

## Report Concerning the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood Pursuant to Synod Resolution 7/83

### Formation of Committee and Terms of Reference

1. The resolution which led to the formation of the Committee reads as follows:  
"Synod does not accept the proposed amendment to the Constitution to facilitate the ordination of women to priesthood as this Synod is not convinced that the proposal is consistent with scripture. Synod asks the Standing Committee to appoint a Committee to further consider the issue discussed in items 23-25 of the report made pursuant to resolution 18/82 and requests that Committee to report to the first session of the next Synod. In the meantime, this Synod acknowledges with grateful thanks to God the important and continuing role played by women in various spheres of commitment throughout this Diocese."
2. After some consideration by Standing Committee, the persons who were appointed to this Committee were Bishops E. D. Cameron and R. H. Goodhew, Canon R. A. Cole, Dr. P. A. Brennan, Miss E. A. Mathieson, Messrs. N. M. Cameron, G. R. Christmas and R. Tong.
3. The Committee met on five occasions: 19 March, 11 May, 7 June, 21 June and 24 July. Mr. Christmas was appointed as Secretary of the Committee.

### Background to Report

4. This Committee is in the nature of a continuation of a previous committee which reported to the 1983 Synod. That previous committee submitted a report concerning legal procedures by the General Synod at its 1981 session and also made some observations on the Meaning, Value and Theology of Ordination Report and recommended that steps be taken to enable women to be appointed as deacons. It, however, stated that such a step "need not necessarily be seen as a substitute for the further consideration of the whole question of women's ministry and in particular ordination to the priesthood".
5. The Committee recorded three views concerning the ordination of women to the priesthood. Its report on this aspect reads as follows:  
"Some members of the Committee would favour ordination of women to the priesthood. Some oppose it. Others would allow ordination to the priesthood provided that such ordination did not mean or necessarily imply the sole cure of a parish.  
These views arise from differing interpretations of Anglican formularies, differing notions concerning the role and ministry of the priesthood and differing understandings of the theory and practice of ordination. Some of these areas involve disagreements concerning the interpretation and application of biblical teaching. The Committee has noted these matters but has not explored or debated the complex questions involved to enable it to make further recommendations as to the ordination of women to the priesthood.  
We suggest that the Committee be re-appointed to discuss these matters (including consequential constitutional changes which may be needed) and report to the next session of Synod."
6. The task of the present Committee is the further consideration of these views.

### Report

7. The complexity, emotive character, importance and divisiveness of the issues involved was quickly recognised. In an endeavour to reach a common mind it was seen that amongst the members of the Committee a majority supported a view which would allow ordination of women to the priesthood provided that such ordination did not mean or necessarily imply the sole cure of a parish.
8. A view which found amongst the Committee a considerable degree of acceptance is expressed in terms of the following draft resolution which was prepared at one of the meetings of the Committee and which is recorded as follows:

"Being mindful of the God-given distinction between men and women, and fully accepting the principles of revelation as contained in the New Testament and therein applied to the cultural situation of that day, and seeking to apply those same principles fittingly in the culture of our own day, without doing violence to the conscience of any, frankly recognising that there will be differences of interpretation of the biblical evidence it is suggested that a Canon be promoted at General Synod, allowing women as well as men to be ordained to the Presbyterate, with the proviso that in no Diocese shall a woman be ordained as priest without the full assent of the

Synod of that Diocese, and that such women priests be not licensed in any Diocese to the sole cure of souls without the Synod of that Diocese having first signified its assent."

9. Resolution No. 7/83 of Synod concerning the subject matter of this report is noted. Synod expressed its present mind in that it is "not convinced that the proposal" (for the ordination of women to the priesthood) is "consistent with scripture". The Committee expressed some uneasiness with this resolution in two areas.

- (a) The resolution appears to assume that our present practice expresses the biblical position. Some members of the Committee are of the opinion that this assumption needs to be justified as much as the position advocated by those who would support the ordination of women.
- (b) Synod confined its attention to the biblical principles; however, it should be recognised that these principles may be applied in different ways in different ages and it is to this that we should address ourselves.

10 Biblical considerations are paramount and primary but they do not exclude other areas of debate which the Church should take into account. Some of these other areas are as follows:

- (a) Catholic tradition concerning the character of the priesthood and the role of a priest in relation to the sacraments,
- (b) Ecumenical relationships with the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches,
- (c) Principles of doctrine and worship contained in the Book of Common Prayer.

11. The Committee spent some considerable part of its time considering the biblical arguments and has prepared as an appendix to this report a resume of such arguments for and against women's ordination. There is already much literature on this subject and little is to be gained by the Committee seeking to add to the wealth of material available. The summary, however, may encourage discussion.

12. We are conscious of the polarisation and alienation which have already occurred within the Church and in various organisations within and outside the institutional structures in considering these questions. These polarisations reveal that the debate has not only great theological significance but also it deals with personal relationships, our attitudes to men and women in ministry, the meaning of ministry, the meaning of ordination, the role of the ordained clergy and patterns of ministry for the future.

13. In addition it should be considered that throughout the world there is a strong body of evangelical opinion which claims biblical authority for the ordination of women. There is also a strong body which claims similar authority against the ordination of women. The matter therefore lies in the interpretation and application of the biblical texts rather than in the texts themselves.

### **Recommendations for a Way Forward**

14. That further copies of the report and the appendix hereto be printed and made available to all parishes and that the ministers of parishes be encouraged to draw it to the attention of all interested persons for discussion within the parishes, the cost being a charge on Synod Fund Contingencies.

15. That the Synod request the Rural Deans to summon Rural Deanery Conferences to discuss the ordination of women, against the background of the role of the ordained ministry and patterns of ministry for the future.

16. That Synod requests the Standing Committee to include on the agenda of the 1985 Synod a series of propositions whereby the issues raised in the report may be debated and become the subject of a synodical expression of opinion.

For and on behalf of the Committee

G.R. CHRISTMAS  
*Secretary*

### **Addendum**

17. Whilst I do not disagree with paragraphs 14, 15 and 17 of the report, I find myself at variance with statements in paragraphs 7 to 13.

18. I agree with paragraph 7 but do so only on the basis of my understanding of the nature of ordination and priesthood. If my understanding is wrong, I may well disagree with paragraph 7. Unfortunately, there is no agreement within the Anglican denomination, or even in the Sydney Diocese, on the nature of either ordination or the priesthood.

19. The view expressed in paragraph 8 goes too far. Disregarding the means of achieving the end, the end is acceptable if and only if the relevant congregation accepts a woman priest as its minister, at least for so long as the traditional Anglican pattern remains and for so long as there is disagreement as to whether or

not a woman may be an elder or "in charge of a congregation". I include a congregation which otherwise has no or little choice. I do not believe that any congregation whose members include persons who object to the ordination of women should be obliged to accept a woman clergy person.

20. I have misgivings about the implications of the two statements in paragraph 9 and the last sentence of paragraph 13. Whilst I accept that the application of biblical principles can be difficult, my understanding is that, at present, there is no agreement on the principles to be applied.

21. In my opinion, the onus rests on those who seek a change to satisfy the reasonable objections of those who do not want the change. I do not regard "tradition" or "ecumenical relationships" or "principles of doctrine or worship in the Book of Common Prayer" as reasonable objections (I do not intend to imply that the Committee does) but all have been raised and are regarded as objections by some. These objections as well as the 9 objections based on biblical material need to be answered.

22. The Rural Deanery Conferences should also discuss the ordination of women against the biblical considerations.

N. M. CAMERON

1 August 1984

## **Appendix to Report Concerning the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood Pursuant to Synod Resolution 7/83**

The following has been prepared by a member of the Committee and is a summary of arguments for and against the ordination of women to the priesthood taken from the current literature on the debate. The arguments on each side may appear to be inconsistent with each other. This is because the summary sets out a range of viewpoints as they are presented without attempting to form them into a coherent argument in the form of a debate or dialogue.

### **Arguments for Ordination of Women to the Priesthood**

1. (a) The Holy Spirit gives gifts as He wills without discriminating with respect to sex. Women were to receive gifts related to ministry of the Word equally with men (Acts 2:17, Joel 2:28). Women in the early church prophesied, i.e. expounded divine truth (Acts 21:9) and prayed (I Corinthians 11:5).
  - (b) If God gives gifts of ministry to women including gifts of teaching and leadership, the church ought not to deny them the opportunity of exercising their gifts simply on the basis of sex.
2. (a) All Christians are priests (I Peter 2:5). While this is a reference to the corporate priesthood of the church, if it is legitimate to individualise the verse and apply it to men, the same can be done equally to women.
  - (b) Women in Christ are able and permitted to do what all Christians are to do. Matthew 20:26-28, Luke 22:25, 26, Romans 12:10, Galatians 5:13, Ephesians 4:2; 5:21, Philippians 2:3.
  - (c) Women are not inferior beings to men nor do they possess a lesser spiritual experience therefore there is no reason not to ordain them.
3. (a) I Corinthians 11:3-15. All ministry should be open to women provided -
  - (i) the peace of the church is not disturbed through failure to conform to church or social customs; and
  - (ii) the women meet the cultural expectations which indicate their authority to minister.
  - (b) Today's church is creating a dichotomy between itself and society over what role, and work, is open to women. It allows women to exercise roles of leadership (over men) in secular society but not in the church. The church however is part of its society and culture and should allow women the full expression of their gifts up to the level acceptable to its society. For us this means full and equal opportunity.
4. (a) Genesis 1 and 2 do not teach the headship of men over women as a principle of the order of creation. To interpret Genesis 2 as meaning man is head over woman makes it contradict Genesis 1 where their equality is taught.
  - (i) Genesis 1:28 men and women together (in dual modality) and to an equal extent are made in the image of God. Both share in the charge to rule and subdue the earth.
  - (ii) Genesis 2:23 subordination and submission for the woman are not implied, rather completeness for the man and equality, "yezer", "helper" is used of God in his relationship to Israel.

- (iii) Genesis 1:18-23 the naming formula is not applied to the woman so no headship is implied.
  - (iv) Genesis 2 if the order of creation (man's creation prior to woman's) has any significance it implies that woman is the climax of creation, i.e. it implies her superiority to man not her inferiority.
- (b) Headship and subordination come about as a result of the Fall (Genesis 3). Even here it is a descriptive not prescriptive statement. It is removed in the new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17).
- 5. (a) "Head" as used of man in relation to woman means "source" or "origin" just as Christ is the "origin" of the Church.
- (b) In the Bible the heart and not the head is the place of decision-making so "head" is not used to express authority.
- (c) Ephesians 5:21. Husbands are included in the command to "submit to one another" i.e. husbands are to submit to their wives. This confirms that man as head cannot mean that he has an authority role.
- 6. (a) Galatians 3:28. There is no distinction to be made between men and women. In Christ they enjoy complete equality.
- (b) Galatians 3:28. The new order in the new creation established by Christ "breaks through" even the creation order of headship/subordination set out in Genesis 2.
- (c) Galatians 3:28. Three dominant/submissive relationships of the first century are nullified in Christ.
- (d) Galatians 3:28 cannot be limited to the spiritual sphere for then the gospel is emasculated and its social dimension denied. Denial of the social implications of this verse was used to keep slaves in their bondage in past centuries.
- 7. Jesus treated women as equal to men. He never suggested or taught their subordination. His citation of Genesis 2:24, 25 in Matthew 19:5 implies the equal and complementary nature of the male/female relationship.
- 8. (a) Paul's teaching in I Corinthians 14:34, Colossians 3:18, I Timothy 2:11, Titus 2:5 on "submission" is culturally determined. Peter also teaches in I Peter 2:13, 14, 18; 3:1,7 that Christians ought to submit to the cultural expectations of their society. Therefore while women in Christ are equal with men, where they are still part of a culture that requires submission they ought to conform. However, women's subordination is not part of our culture.
- (b) I Corinthians 14:34 and I Timothy 2:11 apply to specific situations and are not meant to be universalised since then they would conflict with the general teaching of Scripture on women's equality and certain specific verses, e.g. I Corinthians 11:5.
  - (i) I Corinthians 14:34 applies to disruption of worship due to the women's ignorance, c.f. I Corinthians 14:33, 40.
  - (ii) I Timothy 2:11 applies to false teaching arising from the women's spiritual immaturity. This interpretation of the verse is confirmed by its context within a section of five passages dealing with false teaching. The reference to Eve's deception also supports this. Eve should not have taught Adam as she was ignorant while I Corinthians 15:21, 22 blames Adam for the sin. Teaching by the ignorant is condemned not teaching by women per se. "*Authentein*" refers to vulgar or despotic exercise of authority, not its legitimate use.
- 9. (a) Paul accepted women in positions of ministry and leadership.
  - (i) Junia (Romans 16:7) was an apostle.
  - (ii) Priscilla (Romans 16:3). Her name is often placed before her husband's. She was free to instruct Apollos as Aquila (Acts 18:26).
  - (iii) Phoebe (Romans 16:1, 2) was a *diakonos*, c.f. I Timothy 3:11 and also a *prostatis* or "guide, leader, one who cares" implying a ruling function.
- (b) Women in the Old Testament acted as leaders: Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Deborah (Judges 4:4), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14).
- 10. (a) The nature of God transcends sexual distinctions therefore women are as equally qualified to represent God to a congregation as men.
- (b) The use of masculine language to describe God is essentially personal not sexual, analogical not literal. Paul in teaching women's subordination was mistaken and wrong.

**Arguments Against Ordination of Women to the Priesthood**

1. (a) Efforts toward the ordination of women to the priesthood come from developments in society especially women's liberation movements rather than from biblical considerations.
  - (b) The advocates of women's ordination follow society's trends in
    - (i) accepting its definition of "freedom" as "lack of restraint" not "obedience to God's will".
    - (ii) making "equality" synonymous with "interchangeability".
    - (iii) seeing all distinction as somehow immoral.
    - (iv) adopting the modern cult of the personality, which says submission is degrading and a denial of one's right to a "full" life.
  - (c) Hierarchy, obedience, headship and submission while unpopular in our culture are taught in both Old and New Testaments.
2. (a) The order between the sexes (male headship and female subordination) was established at creation and is taught in Genesis 2.
    - (i) Woman was created from and for man.
    - (ii) Man was created first.
    - (iii) The man named the woman.
  - (b) Headship of men, subordination of women is a divinely inspired principle not open to negotiation.
  - (c) Genesis 2 deals with the headship of a husband over his wife but the principle extends to the relationship between all men and women.
  - (d) That the principle of headship is taught in Genesis 2 is confirmed by Paul's interpretation of the passage (I Timothy 2:13, 14, I Corinthians 11:8, 9; 14:34). The Fall came about as a result of reversing the headship role.
  - (e) Genesis 3:16 does not give the basis of the headship principle. It shows how a previous relationship (Genesis 2) is affected by sin, i.e. how headship is abused.
  - (f) Ordination of women to the priesthood, i.e. to positions of leadership in the church is ruled out by the principle of headship.
3. (a) From the very nature of ordination, the ordained minister is Christ's representative to the congregation. He occupies a position of spiritual authority which is open only to men.
  - (b) I Corinthians 11:7: Women do not bear the image of God to the same extent as men so cannot represent God to his people. They cannot stand "in the place of God" as the ordained minister.
  - (c) Masculine pronouns are used to describe God in Scripture implying God is not womanly and so a woman as his representative is inappropriate.
4. Women act as an erotic stimulus to men whereas men do not so greatly affect women. Women taking the leadership role in public worship would be a distraction.
5. (a) Women did act as leaders in the Old Testament but were never part of the priesthood.
  - (b) The twelve apostles who were the leaders of the early church were all male. This pattern of male leadership is a norm for the church of all ages.
  - (c) While Paul fully accepted women as Christians and recognised their various ministries, their role was never one of leadership in the church. There is no record of female elders in the New Testament.
  - (d) Phoebe's description as *diakonos* more probably means "servant" than "deacon" in the technical sense since in I Timothy 3:11 "diakonos" is not used of the women. In any case a deacon's role was one of serving not leadership and ruling.
  - (e) "*Prostatis*" used of Phoebe probably means "helper" following classical usage. The masculine "*prostates*" does mean "leader" but there is no reason to presume the feminine form of the word has the same meaning.
6. (a) Paul's teaching in I Corinthians 11:3-15; 14:34, I Timothy 2:11-14 seeks to preserve the distinction between men and women expressed in male headship and female subordination and is directed specifically against attempts to deny it.
  - (b) In considering Paul's teaching in these passages there are four possibilities:
    - (i) Paul is wrong - a denial of the authority and inspiration of Scripture.
    - (ii) The teaching is restricted to first century culture -ruled out by appeal to the order established by God at creation prior to the Fall.

- (iii) The teaching is restricted to unique situations in the churches addressed - ruled out as in (ii) above and by the appeal to universality I Corinthians 11:16; 14:36-38.
  - (iv) The teaching involves a universal and permanent prohibition which does not allow women to hold positions of leadership in the church.
- (c) Headship is not restricted to the idea of "origin" but concerns a relationship of authority/submission. This must be the meaning since the term is also used of Christ's relationship to God.
- (d) The analogy of Christ's relationship to God shows that what is involved is the voluntary submission of an equal not an inferior.
- (e) I Timothy 2:11:
  - (i) forbids women teaching men in the church and therefore bars them from the elder's role, hence from ordination, and
  - (ii) "*Authentein*" refers to any exercise of authority by women over men, not necessarily with a wrong connotation.
- (f) I Corinthians 14:34: women should in general be silent in church. Prayer and prophecy being the only exceptions (I Corinthians 11:5).
- 7. (a) Maleness and femaleness are to be reflected in the matter of leadership in marriage and in the church.
- (b) The roles in marriage are based solely in sex difference not on gifts and abilities.
- (c) The same features of relationship occur in marriage and church and are expressed using the same terminology based on Genesis 2.
- 8. (a) Galatians 3:28 applies only to the sphere of salvation, to the baptismal order not the temporal order of church and home.
- (b) The relationships listed in Galatians 3:28 are not parallel. Each has a different basis, e.g. slavery is not instituted by God. Ordination of women and the emancipation of slaves are not concerned with the same issue.
- (c) If Galatians 3:28 is taken to overrule the teaching on subordination of women and slaves in Ephesians 5:22, Colossians 3:18 then the parent/child relationship can also be ignored as it is set out in Ephesians 6:1.
- 9. (a) A person is called of God to the ministerial office but a "felt" call needs to be judged by the church against scripture and according to gifts. Women would never receive such a call as it would be contradictory for God to call a woman to fulfil a husband's role or a role forbidden to women in the Bible.
- (b) Women should exercise their gifts within the bounds set by scripture, e.g. women with a teaching gift should exercise it in the appropriate sphere, teaching women (Titus 2:3-5).
- (c) Women can be involved in all aspects of ministry that do not involve leadership offices or functions.