam in ecclesia (I. Cur. 14.34) if she had done, another might come to doubt non so destinato ad essere nella Chiesa funzioni presbiterale de ministerio et de ministerio." AAS 62 (1970) 593.

27. In an allocution at a private audience granted to the commission charged with studying the response of the church to the International Women's Year. According to *Irenikon* 48 (1975) 236, he declared that the fact that women can be "disciples and co-workers, but not ordained ministers, could not be changed in the church."

28. Since the drafting of this paper, the publication of a correspondence between Paul VI and the Archbishop of Canterbury remained, once again, the serious objections of the Pope to women's ordination, cf. *Origins* Vol. 6, No. 9, p. 129.

29. Letter of Cardinal Merry del Val "Ad R.P. Cardulum M.A. de Courmont, episcopum Antverpeni." AAS 4 (1912) 485.

30. Cf. Y. Congar, "Ordinations inouis, ecclésiastiques, de l'Eglise ancienne au canon 214," in *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 50 (1966) 169-197.

31. Reproduced in *Orientierung* Romano, June 17, 1975.

32. Lk 8:1-3.

33. Cf. Strack-Billerbeck, III, pp. 217, 231, 359.

34. Here we follow R. Gresson, *Le ministère des femmes dans l'Eglise ancienne* (Gembloux, 1977), p. 28-31.

35. Paris-Orléans 1967, p. 251.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 259-260.

37. *Concilium* 33, n. 1, esp. 11.

38. I. Ritting, *Der Ausschuss der Frau vom Erzbischof von Köln: Ein Gespräch über die Frauenordination*, Eine vom Erzbischofshof in Köln herausgegeben, in: *Erziehung der Frauen von Kaiser Otto I. bis Codex Iure Canonico*, Köln-Wien 1973.

39. Thomas Aquinas, in IV Sent. d. 25a, 7a q. 1 ad 4. am.

40. On the theme of Mary's priesthood in Catholic apologetics of R. Laurent, *Mary, l'Esprit et le sacerdoce*, Paris 1972-1973.

41. Good study in H. van der Meer, *Präsenzen der Frau (Quintessenz desprakt. 42)*, Freiburg-Basel-Wien, 1967, pp. 131-139. Translated in English.

42. Y. Congar, "L'Église, problèmes et solutions à propos de la prière d'intercession et des rapports entre le presbytère et l'épiscopat," in *La Mission Dieu* 14 (1970) 128.

43. On the symbolic dimensions of the problem, cf. the interesting work of D. Singlet, "Sur le symbolisme féminin," in *Etudes théologiques* (Jan. 1974) 51-56, and "Symbolisme des épiscopales et sacerdoce ordonné," *Ibid.* 33-38 (Sept.-March 1974) 79-71.

44. Y. Congar, "L'Église ou communauté chrétienne, objet intégral de l'action liturgique," in *La Mission Dieu* 10 (1970) 100-101. *La Mission Dieu* 1967, pp. 241-292.

45. See J. Massin in *Études N. Bonnet, J. Massin, B. Paillet, La femme moderne*, Paris, 1973, p. 111.

46. AAS 60 (1974) 112, p. 21.

47. Cf. Ph. Delvaux, "Rétrospective et prospective des ministères laïques dans l'Eglise," in *Revue de la Mission* 3 (1972) 33-75, esp. 34-35.

48. J. M. Aubert, *La femme*, op. cit. p. 157.

49. To these crises, one could add that the matter of concern is mainly the dissolution of male and female identities and of the corresponding roles.

50. Without saying anything about a man's image conveyed by preaching and piety, one can wonder that the decision making instances of the Catholic Church do not involve women: councils, episcopal councils, ecclesiastical courts (which however possess sentences on marriages and Roman congregations have no women as regular members. No woman is mentioned among the 50 members and 100 consultants of the Commission for the Revision of the Code of Canon Law. The link between power of jurisdiction and power of orders has not necessarily as a result that the whole of the church has to be decided only by men.

51. It is well known that Paul VI, in the dialogue with the Orthodox Church, declares that church is a sister church, without reserves, cf. J. Lantier, "L'Église, source d'inspiration ecclésiologique du Vatican Agains," in *Études* 26 (1975) 47-74. He used the same wording with respect to the Anglican Church: was it in the same sense? See J. Lantier, *Ibid.*, p. 74, n. 70.

Reprinted from Origins,
NC Documentary Service,
January 6, 1977