

The Ordination of Women: A New Obstacle to the Recognition of Anglican Orders

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Introduction

Pope John Paul II's apostolic letter on priestly ordination, *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*,¹ took many by surprise. Its fundamental judgment has been consistently and firmly advanced in the context of the Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue for some twenty years; still, many who wait for the full communion of Anglicans and Roman Catholics viewed it as a preemptory judgment, the closing of the door on an issue barely raised. Anglicans who have concluded that no theological objections prohibit and some positive theological arguments support, and even require the admission of women to priesthood and episcopate expressed dismay, as if betrayed. Some said the pope was responsible for erecting a "new, grave obstacle" to the restoration of communion.

Anglicans, after almost fifty years of debate,² decided at Lambeth in 1968 that arguments for and against the ordination of women to the priesthood were inconclusive—leaving the member churches free to act as they saw fit. But in 1968, Roman Catholics had barely begun to discuss the issue.³ Since vigorous debate over 25–30 years has not given rise to a solid consensus among theologians, many Roman Catholics also regarded the papal letter as bringing premature closure to a relatively new question.

Nevertheless, the actual admission of Anglican women to the priesthood, and in some provinces to the episcopate, has required, for the sake of frank and sincere dialogue, some judgment from the Roman Catholic Church. And the judgment has been that it is the canonical change in *Anglican* practice which poses—in words first used by Pope Paul VI in 1976—a "new" and "grave obstacle," even a "threat,"⁴ to the reconciliation of ministries. As a consequence of its ecumenical commitments, the Vatican

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¹ "Apostolic Letter on Ordination and Women," *Origins* 24 (June 9, 1994), 49, 51–52.

² See Jacqueline Field-Bibb, *Women Towards Priesthood: Ministerial Politics and Feminist Praxis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 67–175.

³ For the beginnings of this debate, see the Translator's Foreword, by Arlene and Leonard Swidler, to Haye van der Meer's, *Women Priests in the Catholic Church?: A Theological-Historical Investigation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1973), ix–xxix.

⁴ "Letters Exchanged by Pope & Anglican Leader," *Origins* 6 (August 12, 1976), 129, 131–32, at 132.

has developed an evaluation, given its judgment, and now, in this apostolic letter, required that it be definitively held.

Different timetables, different procedures for coming to a decision, different ways of exercising teaching authority, then, have led us to this point: just as the prospect of removing the “old” obstacle to Roman Catholic recognition of Anglican orders is in sight,⁵ a “new” obstacle has taken its place.

How might we get some purchase on this question? What can we learn from what has already been worked out? What is the state of the question on this topic as it has emerged from official, public Anglican-Roman Catholic documentation and exchange?⁶

I intend to review four phases of our common history with this topic, drawing upon the pertinent documentation, including reports of the Anglican-Roman Catholic Consultation in the U.S. (ARC-USA) that directly addressed the ordination of women. In the course of this review, I will call attention to two different avenues of approach. Then I will propose that *Ordinatio sacerdotalis* specifies the characteristic Roman Catholic approach, and point out what this suggests as the focus of our future efforts to address this issue.

Four Phases in the Emerging Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue

A. *The First Phase: 1968–75*

In the summer of 1968, the Malta Report was endorsed first by Cardinal Bea and a few weeks later by the Lambeth Conference. During that same Lambeth meeting, Anglican bishops adopted a resolution finding the theological arguments both for and against the ordination of women to the priesthood inconclusive.⁷ Just as the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) was being initiated, then, the Anglican Communion was nearing the conclusion of its long debate.

⁵ See the letter of Jan Cardinal Willebrands to the co-chairmen of ARCIC-II: “New Context for Discussing Anglican Orders,” *Origins* 15 (March 20, 1986), 662–64.

⁶ I will limit my consideration to official communications, aware that this introduces a certain unreality into the report. The “Anglican position” is the position taken by Lambeth Conferences and articulated by the Archbishops of Canterbury; not all Anglicans or member churches are committed to this position. The “Roman Catholic position” is authoritatively articulated by the popes and by the responsible Vatican congregations and their spokesmen; still, many prominent Roman Catholic theologians do not find it convincing, and some explicitly propose the same arguments and conclusions as the Anglicans who favor the ordination of women.

⁷ Resolution no. 34 in *The Lambeth Conference 1968: Resolutions and Reports* (London: S.P.C.K., 1968), 39.

Reasons given in support of the 1968 resolution include the following theological considerations⁸: (1) the need to take with utmost seriousness the appeal to Sacred Scripture and Tradition; (2) the fact that “the data of Scripture appear divided on this issue”; (3) and that the data of tradition found in the early fathers and the medieval theologians reflect “biological assumptions about the nature of woman and her relation to man which are considered unacceptable” today. It concludes from the third consideration: “If the ancient and medieval assumptions about the social role and inferior status of women are no longer accepted, the appeal to tradition is virtually reduced to the observation that there happens to be no precedent for ordaining women to be priests.”

As the Episcopal Church moved towards its decision to admit women to priesthood during the early 1970s, these same points were addressed: the inconclusive character of the New Testament witness, the lack of convincing evidence from early canons and ordination rites, and the obsolete view of women’s inferior and subordinate status held by medieval theologians.⁹ Many Anglican and Roman Catholic theologians recognized that the traditional theological arguments, based on a faulty anthropology, were indefensible.¹⁰ They concluded, therefore, that there was no theological objection to the ordination of women.

The absence of a serious dogmatic obstacle was only the negative half of the argument; positively, they found “urgent theological reasons” in favor of the priestly ordination of women. The equality of the sexes demanded a presentation of Christian doctrine that would explicitly propose the universality of redemption, the inclusivity of the Church as a priestly body, and women’s capacity to represent humanity, the Church, Christ, and God. As the 1976 General Convention approached, advocates in the Episcopal Church saw little on the ecumenical horizon to discourage them from the expectation that a difference in practice—it was viewed as a disciplinary, not a doctrinal matter—could be accommodated within, and might even be a prophetic sign for the one Church of Christ.¹¹

Following the illegal ordinations in Philadelphia in 1974, however, Jan Cardinal Willebrands told some bishops of the Episcopal Church that the move from theory to practice would seriously affect the Anglican-Roman

⁸ *Ibid.*, the Committee Report, “Women and the Priesthood,” 106–108, at 106.

⁹ J. Robert Wright, “Documentation and Reflection: An Address in Favor of the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood,” *Anglican Theological Review* 55 (January, 1973), 68–72. A summary of the arguments in favor and documentation from the Episcopal Church may be found in Emily C. Hewitt and Suzanne R. Hiatt, *Women Priests: Yes or No?* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1973).

¹⁰ For an early and influential investigation of the anthropological question, see George H. Tavad, *Woman in Christian Tradition* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973). The work of Haye van der Meer, cited in n. 3 above, argued that this faulty anthropology might reveal the “tradition” to be determined by socio-cultural rather than theological factors.

¹¹ Wright, “Documentation and Reflection,” 70–71.

Catholic dialogue on the nature of ministry.¹² In October, 1975, Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, then president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, followed up with a statement reasserting the Catholic Church's teaching that women are not to be ordained to the priesthood.¹³ Earlier that year, in an address to the Vatican's Study Commission on the Role of Women in Society and in the Church, Pope Paul VI had expressed, almost parenthetically, the basis for this judgment: "Although women do not receive the call to the apostolate of the Twelve and therefore to the ordained ministries, they are nonetheless invited to follow Christ as disciples and co-workers. . . . We cannot change what our Lord did, nor his call to women."¹⁴

The two different approaches, then, are these: the one—which I shall refer to as "Anglican"—proceeds by way of theological reasoning, and has its base in a renewed theological anthropology; the other—the "Roman Catholic"—proceeds by appeal to the will of Christ revealed in history and confirmed in the experience of the Church.

During this first, American, phase of our common experience with this question, attention focussed almost exclusively on the first approach. The arguments were scrutinized by ARC-USA since the prospect of action on the part of the Episcopal Church was imminent. The ARC-USA co-chairmen convened a special scholarly consultation in June, 1975, and its members prepared a joint statement on the relation of this question to the "authority of the Church's tradition."¹⁵ According to their statement, the ordination of women raises "issues which cannot be answered adequately by the mere citing of traditional practices of belief," for the traditional reasons for refusing women ordination are "not universally acceptable." In addition, "problems relating to the doctrine of God, of the Incarnation and Redemption" were seen to be "at least indirectly involved in its solution." Participants agreed 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."

By 1975, the Episcopal Church had completed its theological exploration and was on the verge of making an authoritative decision. The position of the Roman Catholic Church—not yet developed as it has been in the intervening years—was not, according to the pope, expected to change, though popular opinion in favor of change was mounting, and theological investigation was beginning in earnest. The ARC-USA consultation quite

¹² "Women Priests and Ecumenism," *Origins* 5 (October 9, 1975), 241, 243–44, at 243.

¹³ "Discouraging Unreasonable Hopes," *Origins* 5 (October 16, 1975), 257, 259–60.

¹⁴ "Women/Disciples and Co-Workers," *Origins* 4 (May 1, 1975), 718–19, at 719.

¹⁵ "Ordination of Women/an Ecumenical Dialogue," *Origins* 5 (July 17, 1975), 100. The papers from this consultation were later published as *Pro and Con on Ordination of Women* ((New York: Seabury Professional Services, 1976).

realistically observed that each Church would have to arrive at a decision by means of its own processes.

ARC-USA incorporated the conclusions of the special consultation into a Statement on the Ordination of Women formulated at its October, 1975 meeting.¹⁶ In addition, it named the following common presuppositions: ARCIC's Windsor and Canterbury Statements, Scripture and Tradition as doctrinal sources, the responsibility of theologians to incorporate the findings of other sciences into their work, the fundamental equality of men and women in society and in the Church—"in exercising the ministry of all baptized persons in the public forum."¹⁷ This Statement identified three challenges to be faced: (1) Jesus' choice of males as apostles, cited as a model, and the Church's subsequent practice was a weighty precedent whose explanation and normative character had to be newly evaluated; (2) the exclusion of a large class of persons (granted that no individual has a right to ordination) for no reason other than gender required justification by cogent arguments; and (3) a strong positive case, not just the absence of obstacles, should be proposed by those in favor of ordaining women.

In the mid 1970s, two conclusions drawn by the special consultation in the U.S. shaped the ongoing work of ARC-USA. First, all were convinced that this question was being posed in a new way and would therefore be solved only by a *development* of the tradition, a development of doctrine. Second, the required development of doctrine would involve correlating new appreciation of the equality of women and the meaning of human sexuality with the doctrines of God, the Incarnation and Redemption, and the Church and its ministry. The motivating factor was concern for the recognition of women's full equality in the world, in the economy of salvation, and in church life—what we would recognize today as the concerns of feminist theology. Since common theological objections appealed to women's state of subjection (and consequent inability to represent eminence), the first line of response was to provide theological justification for women's equality with men and their capacity to represent God, Christ and the Church. A second line of response on the part of some members of both communions was to argue, positively, that the admission of women to priesthood is required by these doctrinal developments.

In 1975, the year prior to the Minneapolis General Convention (September, 1976), the Archbishop of Canterbury, Donald Coggan, wrote to Pope Paul VI to advise him of "the slow but steady growth of a consensus of opinion within the Anglican Communion that there are no fundamental objections in principle to the ordination of women to the priesthood."¹⁸ In

¹⁶ (ARC-USA) "Christian Unity & Women's Ordination," *Origins* 5 (November 20, 1975), 349-52.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 4, 350.

¹⁸ "Letters Exchanged" (cited in n. 4), 129.

response, the pope advised him of the Catholic Church's conviction that "very fundamental reasons" make ordaining women to the priesthood impossible. He itemized three reasons: "the example recorded in the sacred scriptures of Christ choosing his apostles only from among men, the constant practice of the Church, which has imitated Christ in choosing only men, and [the Catholic Church's] living teaching authority which has consistently held that the exclusion of women from the priesthood is in accordance with God's plan for his church."¹⁹ In the same letter, the pope observed that this new course of action on the part of Anglicans would inevitably introduce "an element of grave difficulty" into the dialogue between the two communions. In a second exchange of letters in early 1976, the Archbishop of Canterbury said that Anglicans saw the new development as allowing for the genuine expression of diversity in unity, but the pope responded that his affection for the Anglican Communion was the measure of the sadness he felt at the prospect of "so grave a new obstacle and threat" on the path of reconciliation.²⁰

B. *The Second Phase: 1976-78*

A new phase in the Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue on the issue—hardly separable from the intra-Catholic debate—began when a report of the Pontifical Biblical Commission was leaked to the press in 1976.²¹ Asked to consider the question "whether or not women can be ordained to the priestly ministry (especially as ministers of the Eucharist and as leaders of the Christian community)," the Commission replied that, by itself, the New Testament did not provide a clear answer one way or the other.

Much more significant was the appearance, in January, 1976 of a *Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood (Inter insigniores)*, prepared by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and published with the approval of the pope.²² It provided a new statement of the Roman Catholic position. A commentary released at the same time as the Declaration, but not carrying the same authority, supplies a very useful interpretation.²³

The Declaration makes the case that there is an unbroken, universal Tradition, common to East and West, of admitting only men to ministerial

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 131.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 132.

²¹ "Can Women Be Priests?" *Origins* 6 (July 1, 1976), 92-96.

²² "Vatican Declaration: Women in the Ministerial Priesthood," *Origins* 6 (February 3, 1977), 517, 519-24; *AAS* 69 (1977), 98-116.

²³ "A Commentary on the Declaration," *Origins* 6 (February 3, 1977), 524-31. The *Origins* edition lacks footnotes. Both the Declaration and the complete Commentary were published in a United States Catholic Conference pamphlet in 1977. I will cite page numbers from *Origins*.

priesthood, and that this is rooted in the example of Jesus and the apostles. It announces that the Church, "in fidelity to the Lord, does not consider herself authorized to admit women to priestly ordination."²⁴ This teaching, found in the first four sections of the Declaration, is proposed with the authority of the magisterium. Sections five and six, which explore the fittingness of this practice in light of the mystery of Christ and the mystery of the Church, are not.

I do not intend to repeat all the arguments of the Declaration, but I would call attention to four claims. First, the Church's universal and unbroken tradition provides the correct interpretation of the New Testament data. Second, the New Testament basis is Jesus' example in choosing the Twelve, confirmed in the practice and teaching of the apostles. Third, Jesus' choice does not reflect a cultural bias against women because there is evidence that he broke with the customs of his time in his attitude toward women. Fourth, whenever innovations were introduced, the Church has been alert to reject them immediately. The fact of a tradition traced back to Jesus and his call of the Twelve, then, is given as the essential reason. The New Testament, apart from this tradition, could not provide this certainty: it is the tradition which sees a norm in Jesus' example. Analyzing the New Testament text with contemporary methods cannot, by itself, either establish or disprove this interpretation. It is founded in the concrete evidence of history, and understood by the Church's unfolding discernment as binding.²⁵

What is *not* part of the Declaration's teaching? First, it does not substantiate its view by appeal to St. Paul's injunctions (1 Cor 14:34-35 and 1 Tim. 2:12) against public teaching by women and their exercise of authority over men, nor by his teaching regarding male headship and female subordination. Second, it does not defend the faulty anthropology of St. Thomas. The Commentary notes that explanations found in medieval theologians based on the inferiority of women vis-à-vis men, and the view that women are in a "state of submission" have been abandoned.²⁶ The Declaration clearly affirms the equal dignity and rights of women and men as human persons and as Christians, citing Gal. 3:28; at the same time it insists on the influence of sex on the proper identity of the person, and the value and importance of sexual differentiation for the human community. It maintains that "equality is in no way identity."²⁷ So, the Declaration rejects the notion

²⁴ Introduction, 519.

²⁵ Art. 2, 520; Commentary, 526.

²⁶ According to the Commentary, 529, "We have already discarded a fair number of explanations given by mediaeval theologians." These are described as defective because they rely on a theory of women's inferiority and state of subjection to men.

²⁷ Art. 6, 523.

that sexual differentiation implies hierarchical ordering, but envisions the sexes as complementary.

Third, the Declaration does not derive its fundamental argument from the analogy of faith, that is, from a consideration of the doctrine of God, Christology, soteriology, the consequences of baptismal equality, or the representative character of the ministerial priesthood. It appeals instead to history and to precedent—the precedent by which Jesus chose twelve men and gave the apostolic charge to them and not to his women disciples.

The Declaration distinguished between the foundation or “essential reason” for its judgment—discovered not in an explicit saying of Jesus but in his example, interpreted through subsequent decisions of the Church when faced with contrary practice—and the theological reasons advanced to explain it. Among these latter, referred to as the arguments from fittingness, it includes reasoning based on the symbolism of sexual difference in biblical revelation, and the question of the sacramental representation of God, Christ, and the Church. By locating these in the second part of the Declaration, the authors signal that this reasoning is not thought to provide a demonstrative argument but only an illustration by means of the analogy of faith.

This is the crux of the difference between our two ways of examining the question. The official Roman Catholic explanation rests on the example of Jesus, believed to express his will for the Church. That this choice of twelve men was deliberate, that it was not related only to the role of the twelve patriarchs of Israel, that the exclusion of women was not due to religious or socio-cultural constraints, that the Twelve actually constitute the normative expression of the apostolic ministry for the future of the Church, even when the “Twelve” and the “apostles” are not co-extensive New Testament categories, and even when the relation of their office to the priestly ministry which took shape in the Church of the second century is difficult to trace—all of these are the questions the Roman Catholic explanation raises as fundamental.

In March, 1978 a special joint international consultation on the ordination of women cosponsored by the Anglican Consultative Council and the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity was held in Versailles.²⁸ The Versailles Consultation situated the “new obstacle” to reconciliation of ministries within the framework of doctrinal development. Members noted that the Roman Catholic Church did not, in asserting the tradition, affirm it as a matter of divine law. They took hope from the fact that Anglican churches which had proceeded to ordain women to the presbyterate were confident that they had not departed from the understanding of apostolic ministry expressed in the Canterbury Statement. They recommended dialogue on

²⁸ “Women Priests: Ecumenical Obstacle?” *Origins* 6 (September 21, 1978), 211–12.

the related questions of human sexuality, culture and tradition, and freedom and authority. Still, they did not shrink from stating the problem in words that continue to describe our dilemma:

Because of their mutual esteem neither communion can take lightly the fact that the other seems either to do something not warranted by the will of Christ or to be lacking in sensitivity to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.²⁹

As the Archbishop of Canterbury prepared for the 1978 Lambeth Conference, the ecumenical counsel he received from the Roman Catholic Church was clear. Addressing a special hearing on the question in the name of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, Bishop Cahal Brendan Daly repeated the Vatican position at the Lambeth Conference.³⁰ He explained that the doctrinal tradition was not "inert," and was not simply an unexamined way of acting, but "one so firm and decisive as not to have needed formulation or defence." He proposed that the burden of proof lay with those who would depart from the long-standing practice "founded on Christ's example." He also cautioned that despite press reports which portrayed this decision as provisional, the firmness of the Roman Catholic position could not be called into question. He repeated the judgment that departure from the tradition would constitute a "new and grave problem."

The 1978 Lambeth Conference, in resolution 21, noted that four member churches had ordained women priests and eight others had agreed or approved this in principle, finding no theological objections; still, other member churches either remained undecided or stated that they held fundamental objections to this move.³¹ Resolution 22 acknowledged that "member churches might wish to consecrate a woman to the episcopate," and urged consultation and prudence "lest the bishop's office should become a cause of disunity instead of a focus of unity."

C The Third Phase: 1982–86

The third phase of this discussion is marked by some clarification and assessment of the Anglican approach.

ARCIC's *Final Report*, released in 1981, did not formally investigate the ordination of women.³² The "Observations" on this report released by the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, however, assert that the

²⁹ *Ibid*, no 5

³⁰ "The Lambeth Conference/Three Resolutions," *Origins* 8 (September 21, 1978), 213–14 Bishop Daly's testimony is quoted in the margins of the text

³¹ *Ibid*

³² Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, *The Final Report* (Cincinnati: Forward Movement Publications, 1982)

“new canonical regulations . . . introduced . . . in some parts of the Anglican Communion . . . are formally opposed to the ‘common traditions’ of the two communions and therefore create an obstacle of a doctrinal character,” an obstacle evidently thought to affect the solidity of the convergence.³³ ARCIC-II, constituted by the Archbishop of Canterbury and Pope John Paul II in 1982, was charged with studying “all that hinders the mutual recognition of the ministries of our two communions.”³⁴

In the meantime, ARC-USA had already undertaken to study several subjects which it hoped would establish a common context: “the church’s teaching about human sexuality and marriage, the role of Mary in the life, devotion, and theology of the church, and the admission of women to the ordained ministry.”³⁵ Released in 1984, the ARC-USA document, “Images of God: Reflections on Christian Anthropology,” attempted to state a consensus and to follow up the idea that a development of doctrine, given impetus by Christian feminism, sheds new light on women’s ability to represent God, Christ, and the Church. “Images of God” reported a divergence of opinion—not always according to church allegiance—on the theological significance of Jesus’ maleness and on three models for the understanding of the relationship of man and woman and the consequences of each.³⁶

“Images of God” affirmed the doctrine of ministry and ordination adopted in the *Final Report*, but acknowledged disagreement as to “whether a woman may be ordained to ‘stand in sacramental relation to Christ himself’” in the special case of eucharistic presidency.³⁷ ARC-USA states the Vatican’s position very concisely; it is chiefly concerned to respond to its theological reasoning, especially to the argument that natural resemblance between the priest and Christ requires a male priesthood. Countering this, it reports that Episcopalians who support the ordination of women hold that the priest is an image of Christ by virtue of what he or she is and does as a person baptized and ordained with the power of the Spirit, not by virtue of male sexuality. They advance a positive case also: women’s gifts will enrich the priesthood, and “the ordination of women serves to protect the doctrine of God and Christology from an imbalance which diminishes Christian revelation and keeps women relatively unequal as members of the

³³ “Observations on the ARCIC Final Report,” *Origins* 11 (May 6, 1982), 752–56, at 754. These observations twice raise the problem of “adopting as the effective norm for reading the scriptures only what historical criticism maintains, thus allowing the homogeneity of the developments which appear in tradition to remain in doubt” (*ibid.*).

³⁴ “The Pope and Canterbury’s Archbishop: A Joint Statement,” *Origins* 12 (June 10, 1982), 49, 51, at 51.

³⁵ “Images of God, Reflections on Christian Anthropology,” *Origins* 13 (January 5, 1984), 505–12, at 505.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, nos. 14 and 45–48.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 62.

Church."³⁸ The section on the ordination of women concludes with a recommendation for further studies on "the nature of representational imagery, especially as it applies to the eucharist and the ordained ministry."³⁹

Debate on women's access to priesthood in the General Synod of the Church of England in 1984 prompted Pope John Paul II to initiate correspondence with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie. In a letter dated December 20, 1984, he states that "the increase in the number of Anglican Churches which admit, or are preparing to admit, women to priestly ordination constitutes, in the eyes of the Catholic Church, an increasingly serious obstacle" to the progress already made.⁴⁰

The Archbishop of Canterbury took counsel with the primates of the Anglican Communion and replied the following December. His letter alludes to "the serious doctrinal reasons" that motivate those who favor the change in practice.⁴¹ Dr. Runcie explained these serious doctrinal reasons in a letter to Cardinal Willebrands, president of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and Cardinal Willebrands replied at some length.⁴² This published correspondence constitutes the most explicit formal exchange concerning the arguments pro and con at the international level.

According to the Archbishop, Anglicans who see no reasons against change argue as follows: (1) Scripture and Tradition present no fundamental objection; (2) by itself, the witness of the New Testament does not permit a clear settlement of the question; (3) Tradition appears to be "open to this development, because the exclusion of women from priestly ministry cannot be proved to be of 'divine law.'"⁴³ In addition, they believe there are compelling doctrinal reasons for the development of the Tradition in this direction. The "most substantial" reason, which seems not only to justify but even to require the ordination of women, is Christological. The Eternal Word assumed our human flesh, redeemed it and has taken it up into the life of the Trinity. If women are sharers in this new life, it must be because Christ's humanity is "inclusive of women." Second, because the priest represents the priestly nature of Christ's body, the Church—especially in the eucharistic presidency—stands in a special sacramental relationship with Christ, whose humanity includes both male and female, women should be ordained. In this way Christ's inclusive High Priesthood will be more perfectly represented; in fact, the representative nature of the ministerial priesthood is weakened by an exclusively male priesthood.

In reply, Cardinal Willebrands reiterates the Catholic Church's con-

³⁸ *Ibid.*, nos. 66–67.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 68.

⁴⁰ "Women's Ordination and the Progress of Ecumenism," *Origins* 16 (July 17, 1986), 153, 155–60, at 155.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 156–58.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 156.

viction that it is not authorized to admit women to priestly ordination, citing as his principal reason the constant Tradition of ordaining only men to the presbyterate and episcopate. The Catholic Church "has considered the practice of Christ and the Apostles a norm from which she could not deviate."⁴⁴ Urging that the matter be taken up by ARCIC-II and that the Anglican Communion not make so radical a departure "alone" because of the serious ecclesiological implications, the cardinal then indicates what he regards as unsatisfactory in the case put by the archbishop.

In the first place, he notes that ARCIC's *Final Report* advances a common understanding of ministerial priesthood, and cautions that "the question of who can or cannot be ordained may not be separated from its appropriate context of sacramental theology and ecclesiology."⁴⁵ Priesthood, exercised by bishops with priests as their co-workers, is an essential element in the constitution of the Church and the means by which the redemptive work of Christ (his once-for-all sacrifice) is made a present reality. There is, he affirms, a "real continuity" between Christ's saving work and the priestly office. Second, asking whether the place of the ordained ministry in the divine economy of salvation is adequately reflected in the Anglican case, the cardinal reviews the biblical imagery which draws on the symbolism of human sexuality in its portrayal of the divine-human relation. He asserts that the representative role of the ministerial priesthood is understood with reference to Christ's role as Head of the Church. The restriction of priesthood to males, he states, has to be understood in relation to the Savior's male identity and to the priest's iconic role of acting *in persona Christi*. "The priest represents Christ in his saving relationship with his body, the church. He does not primarily represent the priesthood of the whole people of God."⁴⁶ He states frankly that the Anglican arguments "do not negotiate the manifold theological issues which this matter raises," and therefore do not, in his judgment, justify the radical innovation of admitting women to priesthood.

D. The Fourth Phase: 1988-92

In the fourth phase of this history, there is a marked shift of emphasis, with new attention being given to the Roman Catholic approach. This is now correlated with concern for the ecclesiological implications of the ordination of women not only as priests but as bishops. In my judgment, this phase reveals the link between this question and the unresolved issues of ARCIC's work on Authority in the Church.

The bishops of the 1988 Lambeth Conference acknowledged that

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 159. Here, Willebrands refers to articles 1-4 of *Inter insigniores*.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

member churches of the Anglican Communion would continue to determine their own policy regarding the ordination of women to the priesthood, and that in a number of provinces their consecration to the episcopate was also a distinct possibility.⁴⁷ They committed themselves to continue in communion even if the communion suffered some impairment due to divergent positions on this question.

In a letter to Pope John Paul II, written in August, 1988, but released later,⁴⁸ Archbishop Robert Runcie expressed his conviction that the principal issue facing Lambeth 1988 was "the underlying question of authority, the developing tradition of the church and ecclesiology." In the judgment of the conference, a schism in the Anglican Communion was a greater threat than impaired communion. Once again, the archbishop wrote of his desire for an ecumenical "debate" on the divisive issue of the ordination of women. He said the Anglican Communion's positive response to the ARCIC agreed statements on eucharist and ordained ministry was a significant step toward the mutual recognition of ministries, but acknowledged that "there will be no easy solution to the difficult question of the ordination of women."

In reply, Pope John Paul II recognized, on the one hand, the positive signs of "openness to fuller communion with the Catholic Church" evident in Lambeth's response to ARCIC's *Final Report*, but expressed concern, on the other, over developments which "seem to have placed new obstacles in the way of reconciliation between Catholics and Anglicans."⁴⁹ It was in this letter that he made the comment cited earlier:

The ordination of women to the priesthood in some provinces of the Anglican Communion, together with the recognition of the right of individual provinces to proceed with the ordination of women to the episcopacy, appears to pre-empt [ARCIC-II's] study and effectively block the path to the mutual recognition of ministries.

He reaffirmed the Catholic Church's opposition to this development, calling it "a break with tradition of a kind we have no competence to authorize," and urged that the ecumenical and ecclesiological aspects of the question be given further attention to prevent "a serious erosion" of the communion already possessed.

During a visit to the Vatican in autumn of 1992, Archbishop Runcie and

⁴⁷ *The Truth Shall Make You Free The Lambeth Conference 1988* (London: Anglican Consultative Council, 1988). See Resolution 1 The Ordination or Consecration of Women to the Episcopate. The Section Report on Mission and Ministry acknowledges that "it may be many years before the Anglican Communion can be said to be of a single mind regarding the ordination of women" (nos. 132-150, at 138).

⁴⁸ "Letters Exchanged by Pope and Canterbury Archbishop," *Origins* 19 (June 8, 1989), 63-64.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

the Pope issued a Common Statement expressing their concern that divergence on this issue prevents reconciliation and reflects "important ecclesiological differences."⁵⁰ The 1991 Report of ARCIC-II, "Church as Communion," can be read as an effort to address the ecclesiological question in order to develop an approach to this "unresolved matter."⁵¹

The Catholic Church's official response to the *Final Report* of ARCIC-I, released in December, 1991⁵² challenged the Commission's view that agreement could be reached without asking who can or cannot be ordained. According to the Response, "the question of the subject of ordination is linked with the nature of the sacrament of holy orders."⁵³

ARCIC's "Clarifications of Certain Aspects of the Agreed Statements on Eucharist and Ministry," submitted to the Vatican in September, 1993 acknowledges this judgment but maintains that this issue "involves far more than the question of ministry as such. It raises profound questions of ecclesiology and authority in relation to Tradition."⁵⁴ Thus, this belongs to the current mandate of ARCIC-II.

This backward glance over the twenty or so years this discussion has gone on reveals, I believe, the two different approaches. The Anglican approach finds in Scripture and Tradition no obstacles to a change. Since the only serious objection posed up until now was based upon a faulty view of women, this cannot constitute a theological tradition but only a way of acting determined by socio-cultural norms. Once this faulty view is rejected, the way is open to a new development. Recognition of women's equality—the new anthropology—in fact requires this development when correlated with the doctrine of God, Christology, soteriology, and the priest's role as representative of Christ and of the Church.

The Ordination of Women to the Priesthood, a Second Report by the House of Bishops of the General Synod of the Church of England (June, 1988) confirms that this approach provides the framework for that Church's discussion pro and con.⁵⁵ Arguments presented in favor of ordaining women identify the all-male priesthood as a counter-sign to the truth of the Gospel which threatens the mission and unity of the Church and reinforces patterns of inequality and alienation. An inclusive priesthood, on the contrary, would witness clearly not only to the equality and dignity of women and men but

⁵⁰ "A Meeting of the Pope and Canterbury's Archbishop," *Origins* 19 (October 12, 1989), 316-17.

⁵¹ "Church as Communion," *Catholic International* 2 (14 April 1991), 327-38.

⁵² "Vatican Responds to ARCIC-I Final Report," *Origins* 21 (December 19, 1991), 441, 443-47.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 446.

⁵⁴ Here I break sequence, to indicate ARCIC's answer to the Vatican Response: "Vatican Says Clarifications Strengthen Agreement," *Origins* 24 (October 6, 1994), 299-304, at 304.

⁵⁵ *The Ordination of Women to the Priesthood*, A Second Report by the House of Bishops GS 829 (London: General Synod of the Church of England, 1988).

to the mystery of the Trinity and to the Church as a place where the kingdom is being born.⁵⁶ Arguments advanced against the ordination of women appeal to the Church's long tradition but also to the revelation of God signified in the particularity of Jesus' maleness, the male priesthood as most faithfully representing the priesthood of Christ, and the role and status of men in Creation and Redemption. Male headship and the proper subordination of women are mentioned as offering an important witness to society today, and the preservation of the male priesthood is held up as a powerful witness to the continuity of the Church's ministry.⁵⁷

Views both pro and con take the new situation as a starting point, and then take a stand on what fidelity to the Gospel requires. The presentation in the House of Bishops' report has as its chief reference point the questions which *Inter insigniores* regards as belonging to the theological arguments from fittingness. Although attention is given to the Church's tradition, no evidence is provided with respect to the prohibition of ordaining women.⁵⁸ The question of Jesus' choice of twelve men finds no place in the House of Bishops' Report, despite the fact that the Roman Catholic Church has repeatedly identified this as the "fundamental reason."

By contrast, the Roman Catholic approach—at least since *Inter insigniores*—takes a different starting point. It relies very explicitly on the fact that Jesus himself chose twelve men; that—given his freedom with respect to the conventions of his time—he could have included women but did not; that his example was followed in the apostolic Church, despite the active participation of women in various ministries; and that subsequent generations carefully maintained this pattern and condemned contrary practice. Appeal to the subordinate status of women, often cited on behalf of this tradition, is abandoned as a supporting reason⁵⁹; appeal to Jesus' example and that of the apostles is accepted. The questions which lead Anglicans to revise their practice are not ignored, but they are regarded as arguments from fittingness. They are not thought capable of demonstrating the fact, nor of disproving it. Therefore, the concrete facts of salvation history are given priority, and they are seen to be essentially related to the constitution of the Church. In any of its official correspondence with the Anglican Communion, appeal is made only to this line of reasoning.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 163. See no. 151 with reference to the hermeneutic of tradition.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 162.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, nos. 149–55. In fact, no. 152 asserts that "in spite of [the Church's] positive view of women there was no challenge made until now to an all male priesthood." The Declaration *Inter insigniores*, on the contrary, proposes that the tradition has been established in response to such challenges (art. 1). This point calls for further joint investigation.

⁵⁹ Pope John Paul II's apostolic letter *Mulieris dignitatem* provides an exposition which reinterprets New Testament teaching on "subordination" in light of Gal. 3:28, the "Gospel innovation." The text, "On the Dignity and Vocation of Women," is in *Origins* 18 (October 6, 1988), 261, 263–83.

The 1992 Vote of the Church of England, *Ordinatio sacerdotalis* and the Way Forward

The vote of the Church of England's General Synod on November 11, 1992, opening the way to the ordination of women to the priesthood in the spring of 1994, provoked a most serious crisis in our progress towards the reconciliation of ministries. Because the Archbishop of Canterbury as primate of all England exercises a certain primacy among the bishops of the Anglican Communion, the Roman Catholic Church regards the decision of this Church with special concern. Many who wait for the full communion of Anglicans and Roman Catholics received the news of the General Synod's vote with heavy hearts, aware of its implications.

Pope John Paul II's apostolic letter on Priestly Ordination⁶⁰ was addressed to the bishops of his own Church, not to Anglicans, but it can be seen as reinforcing the distinctive Roman Catholic approach. In recalling the "fundamental reasons" which prohibit the ordination of women, the Pope asserts that Christ gave the Church "her fundamental constitution, her theological anthropology." "The Church," he writes, "has always acknowledged as a perennial norm her Lord's way of acting in choosing the twelve men whom he made the foundation of his Church."⁶¹ By Jesus' choice these men did not only receive a function but were associated with him in his own mission. The Apostles followed the same pattern in choosing their co-workers, men who would carry on their mission of representing the Lord.⁶²

The Pope also repeats the ancient argument that the exclusion of women from priestly ordination "cannot mean that women are of lesser dignity, nor can it be construed as discrimination against them,"⁶³ since even the Lord's own Mother was not called to the mission proper to the apostles nor to the ministerial priesthood.

This forceful appeal not just to the unbroken Tradition but to its foundation, traced to the will of Christ revealed in his choice of the Twelve, is more than a reiteration of the "fundamental reasons" given in 1975. In my opinion, it represents an effort to direct attention *away* from arguments drawn primarily from the analogy of faith—speculative efforts to discover what arrangement might best witness to the "inclusive" message of the Gospel—and *towards* the prior fact that ordained ministry originates with

⁶⁰ *Origins* 24 (June 9, 1994), 49, 51–52.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, no. 2, 51.

⁶² See Albert Vanhoye, "Church's practice in continuity with New Testament teaching," *L'Osservatore Romano* 10 (10 March 1993), 10–11, for an updated version of the case made by *Inter insigniores*. See also no. 1577 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* which explicitly links the college of the twelve apostles to the college of bishops in its statement of reason for the tradition.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, no. 3.

the Church itself, and is given its shape by Christ. Shortly after the apostolic letter appeared, Cardinal Ratzinger wrote that the Pope wished to emphasize the limits to the Church's authority by calling attention to the will of Christ, and that he leaves the task of elaborating the anthropological implications of this choice to theologians.⁶⁴

What is the problem? As debate within the Roman Catholic Church and between our two communions has proceeded, some theologians (both Roman Catholic and Anglican) have dismissed the appeal to the example of Jesus and the apostles in a way which would, if carried to its logical conclusion, undermine our common ecclesiology. Arguments put forth in favor of ordaining women, because they are based on the doctrine of baptismal equality, tend to call into question the real distinction between the common priesthood of the baptized and the ministerial priesthood. They often suppose that arrangements for ministry in the early Church were worked out without reference to what Jesus did in his earthly life, especially to his choice and commission of the Twelve. But this bears directly on an understanding of the constitution of the Church.

The Vatican Response to the *Final Report*, it seems to me, continues to set our agenda. The questions this agenda requires us to address, or to reaffirm, are: (1) the dominical foundation and sacramental nature of the ministerial priesthood, (2) the ministerial priesthood as an essential element in the Church, (3) the sacramental distinction between the ministerial priesthood and the common priesthood of the baptized which it serves, (4) the functions of the ministerial priesthood as a continuation of Christ's ministry, (5) the historical continuity between the apostolic ministry and the episcopal office (apostolic succession), and (6) the role of the Tradition and the Church's teaching authority in the interpretation of the Scriptures. It would not be difficult to find formal expressions of our common belief on all of these matters in the *Final Report*, as ARCIC's *Clarifications* of 1993 demonstrates, but it remains necessary to make their implications for this topic explicit.

These questions are not new to our dialogue. But they need to be revisited and set in clear relationship with the issues left unresolved in ARCIC's Agreed Statement on Authority in the Church. The same hermeneutical questions are at stake: How assess the position of Peter among the apostles as attested by the Petrine texts? How explain the transmission of Peter's leadership to the bishop of Rome? How discern which ecclesial institutions are of divine right? What is the source of the pastoral authority needed to exercise *episcopé*? On what basis does the episcopal ministry claim to teach with a special authority and to be competent to make deci-

⁶⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, "The Limits of Church Authority," *L'Osservatore Romano* 26 (29 June 1994), 6-8, no. 2, at 6.

sions that become part of the Church's permanent witness? By what process does an authentic development in the Church's teaching take place and according to what criteria may it be rejected or verified? Indeed, this topic does raise "profound questions of ecclesiology and authority in relation to Tradition."⁶⁵

The common foundation on which we move towards fuller consensus on these matters, in addition to "the Gospels and the ancient common traditions,"⁶⁶ is our commitment to the historic episcopate as a gift of the Spirit, an institution that belongs to God's plan for his Church. I believe that commitment to this strong foundation, and renewed attention to the very questions which have been part of our agenda for years, must give direction to the future of our dialogue on the ordination of women.

Postscript

Since this paper was written, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, with the approval of the Pope, reasserted *Ordinatio sacerdotalis* in the form of a reply to the *dubium* concerning that letter's teaching.⁶⁷ The reply clarifies the reason for which the prior teaching is said to require definitive assent. The teaching in question is that "the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women." The reason it is said to require definitive assent is that, "founded on the written word of God, and from the beginning constantly preserved and applied in the tradition of the Church, it has been set forth infallibly by the ordinary and universal magisterium." Pope John Paul II, by a formal declaration, hands this same teaching on as something that belongs to the deposit of the faith. What some have continued to regard as a question of discipline, subject to development in light of recent teaching on the equality of women, is hereby expressly affirmed to be a question of doctrine, and even to have been taught infallibly by the ordinary and universal magisterium. This new development places squarely before Anglicans and Roman Catholics the agenda outlined in the preceding paragraphs, especially the "profound questions of ecclesiology and authority in relation to Tradition."

⁶⁵ ARCIC's "Clarifications," (cited in n. 56), 304.

⁶⁶ According to its original mandate, the work of ARCIC is to be founded on these.

⁶⁷ "Inadmissibility of Women to Ministerial Priesthood," *Origins* 25:24 (November 30, 1995), 401, 403. It was prompted by "a number of problematic and negative statements" from certain theologians, organizations or priests and religious, and associations of lay people. See "Cardinal Ratzinger: Cover Letter to Bishops' Conference Presidents," *ibid.*, p. 403.