

ARC CONSULTATION ON ORDINATION OF WOMEN

A special meeting was held between Anglican and Roman Catholic consultants to review this issue. The sessions took place at the Mercy Center in Cincinnati, June 22-25. At that time the following press release was issued:

"In considering the relation of the question of the ordination of women to the authority of the Churches' Tradition, the following considerations must be kept in mind.

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(1) There is what may be called an "essential tradition" which, as witnessed in the Scriptures, the ecumenical creeds, the Church's liturgical tradition, and its proclamation and teaching, constitutes the basic identity of the Christian community. This tradition has as its fundamental content the relation of human beings to the God and Father of Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.

(2) This tradition is variously elaborated and interpreted in dogma and doctrinal tradition, according as inquiry and change within the Church, or confrontation with intellectual, social, or political movements in the world require the Church to move towards a deeper self-understanding through explication of the tradition which constitutes its identity. It thus faces, from time to time, novel issues, which demand that on the basis of its given self-understanding, it explain itself in new ways for the sake of fidelity to the Gospel.

(3) In the current situation, the question of the ordination of women has raised issues which cannot be answered adequately by the mere citing of traditional practices or beliefs. Current discussion of the issue has showed that traditional reasons for refusing the ordination of women are not universally acceptable. It has further showed that problems relating to the doctrine of God, of the Incarnation, and Redemption are at least indirectly involved in its solution, so that any decision, whether for or against the ordination of women, will in fact require the Church to explain or develop its essential tradition in an unprecedented way. The Church faces an issue which demands of it a new effort at self-understanding in regard to certain elements of its Gospel.

(4) Such an effort involves a two-fold process: first, the theological exploration of the Tradition and of the new question in its bearing on the data of Christian revelation; second, an official decision by constituted authority in the Church which encompasses the doctrinal and practical aspects of the issue. In the divided state of the Christian churches, separate processes will be gone through by the different bodies.

"The Theological exploration mentioned above has been undertaken by both Roman Catholic and Anglican theologians. Official pronouncements give no indication of any expectation of change in the present position of the Roman Catholic Church on this issue in the immediate future. At this meeting, a number of the Roman Catholic participants felt that the implications of this matter had not been explored sufficiently to offer a final decision. On the other hand, the question of the ordination of women is expected to be proposed for action at the General Convention of the Episcopal Church in 1976. Anglican participants felt that discussion in the Episcopal Church in the United States had reached a stage where decision was becoming possible."

This consultation was chaired by Bishop Charles H. Helmsing and Bishop Arthur A. Vogel. They were joined by eighteen men and women representing backgrounds in scriptural studies, theology, church history and law and psychology.