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THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN

The Lambeth Conference will today be discussing one of the most delicate issues with which it has to deal: the ordination of women. The question presents particular difficulties because there is such intensity of conviction on both sides. It is a matter that causes differences within individual Churches, between one Church and another within the Anglican Communion, and in relations with other Churches. A number of Anglican Churches already have women priests and three years ago the General Synod of the Church of England decided that there were no fundamental objections to the ordination of women. Even though it was unable then to agree on what the next step should be, one might have supposed that the issue of principle had been settled and that it was simply a matter of arranging the most suitable time for following the course already taken by others.

But it is not as simple as that. For many people these days it is not hard to accept that women should be admitted to the priesthood when they occupy so many positions of leadership in secular life. It is natural that the Churches should be influenced by this social trend, that some women who feel a calling to the priesthood should be just as eager as women in other professions to see the barriers come down, and that they should receive the support of those who see no doctrinal justification for continuing to exclude them. But

there are still a number of people who do see doctrinal objections and undoubtedly a good many more who have an instinctive reaction that it is not fitting for women to be priests.

Within the Church of England they are probably a minority. That is suggested by the large majority of dioceses who concluded three years ago that there were no fundamental objections to the ordination of women, though one must always be wary of assuming too readily that the views of the average man and woman in the pew are faithfully reflected in the official bodies of the Church. But the lesson to draw from so many schemes of change and reorganization for the Churches in recent years is the need for tolerance of the convictions of others.

Within the Church of England that means not pushing reforms past the firm objections of a strong minority. The experience of the Episcopal Church in the United States is a warning of the dangers. There the ordination of women has provoked an outright schism, with all the bitterness and diversion of effort that is inevitably involved. It is doubtful if the ordination of women would lead to a similar division within the Church of England. All its traditions point to the acceptance of diversity, even when unwelcome. But it is true that there is not yet that degree of accord within the Church that is desirable before a change of this magnitude is undertaken. The internal circumstances of

the largest Church in the Anglican Communion do not therefore point to the early ordination of women.

Contradictory conclusions can be drawn from considering relations with other Churches. Relations with both the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches would be seriously complicated by admitting women to the priesthood. The views of these Churches have been made sufficiently well known, even though a more hopeful conclusion may be drawn from the report published last week of the joint consultation on the ordination of women convened by the Anglican Consultative Council and the Vatican Secretariat for Christian Unity. This consideration must weigh heavily for those whose hopes are directed towards intercommunion, while recognizing that it is not realistic to look for organic union. At the same time, relations with the Free Churches would be improved by having women priests. So the ecumenical arguments conflict.

What about relations between different Churches of the Anglican Communion? It would be foolish to predict what each one of them will do in the coming years. The only strong probability is that they will not do the same. That should be an indication to the Conference. It has no executive authority. Its discussion of such an important and intricate topic should be of great value. But it should not seek to impose a line.

NOT ALIGNED WITH EACH OTHER

The Belgrade meeting of foreign ministers of non-aligned countries was intended to smooth the way to the summit conference of the movement due to be held in Havana in September 1979. Instead the meeting only exposed the sharp differences among its membership. The issue of principle over the meaning of non-alignment became entangled with the ostensibly procedural one of the place and date of the summit, since Cuba has become the symbol of an interpretation of non-alignment which some members openly reject and many others view with obvious unease. In the event the Havana

ment at all, and one must that some countries will to go to Havana next year Cuba has by then changed policy.

These differences have been absent from the beginning of non-alignment as conceived at Bandung in 1955. The main theme then was for the unfettered dependence of those emerging from colonial rule for their peaceful development. At that time the threat in a confrontation between western and communist had been made manifest in the Korean war.