

A
MEMORANDUM
to
THE LAMBETH CONFERENCE
from the
ORDINATION OF WOMEN AD HOC COMMITTEE
1948

In support of the Resolution on the
ORDINATION OF WOMEN TO THE PRIESTHOOD
submitted to the Conference by the General Synod
of the
Chung Hua Sheng Kung Hui

ORDINATION OF WOMEN AD HOC COMMITTEE

- Chairman* The Dowager Lady Nunburnholme,
20 Cottesmore Gardens, London W. 8.
(Past President of the National Council of Women of Great Britain; Vice-President of the International Council of Women).
- Mrs. Corbett Ashby, B.A., LL.D.,
(President of Honour, International Alliance of Women).
- The Rev. Dorothea Belfield, Deaconess,
(Hon. Sec., Society for the Equal Ministry of Men and Women in the Church).
- Miss G. M. Ireland Blackburne, S.Th.
- Miss C. M. E. Burrows, M.A.,
(Formerly Principal of St. Hilda's College, and of the Society of Home Students, Oxford; Member of the Archbishops' Commission on the Ministry of Women).
- Miss E. M. Chrystal, M.A., S.Th.,
(Tutor in Theology, Newnham College, Cambridge).
- Mrs. V. H. Galbraith, M.A., Ph.D.
- The Rev. Prof. L. W. Grensted, D.D.,
(Nolloth Professor of the Philosophy of the Christian Religion, Oxford; Member of the Archbishops' Commission on the Ministry of Women).
- Miss K. M. Hardwick,
(Gen. Sec., Association for Moral and Social Hygiene).
- Miss R. Hill, M.A., B.Litt.,
(Lecturer, Westfield College).
- The Rev. A. S. Hopkinson, M.A.,
(Vicar of Battersea).
- The Rev. Canon W. R. Howard, M.A.,
(Master of St. Peter's Hall, Oxford).
- Miss Eleanora Iredale,
(formerly General Secretary, Christian Reconstruction in Europe).
- The Rev. H. T. Malaher, M.A.,
(Vicar of Whitchurch, Aylesbury).
- Miss Julia Mann, M.A.,
(Principal of St. Hilda's College, Oxford).
- The Very Rev. W. R. Matthews, K.C.V.O., D.D., Dean of St. Paul's,
(Member of the Archbishops' Commission on the Ministry of Women).
- The Dowager Lady Nunburnholme.
- The Rev. Professor C. E. Raven, D.D.,
(Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University; Master of Christ's College, Cambridge).
- The Rev. Canon T. Guy Rogers, B.D.,
(Rector of Birmingham).
- Miss Mabel Shaw, O.B.E.,
(Missionary).
- The Viscountess Stansgate,
Member of Study Commission, World Council of Churches; Executive Central Council for Womens' Church Work; Lambeth Diploma Committee.
- Mrs. J. L. Stocks, B.Sc.,
(Principal of Westfield College, London).
- Miss E. M. Verini, M.A.,
(Principal of Cambridge Training College for Women).

MEMORANDUM

The reference to the Lambeth Conference of a proposed Canon of the Church in China on the ordination of women to the priesthood, together with the enquiry whether "liberty to experiment within the framework of the Anglican Communion would be in accordance with Anglican tradition and order" has raised two distinct sets of questions, the one theological, the other practical and contingent. The enquiry from China is related immediately to the second of these, but it cannot properly be discussed without previous reference to the first, more fundamental, consideration. We approach this subject, therefore, in that order.

The purpose of God in Creation, so far as man is able to apprehend it, is the creation of free beings capable of responding to His love, directly in worship and indirectly by fulfilling His will in service. This involves true freedom of the will of man, and real ability to choose between ends and between the means to those ends. Such freedom extends to every opportunity of personal service in which man can serve his fellow-man, whether at the simplest level of physical help or at the deepest level of response to spiritual need. It is clear that to such freedom race, class and sex are equally and entirely irrelevant.

The assertion, for which no proof or intelligible reason can be given, of an inherent incapacity in women to receive Holy Orders is clearly a denial to them of this freedom, as is the consequent refusal to them of the right to accept or to choose particular forms of service. In principle any and every freedom which is open to men is open to women also and equally. Such freedom may properly be regulated but it cannot be taken away.

This freedom is inherent in the individual in virtue of the action of the Holy Spirit in Creation itself. Creation is not a static process, completed in the external action of God the Father, but a process which is eternally complete yet ever renewed in Time, in the action whereby the Holy Spirit moves the creature to make the free response to his Creator which is the only true freedom. It is this that distinguishes freedom as the Christian understands it from the false freedom of individualism and self-fulfilment in which man's will is not free but enslaved.

It is of supreme importance that the Church, in its wholeness and in all its parts, should be recognisable and recognised as the sphere of such freedom. This involves the full acceptance of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as inspiring and guiding the Church, leading it on to new and creative fulfilment of the whole purpose of God in and through man. The action of the Spirit cannot lead to the denial of anything that is fundamentally true, but it may, and indeed it must of necessity from time to time, lead to new developments in line with that truth. A conservative adherence to traditions which are not of the essence of the Gospel may be proclaimed as loyalty to the Faith and yet, in reality, involve a misunderstanding and a denial of its essential meaning.

This implies that freedom both to experiment and to lead is inherent in every part of the world-wide Church; and this is a truly Catholic principle, involving loyalty—which will sometimes be a creative tension—not only of the local Churches to the Whole Church but, also, of the Whole Church to the local Churches.

The leading of the Spirit to new developments in man's freedom may be recognised in various ways. The pressing need of a missionary or local Church, or of new conditions in older Churches, may be a true indication of the lines upon which a fresh phase of development is to be expected. It must certainly be true that a local need which cannot

adequately be met indicates, not a failure of the Gospel, but a summons to this Age to recognise a fresh leading of the Spirit and to respond to a new Word of God to the Churches.

That these needs exist in many parts of the world is becoming increasingly evident and it is such a need that has found expression in the proposed Canon of the Church in China concerning which an enquiry has been sent to the Lambeth Conference. Admittedly the Canon would involve an administrative innovation: but a negative reply to the enquiry could only be justified on the ground that liberty to experiment along the lines suggested would be contrary to fundamental Christian or Catholic teaching.* And no theological bar to the full ordination of women has shown itself capable of being sustained. The argument from St. Thomas Aquinas,† commonly quoted in this connection, is not authoritative for the Anglican Communion, neither is it strictly theological, since it bases a theological conclusion upon a faulty sex psychology which, in its turn, rests upon the social conditions and assumptions of his day and upon certain passages in St. Paul's epistles, one of them a purely local regulation, the other a Jewish mystical analogy quite irrelevant to the subject.

We submit that the argument for the full ordination of women on grounds of practical expediency and spiritual need is, conversely, not only capable of being sustained but is increasing in weight and urgency. The specialised domestic needs of the Chinese Church can only be fully appreciated in that country; but the main facts should be obvious to all and they do not apply to China alone. In

* cp. Articles of Religion, Art. XXXIV:—"It is not necessary that Traditions and Ceremonies be in all places one, or utterly like; for at all times they have been divers, and may be changed according to the diversities of countries, times, and men's manners, so that nothing be ordained against God's Word."

† Summa Theologica, Part III. Supplement. QII. 39.

every part of the world Christianity itself is confronted with a situation of the utmost gravity. It is common knowledge that the task which lies before the Church is immeasurably greater than the resources which are now available to meet it.

"In recent times," runs the Report of the Committee appointed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, "the Ministry has not been equal to an increasingly difficult task and growing responsibility. There are no grounds for supposing that in the years immediately ahead the quantity or quality of men offering for the Ministry will be better than it has been."

The same anxious and defeatist note can be heard in other parts of the Anglican Communion. From many areas of the mission-field come reports of converts to Christianity—often made by women evangelists—left for long periods without the sacraments of the Church for lack of Clergy to Administer them. In England, shortage of manpower is necessitating the system of combined benefices which is undermining the spiritual life of the parishes. And everywhere the need for fresh initiative and vigour in Church affairs is being recognised with small hope of its being met in anything like the measure which is required.

"... we ask the question," continues the Report of the Archbishops' Committee, "whether the Church could not by a fuller and more intelligent use of women supplement and strengthen the ministry of men in its service, and also enable them to make their special contribution."

The Archbishops' Committee, by reason of its terms of reference, ventured no further than recommendations for the greatly enlarged use of lay women as a remedy for the present situation. But in China a more courageous note has been struck which has resulted in the enquiry which is now before the Lambeth Conference:—

"We believe," runs a document produced by the Diocesan Synod of Kong Yuet and circulated by it to all other Diocesan

Synods of the Chung Hua Sheng Kung Hui, "that God is using China's age-long respect for women, and her traditional confidence in women's gifts for administration and counsel, to open a new chapter in the history of the Church We expect that we shall always need the services of a few outstanding women in the priestly ministry to enable us to develop and maintain the Church on an essentially pastoral and parochial basis We do not know if there is in other provinces of the Anglican Communion need for women in the Ministry. We know that in our own Diocese there is such need and that God has raised up at least one woman able to meet that need."

It is against the background of the facts so presented that the proposed Canon, with its accompanying enquiry, comes before the Lambeth Conference. The special regulations of the Canon,* and the immediate reference of the enquiry, are local and particular: but the principles and the considerations involved are of importance for the whole Anglican Communion. We submit, therefore:—

1. That this is a case where freedom of action in a local Church ought to be fully recognised and encouraged since no contravention of any ultimate principle of faith or order is involved.
2. That no argument forbidding the experiment in question can be based upon the theological tradition of the Anglican Communion.
3. That a conclusive argument on grounds of expediency for or against the full ordination of women must be sought, not in the past, but in the future when the value of women priests to the spiritual life of the community has been tested in the light of experience. Only if this thing be of God can it prosper.

L. W. GRENSTEAD,

D. E. BELFIELD,

On behalf of the Ordination of
Women Ad Hoc Committee.

* See overleaf

NOTE

* We are not prepared to endorse every detail of the proposed Canon. In common, with the great majority of those who desire the admission of women to Holy Orders we deprecate the introduction of a marriage bar in Clause Two as an infringement of personal freedom and the denial to the Church of the special contribution which married women priests could make to its life and work. We should feel obliged to oppose the inclusion of a similar provision in any future Canon of the Church of England.

Obtainable from
The Honorary Secretary,
Room 44a, 25 Victoria St., London, S.W. 1