

# THEOLOGICAL TRENDS

## MINISTRY AND ORDINATION II

### The Ordination of Women

**T**HE FIRST article in this two-part series discussed the theological source of current developments in the area of ministry, namely the renewed ecclesiology articulated at Vatican II, and pointed out some of the implications of these developments for the theology of ordination. The question of the ordination of women was postponed to this second article where it can be treated in greater detail. This further treatment is necessary not only, or even principally, because of the publicity and passion of the current debate about the admission of women to Orders, but because of the radical theological and pastoral implications of the issue.

In this article, I will consider the sources of this essentially *new question* and its symbolic, practical and theological dimensions. Secondly, I will survey the current state of the theological discussion. Finally, I will point out the relationship of this issue to the overall malaise in the area of ministry discussed in the preceding article.

#### *Sources of the Question*

Raymond Brown begins his brief essay on the significance of modern biblical studies for the question of ordaining women with a discussion of 'non-theological factors' affecting the current debate, among which he cites the economic, social, sexual, international or cultural, and ecumenical factors.<sup>1</sup> There can be no realistic appraisal of the contemporary question of the ordination of women which does not recognize the determining role of the non-theological factors in its emergence and its shape. Two closely interrelated non-theological factors are especially important: namely, the generalized revolution in human consciousness that has marked the post-colonial world, and the rise of feminism.

Our own century has seen the end, at least in principle, of the universal acceptance of imperialism as a natural, social and political arrangement. It is no longer acceptable to humanity at large for any individual or group of people to own, rule over, exploit, or destroy any other individual or group. In positive terms, there is general recognition that all people have a natural right to self-determination, even though practice is far behind principle in this regard. The multi-nationals continue to exploit third world countries, economically privileged ethnic and racial groups oppress the minority

populations in the United States, Canada, Belgium, Ireland, South Africa, Australia and elsewhere; whilst the traditionally powerless in every society, for example, the poor, the aged, the handicapped, homosexuals, the ill, prisoners, women and children, are victimized by marginalization, neglect, and outright violence. Nevertheless, we live in a world society which recognizes, if only by lip-service for the sake of appearing civilized, the fundamental legitimacy of the demand for self-determination of all these individuals and groups. This is, at base, a recognition of the principle of radical equality among human beings. Consequently, when the consciousness of any individual or group, however oppressed, begins to register the fact of hetero-determination, a liberation movement of some kind, violent or non-violent, is virtually certain to follow.

Feminism, at root, is a liberation movement born of the rising consciousness of increasing numbers of women that they are not equal, self-determining participants in society or even in their own families, but have been and continue to be subordinate to men in virtually every sphere of life. Studies undertaken in preparation for and during the World Conference of the International Women's Year (I.W.Y.) 1975, established such worldwide oppression and abuse of women as to lead the United Nations to declare 1975-85 as the 'International Women's Decade'. The mid-decade conference was held in Copenhagen last year. Using as indices 'Women and health, employment and education', the conference tried to discover if any progress had been made. The evaluation showed that the universally inferior status of women had actually deteriorated in the past five years.

All liberation movements are marked by a vehemence which the non-oppressed see as extremism or even as a threat to the very structure and good order of society. Feminism is no exception in this regard. But once under way, liberation movements cannot be halted except by the virtual extermination of the rising group. This was not always the case; but in our own time, the quest for self-determination is legitimated, at least in principle, by world opinion. The United Nations' establishment of 1975-85 as The Decade of Women is an international recognition both of the worldwide oppression of women and the legitimacy of this quest for liberation.

The first targets of feminist efforts are, naturally enough, survival issues such as economic exploitation, inequality of educational opportunity, political marginalization, and condoned physical violence suffered by women in virtually every society in the world. But the role of religion in legitimating and participating in the oppression of women has not passed unnoticed. Although the situation in third world countries is more desperate than in the first, the latter is no exception to the generally oppressed condition of women. The U.S. National Women's Agenda, prepared for the I.W.Y., listed specific areas of oppression of U.S. women as follows: political exclusion, inequality of educational opportunity, occupational and economic discrimination, inequality in health care and

housing, unequal treatment before the law, marginalization in and abuse by the media, victimization by inadequately sanctioned physical violence, social discrimination. In the United States for example, according to the statistics released by the Census Bureau in 1979, women in all occupations earn, on the average, fifty-nine cents for every dollar earned by a male doing the same work. At the same time, the inequality of women in the religious sphere has taken on increasing symbolic and political importance. In the mainline Christian Communion, including Roman Catholicism, the exclusion of women from leadership roles in the community has been identified as both the articulation of women's inferiority and the most effective means of denying women religious self-determination and decision-making influence. Feminism in the world context of post-colonial consciousness is a major non-theological source of women's recognition of the true significance of their exclusion from ordained ministry.

A second set of factors which have influenced the rapid maturing of the ordination question arises from the pastoral situation in the post-conciliar Church. The shortage of ordained ministers in the Roman Church has reached emergency proportions, not only in the so-called mission countries but also in virtually all first world countries, including traditionally Catholic ones. The relevant statistics can be found in the *Annuario Statisticum Ecclesiae*, issued by the Vatican. For example, in the U.S.A., the number of pastorally active priests declined by eighteen per cent during the past decade, and of seminarians by thirty-five thousand, whilst the Catholic population increased. In Europe, only Poland and Yugoslavia show increases in the number of seminarians; the decline elsewhere is dramatic. In third world missionary countries, almost half of all parishes and mission-stations have no resident priest. Hundreds of counties in the U.S.A. have no priest at all, according to the continually updated research of the Glenmary home missions.

Two possible solutions to the problem are evident: the ordaining of married people, since mandatory celibacy has been established by recent studies, and by the informed testimony of the hierarchies of several countries,<sup>2</sup> as a major factor in the 'priest crisis'; or the ordaining of women who are already successfully ministering in many areas currently devoid of ordained personnel. It is being argued by increasing numbers of theologians and lay people that to deprive entire believing communities of sacramental life over long periods of time, when suitable ministers are readily available, is theologically indefensible and pastorally intolerable. Furthermore, there is a growing sense in many areas that an all-male ministry, even if there were an adequate number available, is not desirable. Fr Eugene Kennedy, in his psychological study of United States' priests in 1972, found that sixty-five per cent had 'under-developed personalities', another eight per cent 'maldeveloped personalities'; and that their isolated life-styles and the exhausting demands of an unchosen celibacy were

important factors in their lack of personality integration. Contemporary consciousness, particularly in psychologically sophisticated areas of the world, is rapidly moving towards the acceptance of androgyny as a principle of health not only for individuals but for societies. In other words, the pastoral need for women ministers is as much a need for the feminine in ministry as for increased numbers of ministers.

Another pastoral consideration, one which many Church officials have consistently refused to take seriously, is the rapidly increasing disaffiliation of women from the Roman Church, markedly in the U.S.A. Sister Theresa Kane R.S.M., in her presidential address to the L.C.W.R. last August, said: 'I am concerned for the growing number of women who have left the Roman Catholic Church, and for those amongst us, both sisters and laywomen, who can no longer enter into the sacramental life of the Church because of the sin of sexism'. Intelligent and educated women who have come to expect to participate as equals in every area of life are increasingly unwilling to belong to a Society in which they are defined as second-class members. It is naïve to think that the exodus of women from the Church is restricted to those who wish to be ordained, or for whom the ordination question is the most serious item on the contemporary theological agenda. The exclusion of women from ordained ministry is, for many women who have no personal interest in ordination, symbolic of their permanent inferiority in the Church and the religious legitimation of their oppression in the family and in society. Those who realize the implications for the Church of the possible, indeed likely, loss of significant numbers of highly motivated women have a pastoral reason to be deeply concerned with the ordination question.

A third set of factors making the ordination of women an increasingly urgent question lies in the area of theology. I will point out only two of the more important theological problems. First, the theology of ordination itself, as well as sacramental theology generally, is being negatively affected by the exclusion of women. Abstracting from the political and economic dimensions of ordination, women in certain places are currently publicly exercising every role associated with ordained ministry except the pronouncing of the words of institution and of absolution. Women administer parishes which have no ordained pastor, counsel, preach, teach, catechize, baptize, preside at 'para-liturgies' which include the entire Eucharistic action except the words of institution, witness marriages, accompany the dying, and bury the dead. They are effectively 'demonstrating', in the U.S.A., in Africa and in Latin America, that there is no intrinsic relationship between ordination and any aspect of pastoral ministry except the pronouncing of two brief formulae. Not only does this implicitly inculcate a very inadequate and even magical theology of Eucharist and Reconciliation (which the Church has always recognized as a danger), but it drastically restricts and distorts the meaning of ordained

ministry. At the same time, in increasing numbers of communities, the christian experience is becoming largely non-Eucharistic. Many who are studying the implications for sacramental theology and practice of this double disjunction between pastoral ministry and ordination on the one hand, and between christian life and Eucharist on the other, see the question of the ordination of women ministers as critical.

A second theological source of the ordination question is the progressive realization of the negative theological conclusions concerning women Christians implied in the exclusion of women from Orders. If baptism initiates a person into the mystery of Christ and yet has different effects on males and females, that is, makes males fully participating members of the ecclesial community who are fit subjects of all the sacraments and potential participants in all aspects of the Church's saving mission, but does not so affect females, then either we must admit that there are two essentially different christian baptisms or that women are a really different and intrinsically inferior type of subject for christian initiation. Both conclusions are, of course, excluded by the New Testament and the traditional theology of baptism; but the impasse is becoming ever more evident to reflective theologians and lay people.<sup>3</sup>

A fourth urgent factor is the very practical issue of the *de facto* sacramental subjugation of women to men in the Church. We need not belabour this point. Most people who have been sensitized to the ordination issue have realized its practical urgency precisely in situations in which the inappropriateness of the male minister's sacramental activity was painfully obvious. In the last few years women's tolerance of this sacramental dependence has appeared to decline rapidly. Alternative liturgies as well as illicit celebrations of Eucharist and Reconciliation by the non-ordained have multiplied, and increasing numbers of individual women and groups have preferred to forego Eucharistic celebration altogether, until they can celebrate in a way that does not symbolize their inferiority in relation to men.

This survey does not exhaust the list of factors giving rise to the question of ordaining women, but it does suggest why a seemingly minor element of sacramental discipline which has been accepted without question for centuries has suddenly become a highly volatile, divisive, and urgent issue in the twentieth-century Church.

#### *Dimensions of the question*

Any adequate grasp of the issue requires some awareness of its complexity. I will mention three aspects which are particularly important: the symbolic, the practical (both pastoral and ecclesiastical), and the theoretical (both biblical and theological).

The *symbolic* significance of the exclusion of women from Orders is, in my opinion, the least understood. It symbolizes (that is, articulates and

realizes) several meanings, such as the normativity of maleness for christian identity, the derivative nature of women's participation in the Church's mission, and the sacramental dependence of women. But the foundational symbolism is that of hetero-determination, the subordination of women to men in the Church. When one person or group assumes the right, especially a divinely sanctioned right, to decide the nature, competence, roles, and limitations of another person or group, the latter is subordinate and dependent. Men in the christian community have claimed the right to determine the nature and proper roles of women. This foundational arrangement articulates and reinforces the inferiority of women Christians, and the rhetoric of 'complementarity in equality' in no way disguises or mitigates the subjugation.<sup>4</sup> It is certainly true that this subjugation is perfectly acceptable, even desirable, to many women. But as increasing numbers of women repudiate their inferior status in family and society, they also find their ecclesial subjugation unacceptable. Because exclusion of women from Orders is the symbol of this ecclesial subjugation, it often becomes the focus of liberated women's (and men's) attempts to change the patriarchal structure of the Church.

The *practical* aspects of the question are both pastoral and ecclesiastical. We have already mentioned the numerical need for ordained ministers and the psychological-spiritual need to balance an all-male ministry. Another important pastoral consideration, mentioned in the previous article, is the problem created by the disruption of the sacramental process when the minister who has accompanied a fellow-Christian throughout the process cannot lawfully bring that process to full sacramental expression by presiding at Eucharist, reconciling, anointing, or witnessing the marriage. The need to call upon an ordained minister who has not participated in the sacramental process fosters a magical conception of sacraments, if not a growing conviction of their irrelevance to the reality of the spiritual life.

A very important ecclesiastical aspect of the exclusion of women from orders arises from the unfortunate, but very real, identification of jurisdiction and decision-making power in the Church with ordained ministry. No matter what positions women hold in the parish or diocesan structure, they will not have any real power in the ecclesiastical world as long as they are excluded as a group from ordained ministry. Much as we might wish that power were not an issue among Christians, it would be naïve to pretend that it is not. Control of personnel and financial resources as well as ministerial policies is in the hands of the ordained, and the exclusion of women from orders is effectively their exclusion from power in the Church.

The *theoretical* aspects of the ordination question are both biblical and theological. If this controversy can, in any sense, be considered a blessing for the Church, it is perhaps because it has focused sharply some very important questions, the answers to which have ramifications far beyond the immediate issue of women's ordination.

First, it has become painfully obvious that we do not have a really adequate or usable theology of Tradition. To maintain that, because women have never been ordained they never can be, is to identify tradition with long-standing practice,<sup>5</sup> a position which would, among other things, legitimate slavery and anti-semitism, and de-legitimate the ordination of priests altogether, since there were none in the earliest days of the Church.<sup>6</sup> The logical conclusion of this position is that nothing may be done for the first time!

The efforts of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in its Declaration, *Inter Insigniores*, discussed in detail below, to establish some meaning of Tradition independent of Scripture (a position implicitly dismissed by the Council in *Dei Verbum*) was roundly rejected by several eminent theologians from a variety of countries as anachronism at best and theological expediency at worst.<sup>7</sup> But knowing what Tradition does *not* mean is not the same as knowing what it *does* mean: that is, what criteria are necessary and adequate for determining the status of some belief or practice as Tradition rather than mere custom, however venerable. Even more problematic is the question of the 'irreformability' of Tradition, even if we were able to determine its content.

A second cluster of theological questions concerns the use of the Bible, especially the New Testament, in the resolving of contemporary questions which are not directly addressed by the New Testament texts. Under what conditions is the behaviour of Jesus and/or the early Church normative for the later Church? How important is the silence of the biblical texts on certain issues? Can theological questions, such as who can minister in the Church, be settled by historical investigation of biblical material and, if not, what is the role of historical data?

The Pontifical Biblical Commission's 'Report' suggested extreme caution in the use of biblical material for the establishment of absolute positions on contemporary questions. But knowing how the biblical materials *cannot* be used does not establish how they *should* be used. The question of the ordination of women is one of several contemporary concerns which are challenging biblical scholars to bring their traditional historical-critical methods into dialogue with the methods of literary criticism and the developments in the area of philosophical hermeneutics. Only an adequate hermeneutical theory which takes proper account of the theology of revelation can ground the valid use of the Bible in the discussion of contemporary problems. Such a theory does not currently exist.

A third set of theological questions was raised by the Declaration's 'fifth argument'. Assuming that the 'natural resemblance' required for sacramental signs extended to sexual similarity between the priest and Christ, the Declaration focused theological attention on the significance of the maleness of Jesus in the mystery of the Incarnation, and, by rebound, on the implications of exclusion from Orders for the doctrine of salvation as

it applies to women. If the maleness of Jesus is of determining significance in the subordinate question of ordination, then is it not equally significant in relation to the foundation of the sacramental economy, the Incarnation itself?

Despite its extraordinary insensitivity and the endless series of repudiations (many of them tasteless for that reason), the 'fifth argument' has evoked a long-overdue explicit examination of implicit but highly operative assumptions for christian identity and mission about the normativity of Jesus's maleness. It has led, by extension, to the exhuming and formal disavowal by numerous theologians of patristic and medieval positions on women being created 'not in God's image'. The most notorious versions of this position are Augustine's argument that woman alone is not the image of God, whilst man alone is, and St Thomas's acceptance of the Aristotelian position that 'woman is defective and misbegotten', and that 'in a secondary sense the image of God is found in man, and not in woman'.<sup>8</sup> No fully satisfactory work has yet appeared on the increasingly important but delicate question of the significance of Jesus's masculinity for christian, especially feminine, consciousness, but there has been a resounding repudiation in the christian community, both theological and lay, of the significance assigned to it by the Declaration.

Finally, as we have already mentioned above, the exclusion of women from ordination raises very serious questions in the area of theological anthropology. To exclude half the baptized from participation in some aspect of the Church's life, while maintaining that this exclusion implies no inequality, requires the assumption of a 'dual anthropology', a theory of real difference between the humanity of men and of women. Rather than being seen as two ways of realizing human nature, maleness and femaleness must be seen as constituting two kinds of human nature. Such a dual anthropology can justify (and historically has justified) any form of oppression or exclusion which the more powerful of the two groups decides is 'according to the nature' of the other.

Again, our listing of the dimensions of the question of the ordination of women is not exhaustive, but is intended to show why an issue which seems, in itself, relatively minor in comparison with such momentous ecclesial concerns as evangelization, the breakdown of the traditional family, and the role of the Church in the world-wide struggle for social justice, has assumed such importance in our day.

#### (a) *Official positions*

Although the exclusion of women from presbyteral ordination has been occasionally referred to, re-affirmed, and/or justified in official ecclesiastical documents throughout church history, it would be inaccurate to say that there had been any official discussion of the question prior to Vatican II. In the Roman Communion, the practice of ordaining only

males was virtually universally accepted until the 1950s. (The notable exception is St Joan's International Alliance, founded in 1911 to espouse the equality of the sexes universally.) Occasionally the question was raised as to *why* the practice was such, but the practice itself was not questioned. Consequently, the contemporary question must be regarded as a really new one that has emerged in the second half of the twentieth century and which has been addressed in only two official Vatican documents.<sup>9</sup>

The first 'official' document, the 'Report' of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, was never intended as a public statement, is still not available in its entirety, nor are all the relevant details of its composition known. However, this report was leaked by some unknown source, unrelated to the Commission itself, and was published under the title, 'Biblical Commission's Report. Can Women be Priests?'<sup>10</sup> The Commission had been dealing with the question at least since the previous year, apparently at the request of higher authority, probably the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. In essence, the Commission's contribution is 'negative'. It concluded unanimously that 'the New Testament by itself alone will [not] permit us to settle once and for all the problem of the possible accession of women to the presbyterate'. By a majority of twelve to seven votes it favoured the view that Scripture alone does not provide sufficient grounds to exclude the possibility of ordaining woman, and that Christ's plan would not be transgressed if women were allowed to be ordained.

The second official document is *Inter Insigniores*, the 'Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood', published on 15 October 1976, by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The Declaration concludes that 'the Church, in fidelity to the example of the Lord, does not consider herself authorized to admit women to priestly ordination'. It gives six arguments, of admittedly varying weight, in support of the conclusion: (1) the Church's constant tradition has been to ordain only males; (2) Jesus did not call any women to be members of the Twelve; (3) the apostles did not add any women to the apostolic group; (4) the practice of Christ and the apostles in this regard is permanently normative; (5) the priest must have a 'natural resemblance' to Christ, and the male sex is constitutive of this resemblance; (6) the issue of equality in the Church and of human rights is irrelevant to the question of ordained ministry.

#### (b) *Collective professional responses*

The Declaration evoked an immediate and prolific response from the professional theological community, not only in the form of symposia and lectures, but in collective statements and volumes. In March 1977, the faculty of the Pontifical Institute of Theology in Berkeley, California, wrote a lengthy open letter of dissent to the apostolic delegate to the United States, Jean Jadot, requesting that he transmit its contents to the Pope and

the Congregation for Doctrine.<sup>11</sup> Although the letter does not explicitly argue for the ordination of women, it forcefully points out that none of the arguments against the ordination of women given in the Declaration 'either individually or collectively, can bear the weight assigned' them. It suggests several considerations which would favour ordination, and strongly intimates that the Declaration is not only faulty in its argumentation, but potentially destructive to women, damaging to the pastoral ministry of the Church, and undermining of papal authority and credibility.

A volume of theological essays, written by forty-four scholars, was published in 1977 under the editorship of Arlene and Leonard Swidler.<sup>12</sup> Its fifty essays constitute a virtual line-by-line evaluation of the Declaration; and the book's judgment of the latter is overwhelmingly negative. It finds no argument of the Declaration convincing. This volume is a particularly useful source for the current discussion, because it contains not only the theological essays but all the official documentation in English translation, and a number of articles surveying current studies on the question, evaluating the authoritative character of various types of official statements, and exploring questions of theological method in dealing with practical issues in the Church.

In 1978, a number of collective studies appeared, among them the volume edited by Carroll Stuhlmueller, presenting the collegial work of the faculty of the Chicago Theological Union on the question of women's ordination.<sup>13</sup> This volume also seriously questions the validity of the Declaration's arguments and conclusion. It is especially useful as a demonstration of methodological critique of an official ecclesiastical document.

In June 1978, the Task Force of The Catholic Theological Society of America published its 'Research Report: Women in Church and Society'.<sup>14</sup> The Task Force had been established in 1975 to 'conduct a theological review and critique of the work that has been done' on this question, and its report was accepted by the Board of Directors of the CTSA in October 1977. Although not concerned exclusively with the ordination question, the Research Report saw it as focusing 'the wider question of the status of women in Church and society', and concluded that none of the arguments adduced against the ordination of women 'present any serious grounds to justify the exclusion of women from ordination to pastoral office in the Catholic Church' (p 47).

In 1979, the Executive Board of the Catholic Biblical Association of America directed the publication of the report of the Association's Task Force on the Role of Women in Early Christianity. This document concluded that the arguments adduced against the ordination of women cannot be sustained, and 'that the New Testament evidence, while not decisive by itself, points towards the admission of women to priestly ministry'.<sup>15</sup>

While this survey of collective professional responses to the Declaration is

not exhaustive, it does indicate the breadth of theological consensus on the question, especially in the United States of America, and the depth of commitment to its full exploration, despite official unease. This theological consensus is paralleled by the growing acceptance of women's ordination among adult Catholics. In the wake of the Declaration, between 18 February and 18 March 1977, support for the ordination of women among American Catholics increased from thirty-one to forty-one per cent. There is every scientific indication that this support will continue to increase, and that within the coming decade over half the Catholics in the United States will actively favour the ordination of women.<sup>16</sup> Although the data cited here is from the United States, where the most intensive statistical studies have been done, it does not appear that the phenomenon is limited to the United States of America or to the first world.

This survey would be seriously defective if it failed to mention at least a few of the outstanding individual theologians whose work has furthered the discussion of women's ordination. The English translation of Roger Gryson's important study, *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church*, made the relevant historical data readily available.<sup>17</sup> André Lemare's 1971 study, *Les ministères aux origines de l'Église*, critically evaluated the New Testament evidence, and much of this material was summarized in more accessible form in his *Ministry in the Church*, which appeared in English in 1977.<sup>18</sup> In the field of systematic theology, Bernard Cooke has made a major contribution to reflection on ministry in general in his monumental volume *Ministry to Word and Sacraments*,<sup>19</sup> in which he treats the question of the ordination of women under various headings. In the field of periodical literature some of the best work has been done by women scholars such as Elizabeth Schussler-Fiorenza, Anne Patrick, Francine Cardman, Margaret Farley, Rosemary Reuther and Fran Ferder. Karl Rahner's article, which appeared shortly after the Declaration, deserves special mention, because it signalled to all the high level of the theological discussion and the pastoral importance of the question.<sup>20</sup>

The literature bearing directly on the question of the ordination of women has increased so rapidly in the last fifteen years that no comprehensive survey of it is possible. But it should be noted that virtually every branch of the sacred and humanistic disciplines has felt challenged to make its contribution. The arguments for the ordination of women are coming from history, sociology, psychology, ethics, and philosophy, as well as from biblical studies, systematic theology, moral theology, church history, and pastoral theology. The Canon Law Society of America has been noteworthy for its contributions to the overall topic of women in the Church.<sup>21</sup> If it is assumed that the Declaration *Inter Insigniores* surfaced the best arguments against the ordination of women that history and theology can provide, then one may concur with Bernard Cooke's opinion that 'from a theological point of view, it [the question of women's ordination] is

really a non-question. There is no apparent reason why the ability and right of women to function in this manner should even be questioned . . . that there is no intrinsic barrier to admitting women to all the various ministerial functions of the Church . . . that basic justice demands that women be no longer denied their full rights within the Church'.<sup>22</sup>

In summary, then, there already exists something approaching theological consensus that there are no intrinsic obstacles to the ordination of women; the pastoral need for it is evident; it seems probable that it would be acceptable in those parts of the Church which are asking for it. Nevertheless, the proposal to ordain women involves a number of serious ambiguities which ought not to be passed over in silence. The most problematic is that ordaining women into the present structure would constitute a reaffirmation of the clerical-lay dichotomy which is a major obstacle to the development and recognition of the plurality of ministries needed in the contemporary Church. It would also retard the re-examination of the relationship between ordination and Eucharistic presidency. Finally, it might well reinforce the dysfunctional understanding of ordination as access to sacramental and political power within the Church rather than as designation for community service.

### *Conclusion*

The question of the ordination of women is a lens focusing the broader issue of ministry in the contemporary Church. This issue was well-defined by the sociologist of religion, John Coleman, in his August 1980 address to the Leadership Conference of Women Religious in the United States: we are engaged in a major paradigm shift in which our conception of ministry is undergoing radical change. Baptism, charism, competence and collegiality are achieving ascendancy respectively over ordination, office, ascribed clerical status, and purely hierarchal organization and function as defining characteristics of ministry. Coleman points out that we are experiencing a real ideological and practical clash between the new conception of ministry which is operative among most religious professionals outside the hierarchy, and the structure which the latter accept and are attempting to maintain. However, both theology and the demographic reality of declining numbers of male celibate priests and increasing numbers of Catholics favour the ultimate acceptance of the emerging conception of ministry. In the opinion of this writer, such acceptance will be not the triumph of novelty but the vindication in new and changed circumstances of our tradition. For it is from the New Testament that we learn that ministry is not the exercise of dominion but the free exchange of God-given gifts manifested in weakness, recognized gladly, and used collegially in the service of one another and the world.

*Sandra M. Schneiders I.H.M.*

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> R. E. Brown, 'The meaning of modern New Testament studies for the possibility of ordaining women to the Priesthood', in *Biblical Reflections on Crises facing the Church* (New York, 1975), pp 45-62.
- <sup>2</sup> In the last ten years, Bishops' Conferences in Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay, Indonesia, Chad, the Cameroons, the Central African Republic and the Netherlands have called for a married clergy.
- <sup>3</sup> Cf S. Butler and the Catholic Theological Society of America Research Team, in *A Report on the status of women in Church and Society, considered in the light of the question of women's ordination* (CTSA, New York, 1978).
- <sup>4</sup> Cf M. A. Farley, 'Sexism', in *The New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Supplementary Volume XVII (New York, 1978), 'Changes in the Church', p 604; and S. Butler, *A Report*, pp 36-40.
- <sup>5</sup> Cf my article, 'Did Jesus exclude women from the priesthood?', in *Women Priests: a Catholic Commentary on the Vatican Declaration*, ed. L. and A. Swidler (New York, 1977), pp 227-33.
- <sup>6</sup> Cf R. E. Brown, *Priest and Bishop: Biblical Reflections* (New York, 1970), esp. pp 13-20, 'The absence of Christian Priests in the NT'.
- <sup>7</sup> Cf L. Swidler, 'Introduction: *Roma locuta, causa finita?*', in *Women Priests . . .* pp 9-10.
- <sup>8</sup> Augustine, *De Trinitate XII*, 7; Aquinas, *Summa Theol.*, 1, 92, 1, and 1, 93, 4. For a vast collection of texts, both sacred and secular, witnessing to the universal conviction of women's intrinsic inferiority to man, cf J. O'Faolain and L. Martines, *Not in God's Image* (London, 1974).
- <sup>9</sup> For the statement by Archbishop Joseph Bernardin, made on behalf of the Conference of the U.S. Hierarchy, cf 'The Ordination of Women', in *Commonweal* 103 (16 January 1976), pp 42-44.
- <sup>10</sup> In *Origins*, the official organ of the U.S. NCWC, for 1 July 1976, pp 92-96.
- <sup>11</sup> Published in the *Los Angeles Times* (18 March 1977), and in *Commonweal* 104 (1 April 1977), pp 264-66. <sup>12</sup> Cf note 5, above.
- <sup>13</sup> *Women and Priesthood*, ed C. Stuhlmüller, C.P. (Collegeville Liturgical Press, 1978).
- <sup>14</sup> Cf note 3, above.
- <sup>15</sup> M. Boucher *et al.*, 'Women and Priestly Ministry: the New Testament Evidence', in *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 41 (October 1979), pp 608-13.
- <sup>16</sup> Cf M. Fiedler and D. Pomerleau, 'America Catholics and the Ordination of Women', in *America* 138 (7 January 1978), pp 11-14.
- <sup>17</sup> Tr. J. Laporte and M. L. Hall (Collegeville Liturgical Press, 1976).
- <sup>18</sup> Paris, 1971, tr. C. W. Danes, *Ministry in the Church* (London, 1977).
- <sup>19</sup> *Ministry to Word and Sacraments: History and Theology* (Philadelphia, 1976).
- <sup>20</sup> K. Rahner, 'Preistertum der Frau?', in *Stimmen der Zeit*, 5 (May 1977), pp 291-301.
- <sup>21</sup> Cf particularly 'Report of the Canon Law Society of America's *ad hoc* committee to study the Ordination of Women', 24 August 1973; *Sexism and Church Law*, ed. J. A. Coriden (New York, 1977), contains the papers presented at the Symposium 'Women and Church Law', sponsored by the CLSA and Rosemont College in October 1976.
- <sup>22</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp 654-55.