

To Archdeacon Wm C Kee
1963

AR/2116

Romany Cottage,
Moggerhanger,
Bedford.
April 5th, 1963.

Dear Sir,

I am sending various press-cuttings and articles dating back to the early years of the movement for the ordination of women to the ministry.

I enclose stamps for return postage, as some of them should be of interest when the history of the movement comes to be written.

It may be that the period they come from -- 1914 - 1936 -- is too remote to be of any but historical interest. Was not the situation transformed when Bishop Ronald Hall ordained Tim Oi Li? That was during the second World War. Since then the three Swedish women and the Norwegian woman have been priested. There are now five women priests in the Catholic Church. The issue is no longer an hypothetical issue.

Possibly some members of the 1963 Committee will dispute this. To the question 'Is Tim Oi Li a priest as certainly as the ordained members of the Committee are priests?' they may say 'No'. They may refer us to the Fathers, to St. Thomas Aquinas, to Phillimore, or to the Cowley Father, now deceased, quoted by Mrs. Blomfield in her little book "Wonderful Order". For them the invocation of the Holy Ghost to bestow his Charismata on Tim Oi Li was either a meaningless occurrence (like the 'Confirmation' by a short-sighted bishop of a round smooth pew-knob) or a blasphemous travesty. If a woman is by virtue of her womanhood incapable of receiving the charismata, there is no more to be said. It is not to such members -- if any -- that the rest of this letter is addressed.

Women are "absolutely incapable of ordination. . . ordination of such persons is wholly inoperative." Phillimore: Ecclesiastical Law. 1895. Vol. 1. p.93.

"A woman can no more celebrate the Holy Communion than a man can bear a child."

It is addressed, rather, to those, if any, who take the line: "Yes, I suppose the Chinese, Swedish, and Norwegian women are priests. What is done cannot be undone. But the bishops who ordained them were ill-advised. The less said about them the better. We do not want women priests in the Church of England. The decision to ordain women would hinder re-union with Rome, would alienate the extreme Anglo-Catholics, would upset the Mothers' Union, would stir up undesirable controversy in conventional congregations, would. . . ." and so on and so on.

I venture to plead with any who may reason in this way that they should consider very seriously the consequences of the inhibition of Tim Oi Li from carrying out the priestly functions to which she was ordained. Hands outstretched to receive the Host were sent empty away and sins which cried out for absolution went unabsolved; Chinese Christians who had supposed that loyalty to Christ had set women's souls free to serve God as certainly as it had set their crippled feet free to walk and run found themselves bewildered. This is not rhetoric but plain fact, for in the district whic Tim Oi Li served no men priests were available.

Is the situation in the Church of England utterly dissimilar? There is a difference, of course, but no member of the 1963 Committee is likely to maintain that the supply of clergy is adequate to the need.

So long as would-be ordinands are being refused the testing they plead for the responsibility of those who reject them on grounds of expediency is surely extremely grave. We are encouraged to pray, "O Almighty God, incline the hearts of many to offer themselves for the sacred ministry of Thy Church." Would any member of the 1963 Committee venture to add, "But make sure that that all the hearts Thou dost incline are men's."

Yours faithfully,

('SusanMiles')

(Mrs. W.C.Roberts)