

The purpose of the statement was clear: to reaffirm the teaching of the Church that "women are not to be ordained." The reason for the statement was that the ordination of women has become a topic of lively discussion within the Church. The Bishops of the Administrative Committee, who authorized me to make the statement, felt that in the light of the discussion taking place their position should be made known.

I have been asked whether the issuance of the statement means that the bishops do not consider the matter an open one, and whether we are ruling out all discussion of the topic. In answering these questions the salient points to be remembered are as follows:

1. In our judgment, the problem is theological or doctrinal. The precise question is: Was the exclusion of women from the priesthood by Christ determined simply by the cultural situation which existed in His day? Or did Christ exclude women for other reasons, so that changes in culture, etc. would have no bearing on the question? Was it His will, in other words, that only men be called to the ordained ministry as a matter of principle?

2. Admittedly, this question has never been addressed by a solemn definition of the extraordinary magisterium. The Church, however, as consistently taught and understood that it was Christ's view of the Church and how its teaching authority operates, does have a great deal of significance. When the Bishops' Committee on Pastoral Research and Practice in 1972 referred to a longstanding tradition, they were not referring simply to a custom but to a teaching that has been constant, one that has been questioned only in recent years. It is because the bishops do not see any development on the horizon which is of sufficient weight to overturn this teaching that they felt obligated to reaffirm it.

3. Does this mean that the question of the ordination of women can no longer be subjected to theological scrutiny? No. Even matters that have been solemnly defined continue to be studied so that our knowledge of them can be deepened or refined. But any study of this particular question should take place within the following framework:

- a. It must be done in accord with the accepted norms of theological research.
- b. It must take into account the fact that the Church's constant tradition has been not to ordain women and that this fact does have significance in Catholic theology.
- c. There must be a willingness ultimately to accept the judgment of the magisterium.

Any study which is not carried on within this framework will, in my judgment, be of little value.