

THE EDITOR

Anglicans and the ordination of women

From Canon Peter Boulton

Sir, As one of the three Church of England members of the Anglican Consultative Council, I read with interest and then with growing astonishment the assertions of the apparently official Anglican/Roman Catholic joint consultation on the ordination of women published in your issue of July 27.

In case its use at the Lambeth Conference should give bishops and others the false impression that this is an official document on the level of the statements of the Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission or of the Anglican/Orthodox Theological Commission, I trust you will allow me to make known the following facts:

1. The Standing Committee of the ACC, with the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, "agreed that a small consultation should take place to consider 'in what ways churches with women priests and churches without women priests can be reconciled in sacramental fellowship'". "The first meeting is expected to take place in February 1978 and a report available before the end of 1979. *The Consultation in its report would offer only the advice of its members.*" (My italics.) (Anglican Information of the ACC No 1767 and dated November 1977.)

2. The statement in the second paragraph of the report, "a substantial majority in each Anglican Church accepts the possibility of ordaining women to the presbyterate", is quite simply *not true* on the most lenient interpretation of the facts. The following churches have *not* taken synodical decisions by substantial majorities to accept and make possible the ordination of women:

Church of England, Church in Wales, Episcopal Church of Scotland, Church in Japan, Churches of the Province of South Africa, Central Africa, Uganda, West Indies, Tanzania, West Africa, South Pacific, New Guinea/Papua, Sudan, Melanesia and of the dioceses of Sri Lanka, Singapore and Korea, let alone the Provincial Council of Jerusalem and the Middle East.

Can the authority of such a hastily concocted and tendentious document be said to carry any more weight than those of the signatories, only two of whom have been made public? Competent Anglican and Roman Catholic authorities should make this clear beyond all doubt.

Those in high place in the Anglican Communion who have connived at the way in which this report has been presented, must now explain themselves to our Roman and Orthodox brethren who have been led to believe that the Anglican Communion was giving serious theological and pastoral attention to the place of women in the Ministry of the Church, assisted by those other churches (who have vast numbers of women in full-time service) and with whom it is involved with the

whole range of ecumenical issues.

I regret to have to say, as a member of the ACC from 1973, and as chairman of the Unity and Ecumenical Affairs Section at the 1976 Trinidad Meeting, that those in favour of the ordination of women (notably from the United States and Canada) in the Anglican Communion have consistently used, and have been allowed to use, the structures of ACC to give spurious ecclesiastical respectability and authority to their views. When others attempted to place the debate within the wider context of the total ministry (as at Dublin 1973) the subject was quietly dropped after Canada and the United States synods had taken their decisions. Moreover, this matter has been allowed to cramp discussions on issues of far greater importance and deeper significance in the fields of ecumenism and mission. And now this report is yet another example of a *fait accompli* taken to be the *status quo*.

I hope that before it is too late, the Lambeth Conference will call for a moratorium on the ordination of women by the bishops of its member churches as a sign of Anglican good faith in the search for visible unity in the Universal Church of Christ.

Yours truly,
PETER BOULTON,
Vicar of Worksop,
Worksop Priory,
Nottinghamshire.
July 28.

From the Bishop of Southwark

Sir, Members of the Lambeth Conference are considering the desirability of the ordination of women. Later in the year the General Synod of the Church of England will be asked to vote on the matter.

In the interests of ecumenicity, I suggest that members of other denomination should not do anything, in writing or speech, which might be thought to be pressuring the Anglican Communion. If another denomination, for instance, were to be considering or reconsidering the controversial subject of birth control, I am sure that the Archbishop of Canterbury and his colleagues would maintain a discreet silence, and would not seek to influence the vote, no matter how strongly they might feel about the outcome, both from a moral point of view and from a third world point of view.

The English Church has insisted upon its independence for many centuries and has paid a great price for it. Any attempt to interfere with our freedom is likely to be resisted — no matter how well intentioned the interference.

Our duty is to vote for what we believe to be theologically true, not for what is ecclesiastically expedient.

Yours faithfully,
† MERVYN SOUTHWARK,
House of Lords.
July 28.