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Calcutta House  
Old Castle Street  
London E1 7NT

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## THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN TO THE PRIESTHOOD

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It has been said by a bishop, and by a bishop speaking in Convocation, that there is one principle and one principle only that is relevant to the ministry of women in the Church. The principle to which Dr. Swayne referred was that which St. Paul put forward in the third chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians: "There is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."

It seems to the advocates of the ordination of women that the full realization of what is implicit in that principle carries with it a realization that the ordination of women is in accordance with the will of Christ. Would that discussion could end at this point! But it is obvious that to leave the question here is impossible. For nearly two thousand years the church has failed to interpret St. Paul's principle in this sense, and the grounds for the failure need to be examined. They need to be examined—in an article dealing with principles—primarily from a metaphysical and not from an historical point of view. History, psychology, expediency, are necessarily, in this article, secondary considerations.

It has been maintained by opponents to the ordination of women that St. Paul's principle applies only in the spiritual realm, and that since the church is a human organization functioning on a material plane the interpretation given to the principle by Dr. Swayne and others is not legitimate. But

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under what circumstances would the principle ever apply were this contention valid? Was St. Paul addressing disembodied spirits functioning in an ethereal realm unbounded by human limitations, or was he addressing men and women whose flesh and blood was as human as our own? He was indubitably addressing men and women functioning in a physical world and in a visible Church, as we are. He was, furthermore, addressing those men and women with a definite purpose in view, and that purpose one concerned with the religious status of people whose physical as well as whose social and spiritual attributes were in question. The epistle was written in the heat of the controversy over circumcision. Under the law the uncircumcised slave and the uncircumcisable woman were alike despicable. In Christ Jesus both were to be one with the Jewish man. Both were to be baptized and admitted to the duties, responsibilities, and the privileges of church membership. The old differences were to be swept away. "Before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed." "Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." That St. Paul could formulate this fundamental principle as he did has given him the position which he holds as the greatest of all Christian leaders; it would be impossible to exaggerate the importance of his achievement.

Why, then, it may be argued, did St. Paul himself not apply the principle as Dr. Swayne would apply it? If he who formulated the principle did not so apply it how can his followers?

The answer to this is twofold: considerations of principle must in passing lead us into history and into psychology. We must refer to the difference between social conditions in, for instance, Corinth in St. Paul's day and social conditions in a world which nineteen centuries of Christianity have, in a

measure, civilized; and we must refer to the psychology of St. Paul: we must attempt a psychological analysis of St. Paul's great mind.

It was a great mind; a tremendous mind; but it was essentially a mind darkened by shadows as deep as the illuminations which enlightened it were brilliant. St. Paul more than any other great Christian leader perceived the truth in flashes. He had amazing insight into God's purposes and amazing failures as well as amazing insight. He was suffered by God to persecute the early Church and to look on unprotesting at the martyrdom of its saints. He tended to see one thing at a time and that with such overwhelming vehemence of conviction that for the time being he saw nothing else. He had this great flash of insight: he recognized the principle and he formulated it; and then, seeing only one of its three implications, he closed the valves of his attention to the other two, and threw himself heart and soul into working for that and that alone. He was supremely the apostle to the Gentiles; he was the greatest of all Christian missionaries: but he sent Onesimus back to Philemon, and he told the women to keep silence in the churches. How could it have been otherwise? No one man could have broken the threefold shackles in a single time-time. It took the Church many centuries to see the application of the principle that "in Christ Jesus there is neither bond nor free," and it is taking her even longer to see the application of the principle that "in Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female." The application of the first has involved the recognition within the state that no human being can own another; the application of the second will involve the recognition within the Church that sex is no hindrance to a woman's dispensing the word and holy sacraments of God. It will never, obviously, mean that sex will be abolished, as among Christian people slavery has been abolished. Women priests will still be women: the point is that oneness in Christ means a right relation of his members to one another, and the removal of unchristian restrictions upon Christian activities. In the case of slavery bonds must be

done away with, in the case of women the old Jewish inhibitions must be outgrown. Not even twenty centuries of Christianity have been enough wholly to break down these inhibitions. Even now the attempt is often made to support them by squeezing a principle out of a mere fact of history. "There was no woman among the apostles . . ." "There was no Gentile among the apostles." How easily if St. Paul had been other than what he was might that statement of an historical fact have been twisted into the would-be enunciation of a principle!

The time has come to turn from St. Paul's formulation of Christian principle back to Christ himself. For a Christian in search of principle there is one supreme method, and one only: to look at Christ. Christ is revealed throughout the gospel records as making no differentiation between the sexes. He did not talk down to women; he did not shrink from them; he did not ignore them. It was through a woman that he gave the teaching: "God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." It was to a woman that he first appeared after the resurrection. He let Mary learn from him, sitting at his feet as a disciple; he let Martha minister to him, and the woman who was a sinner anoint him for his burial. He let the woman with the issue of blood touch him and find healing of her plague. There is nothing in the gospels to suggest that he would be displeased at the sight of a woman kneeling to receive the grace of ordination at the bishop's hands to-day. "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not." Would he, at this juncture, be any less displeased at those who through loyalty to the principles of their adolescence—forty years, some have been known to boast, and not a tittle modified—would ban a woman's service?

The analogy must not, of course, be pressed in detail. Those who forbid a woman's ministry do not forbid her approach to Christ. The point is that there are some women who when they have come must needs fetch others. For some women as for some men the call is a call both to come

and to bring. "Tell it out among the heathen . . ." "Go into all the world . . ." "The fields are white unto harvest . . ." "Who will go for me? . . ." Women as well as men hear these commands and need to fulfil them. Women as well as men hear the Church's call to care for—to "cure"—the souls whom Christ has saved. There are women—the bishops know that there are women—who believe that God is calling them to serve the Church as ministers. What principle is there that prevents them? What is there in a woman's sex, *qua* sex, that hinders her to be ordained? And if it be objected that to be an evangelist a woman needs no ordination, why, it may be asked, is the man who believes himself called to be a fisher of men bidden to seek ordination? What need of priests at all? To administer the sacraments, it will be answered. Yes, but not, surely, as an act apart from pastoral activity. To divorce the two and to admit women to one and not to the other would inevitably tend to give a colouring of magic to the isolated sacramentalism, and of taboo to the sex restriction. What is there in the administration of the sacraments that is unsuitable to women?

Attempts are sometimes made to get out of the fact that the objections raised against the ordination of women are necessarily objections arising out of a preoccupation with sex. There is nothing, let it be remembered, that differentiates women from men except sex. Those who believe that God is calling women to the Church's ministry do not believe that he is calling them as women but that he is calling them as human beings. They are not primarily interested in sex. They believe that God uses his human creatures, be they men or be they women, and that he would use them more freely but for his creatures' blundering inhibitions. But anyone who argues against women being ordained is either preoccupied with sex or prepared to let the Church be dominated by those preoccupied with sex. To say this is not, of course, to impute to the opponents of the ministry of women the kind of sex-obsession that one attributes to the prurient-minded: that would be outrageous. The point which is being made

is that the advocates of women's ordination are emphasizing women's humanity; their opponents are emphasizing their sex. The advocates are by no means necessarily feminists; their opponents are necessarily anti-feminists. The latter have no argument on their side except argument which is based ultimately on sex. If they say: "Women should not be ordained because Christ did not choose a woman to be an apostle," they are saying: "Christ did not choose a woman to be an apostle because he rightly held that there is something in womanhood that makes a woman unfit to be an apostle." If they say: "Women should not be ordained because man is the natural ruler," they are saying: "Man rules over woman because there is something in woman that makes her suited to be dominated by man." If they say: "Women ought not to be ordained because one part of the Church cannot act without another part," they are saying: "The objections of the part which does not ordain women because they are women deserve consideration." In other words, they are saying that someone's preoccupation with sex deserves consideration before someone else's sense of being called by God to serve the Church. There is a real case for asserting that all arguments even those which would usually be regarded as frankly arguments of expediency are as a matter of fact arguments in which a principle is involved: a deleterious principle which puts sex before service, and the maleness of a man before the humanity of a woman.

To contend, in this connection, that differentiation of function does not imply inferiority of status is not helpful. There is little to choose between "inferiority" and "difference not implying inferiority" when both alike are bars to carrying out a line of action which seems urgent to the person who is debarred. The question at issue is not whether the admitted difference implies inferiority, but whether it is relevant. We should all be outraged at the suggestion that only people with brown eyes ought to be priests, and we should be outraged even if the possession of blue eyes was regarded as carrying with it no inferiority. The supporters

of women in the ministry believe that the question of sex is as irrelevant to ordination as is the possession of blue eyes. This is not, of course, to say that sex differences go no deeper than the colour of the eyes, or even to deny that motherhood might in individual cases be very much harder to reconcile with the priestly vocation than fatherhood; it is to assert that sex *qua* sex is not relevant to ordination. It is probable that there would always be some things which a man priest could do better than a woman priest and some things which a woman priest could do better than a man priest, but none the less priesthood is a human and not a sexual function. In the greater proportion of the priestly office it would be immaterial whether a priest were a woman or a man.

That is why, or rather partly why, the advocates of the ordination of women to the historic orders of the Church's ministry are so much disturbed at the suggestion of the establishment of a "parallel order" of ministry for women. They do not want to stress the sex of the minister. To do so appears to them extremely undesirable.

Apart from the question of over-emphasizing sex, the suggestion seems to them one that would, when properly understood, please nobody. It is not a case of being offered half a loaf, but of asking for bread and being offered a cardboard imitation. They hope not for a newly invented and sex-labelled substitute but for the historic and apostolic order itself. The establishment of a parallel order for women would either involve a breach with tradition in comparison with which the ordination of women to the historic orders would be slight, or it would deny to women the privilege of administering the sacraments, in which case it would provide but a shadow of what is sought. If a woman-elder were suffered to administer the sacraments without being a priest, church-order would be revolutionized; if she were to be provided with some newly-invented function "parallel" to the administration of the sacraments, her sense of vocation, if not the sacraments themselves, would be mocked.

It is plain from what has been said that to the wholehearted advocate of women's ordination the suggestion of a parallel order for women is irrational. It is a fantastic suggestion arising out of a natural but an unsatisfactory desire for compromise. There is no place for fantasy in a right treatment of this difficult question; a single eye is needed and the renunciation of fantasy's attempts to have a thing both ways. One of the principles relevant to the question of the ministry of women is the principle that the true servant of Christ is a rational being. Every time Christians go to Holy Communion they offer themselves to God as "a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice." It must be realized that to be holy men must be reasonable, that is, rational. To say: "I can see no reason why there should not be women clergy, but I don't like the idea," is not rational. To say: "The eternal beauty of the Incarnate Deity would be lost for me if women were to be ordained," is not rational; it is fantastic. But the fantasy which produced the saying is the fantasy of an intelligent and cultured woman doctor who has recently attempted to formulate the deep-rooted prejudices which she has mistaken for reasons. St. Paul told us that when he was a child he spake as a child, he thought as a child, he understood as a child, but that when he became a man he put away childish things. It is doubtful whether he did, completely, and it is more than doubtful whether the people who have "a feeling in their bones" or "an instinctive dislike of the idea" have put away childish things. On the contrary they seem to have maintained a characteristically infantile and irrational way of looking at womanhood: an attitude which they would be so much ashamed of knowing for what it is that they have to wrap it up in all kinds of sophistications in order to contemplate it without distress of mind. There seems little doubt but that some people who have matured physically but not

Who said this?

mentally still think of a woman not as a human being as complete in her way as a man in his, but as a maimed man, an unfinished man, in some way a man *manqué*: either as that or as an unclean person, incapacitated at times through her very constitution from serving at the altar and from administering the holy elements.

Among the readers of this article some will be indignant at this suggestion. It is not put forward without evidence. A serious-minded churchwoman asked a priest some years ago for an answer to the question: "May I serve at the altar?" The answer which he gave was this: "Yes, if you will undertake to stay away at certain times in the month." The attitude is distressing; it is unchristian. Unfortunately it is not uncommon.

The suggestion is not being made that all men who object to women priests object on these lines. Some men may unconsciously share the attitude indicated by the answer quoted above; others almost certainly do not share it. It seems plain that there are men who feel genuinely distressed, hurt, saddened, when they meet a woman who wants to do anything creative other than bear children and bring them up. Such men have, probably, much of the woman in them—there is more man in woman and more woman in man than people sometimes realize—and they have sublimated in their creative work their own desire to bear children. Whether they are priests, artists, engineers, or what not, it hurts them to see a woman throwing away, as it appears to them, the substance for the shadow. They find themselves in the position of a blind boy whose sister snatches wantonly at the Braille books that he has schooled himself to master. He is not angry, but he is wounded; he does not understand.

It is not only men who oppose the ordination of women;

there are women who feel even more strongly than men about the question. Such women may be of a conspicuously feminine type and may have reacted from an infantile desire to be a boy into an exaggerated hostility to "mannish" women. It would be possible to give many illustrations of opposition based on other forms of infantile fixation; but it must suffice to assert that all such manifestations of the irrational in full-grown men and women are clearly contrary to Christian principle. A reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice: let Christians offer that to their heavenly Father and not an irrational and unholy conglomeration of fantasies. The fantasy-life is not the Christian life. Christ is the way and the *truth*. It is a Christian principle that men should learn to see things not foreshortened as the infant sees them or distorted as the dreamer sees them, but as they are. When Christ told his hearers that they could not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven except they became as little children, he meant that they must learn to be humble and single-minded, not that they must retain in their maturity infantile modes of thought which when retained by people physically mature closely resemble the neuroses of the mentally unbalanced.

It will be well in conclusion to formulate what seem to the writer of this article the most important principles relevant to the question of the ordination of women. They are these:—

1. Christ, in taking upon him the flesh of his mother, manifested to men the holiness of womanhood as well as of manhood.
2. Christ by his growth in wisdom as in stature taught Christian people to put away childish things and learn to think maturely.
3. Christ alike in his life on earth and in his ascended life in heaven has called to his service women as well as men.

4. Christ bade his followers look for the coming of the Holy Spirit and set no time-limit to the Spirit's working.

5. The Church as Christ's visible body here on earth must work out on a human plane the principles which Christ has given her.

6. No part of the Church can perfectly serve Christ if it rejects principles which it sees to be implicit in his teaching.

7. If one part of the Church sees before another what is implicit in his teaching, it is the duty of that part to put the principle in action and not to wait for a lead.

8. The Church of England is a part of the Church Catholic, but a part which is sufficiently a unit to be capable of independent action involving fresh interpretation of the holy scriptures and a breach with catholic tradition.<sup>1</sup>

If to these principles be added the fundamental principle put forward by St. Paul, and if the fact be faced that a woman differs from a man in nothing but her womanhood, it is difficult to believe that the Archbishops' Commission now engaged in investigating the question will when it reports find itself able to enunciate any principle, theological or otherwise, of such a nature as to rule out for ever the ordination of women to the historic orders of the Church's ministry.

And yet though reason is on the side of the innovators, and though reason—rationality—is essential to the Christian, yet it will not be reason that will bring about the change. It will

<sup>1</sup> If it could be established that the ordination of women involved not only a fresh interpretation of holy scripture but the controverting of holy scripture, and not only a breach with catholic tradition but also a breach with catholic principle, then the Church of England would not be at liberty to ordain women while continuing to claim the right to call itself a part of the catholic church.

not be reason, not abstract reason, not ratiocination, but the will to serve. It is that which will ultimately triumph and prevail. Archbishops, bishops, archbishops' commissions, the general run of the clergy, the general run of the laity, none of them are exclusively rational, supremely rational. The change will come and it will only come when they have seen the will to serve, balked and frustrated though it be, struggling through, breaking through, in spite of opposition, hostility, indifference.

The Church has need of ministers; there are women whose need it is to serve the Church, not primarily as a form of sublimation for their frustrated motherhood, not as a means of self-expression, not as a demonstration; but simply from a love of God, from a need in the deepest fountains of their being to share what they have received, to pass on what they have been given, to bring Christ's little ones to Christ. The need is not a trivial one: may those who do not share it come to respect it; and if that cannot be let them at least attempt to meet the need with arguments that are so far as possible worthy of its seriousness.

URSULA ROBERTS.