

Pamphlet

28: 396-5

SOCIETY FOR  
THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN  
(INTERDENOMINATIONAL)

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January, 1930.

To THE LORD ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY.

**“Women and the Priesthood.”**

YOUR GRACE,

The above Society, in view of the fact that more than half its members are Anglicans, begs to submit, on behalf of the Anglican members of the Society and through the Anglican members of the Committee, the accompanying Memorandum with the respectful request that it may be considered at the forthcoming Lambeth Conference.

As stated in the Memorandum we desire to emphasise that our urgency in this matter is due to our belief

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that a question of principle is involved, and therefore we can do no other than press for its recognition and acceptance.

We are, your Grace,

Your most respectful servants,

A. MAUDE ROYDEN,  
CHARLES E. RAVEN,  
LUCY HAMMICK,  
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JOYCE POLLARD,  
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## Memorandum.

### WOMEN AND THE PRIESTHOOD.

The Encyclical letter signed by His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury on behalf of the Lambeth Conference in 1920, contains the following paragraph:—  
“ . . . everywhere the attempt must be made to make room for the Spirit to work, according to the wisdom which He will give, so that the fellowship of the Ministry may be strengthened by the co-operation of women and the fellowship of the Church be enriched by their spiritual gifts.” Resolutions 46-54 of the Lambeth Conference 1920 showed how the gifts of women might be exercised, but although these resolutions were at the time a great advance, they cannot be said to be really abreast of conditions in the world to-day.

We venture to urge, therefore, that the time has now come for a further “ attempt to make room for the Spirit to work.” The words quoted go at once to the heart of the question as we conceive it, and we would emphasise that our reason for pressing for the full ordination of women is entirely a matter of principle. We desire to see the acceptance of spiritual values and the removal of artificial barriers to the operation of the spirit. We are convinced that the restrictions placed upon women in the Church have a far-reaching effect, and indeed we go so far as to affirm that the subordination of women in the Church hampers the work of the most spiritually minded men in the ministry to-day. If the equal spiritual status of men and women were truly recognised, it would follow that the services of women would be accepted in all the

offices of the Church under the same conditions as are those of men. The result, we believe, would be a purified atmosphere, a more wholesome relationship between the sexes and a truer fellowship.

It is commonly argued that, while the spiritual equality of women with men is in fact recognised, yet men and women are complementary to each other and there is a difference of function which does not imply the inferiority of women in regard to men. It is true that men and women are complementary to each other, but this admission implies the necessity for women, *as well as men*, in the priesthood. The "difference of function" is surely just this—that men and women have different ways of looking at life, and to some extent different experiences, and both women and men have therefore a definite contribution to make within the priesthood. The Church cannot offer to Christ the fullest service if one side of humanity is restricted, or if there is any failure to make use of all the spiritual power available.

The "difference of function" is already seen within the priesthood at the present day, where one priest is fitted for one particular kind of work, one for another. One, for instance, is attached to the staff of a cathedral, another works in an industrial area. So that a woman priest might be particularly needed for some special work, a man priest for another. One aspect of this question will be dealt with in a later section of this memorandum.

It is sometimes urged that, unless women seeking ordination were prepared at the same time to make a vow of celibacy, marriage and motherhood might make claims on their time, health and strength which would conflict with their duties as priests. We reply that we

are deeply convinced that the spiritual experience of motherhood—experience deeper and more vital than a merely physical function or a passing physical disability—can be one so enriching both to the woman herself and through her to those to whom she ministers, and to the whole Church, as far to outweigh any temporary disadvantage. It is of course true that some women, like some men, are called to a celibate life, and that through this they also make a special contribution to the spiritual life of the Church; but as this fact has been recognised by the Church from the very beginning, it is not necessary for us to labour it here.

We maintain that it is essential that the requirement for service in the Church should be fitness for the work and should not be dependent upon sex.

We submit that it cannot be contended that a woman on account of her womanhood is unfit for the office of priest. A priest is one who has a great love of individual souls, a sense of their value, a desire to seek and save those who are lost. God has given that gift and vocation to many women as He has also given to women messages for their generation and for humanity.

It is true that if the vocation is real, ecclesiastical order, though it may hamper, cannot prevent its fulfilment; but if the Church fails to recognise vocation when it is found in women, there is a definite loss in service to the Church.

The failure of the Church to recognise the equal spiritual status of women with men is resulting in the alienation of the more educated women and of the younger women from the Church. Many women turn away from institutional religion because they feel it is to a great extent divorced from life. This is particularly the case with young women. They know that the State

now recognises their equality with men and gives them equal opportunities of service, but they find this is not the case in the ordered life of the Church. This gulf between the life of the modern State and the life of the Church, fixed at a point which vitally affects them, tends to make the religion of the Church appear unreal to women, and to young women especially.

There are many opportunities for service open to women in international, political, social and other spheres, in which their gifts are welcomed; and many women who greatly desire to serve Christ within the ordered ministry of the Church, feel that they ought not to waste their time knocking at closed doors but must take their gifts elsewhere.

The barrier referred to hinders the inspiration which the Church might give. It is not easy to find inspiration in a Church which, instead of leading, lags behind the State in applying the principle of equality, a principle about which modern women feel most deeply and which they are convinced is in accordance with the mind of Christ.

While many women are finding their loyalty strained, some at least have felt obliged reluctantly to withdraw from communion with the Church for no other reason than the insult to womanhood offered by the continual refusal of the Church to recognise their equal spiritual status with men. It is impossible, they feel, to join in the sacred Service of Fellowship when real fellowship is in fact denied to them and when at every Communion Service they are reminded that no woman, however spiritually minded, is allowed to consecrate and distribute the Sacred Elements. It is not our purpose to justify—or to condemn—this attitude, but we feel bound to point out that it exists and that it arises from

no sense of merely personal grievance but from a deep conviction that the exclusion of women from the priesthood and thereby from celebration of Holy Communion is contrary to the mind of Christ.

These women would most thankfully return to the Church, which is in fact their spiritual home, were it made possible for them to do so.

A further strain is imposed on the loyalty of women by the proposal now before the Lambeth Conference that a new Order, known as Voluntary Clergy, should be set up, and by another suggestion, which is being made in some quarters, that laymen should be allowed to assist in distributing the Sacred Elements in Holy Communion. In view of the limited powers given to Deaconesses who (as was admitted at the last Lambeth Conference) are in fact in Orders, this suggestion in regard to laymen is causing some of the most loyal women seriously to consider whether (in the event of the suggestion being adopted) they should not give up the work they are now doing in the Church. The proposal in regard to Voluntary Clergy also fills women with bewilderment. While realising that the Sacrament of the Holy Communion is not affected by the worthiness or unworthiness of the priest, they ask themselves whether there is not an element of unreality in setting apart men solely for this work, when there are women with a real vocation to the priesthood whom the Church refuses to ordain.

This differentiation between men and women, based not on the capabilities of women but on their womanhood, is deeply wounding to women, and there is a tendency for them to drift away from the Church, which tendency, we greatly fear, is likely to become more marked in the immediate future.

We realise the value of Catholic tradition, but we

observe that tradition originated from experience under certain conditions. Both experience and conditions change and act and react upon each other, so that changing traditions are inevitable. Tradition has in fact been departed from in the case of the celibacy of the clergy. The higher education and the needs of women have necessitated the modification of traditions both in Church and State, and there are now women in the Councils of the Church, women in Parliament, women doctors, magistrates, architects, factory inspectors, etc., all resulting from changed conditions which have necessitated the breaking away from tradition.

Although the Church is slow to move there has been some progress within it. Women speak at Church Congresses, etc., are invited to instruct candidates for ordination, and address gatherings of clergy on various questions, including theology, pastoralia, social morality and religious education. Women have preached to mixed congregations in churches, including cathedrals, and have been acknowledged to be qualified for the work. But until the Church admits women to all the offices of the Church on the same terms as men, there will continue to be hesitation and timidity on the one hand, and lack of order on the other.

We now turn to the needs of women themselves. Women are increasingly inclined to wish for the ministry of their own sex in case of conscience, just as they are inclined to seek the services of women doctors when their needs are physical. In some cases so great is the need in this direction that women are at the present moment seeking the ministry of women in sacramental confession and are experiencing the reality of the absolution conferred. The fact that the absolution is not conveyed in the Church's formula matters little

to some of them; they have the knowledge of the real and spiritual priesthood of the woman whose help they seek. No one with any real sense of vocation could refuse such a call. So long as the Church refuses to authorise women to whom the call comes, such women are bound to choose obedience to God rather than obedience to man. Indeed in this, and in the courage they show, their priesthood is confirmed. Those who have the passion and love for individual souls are unable to refuse to minister to all who are in need. But this unauthorised ministry is inadequate to the needs of the situation and from the point of view of order is undesirable though inevitable under present conditions.

The Women's Movement has secured for women freedom, and it has also brought them responsibilities and difficulties hitherto unknown. Is the Church to stand aloof and not offer to women who are trying to follow Christ in the midst of perplexities, problems and temptations the help they need? Often this help cannot be effectively rendered by a man. On the one hand, many women are averse from seeking so intimate a relationship with a man, for reasons which need not be entered into in detail here; on the other hand (although it is argued that the priest is impersonal—in which case the question of sex does not arise and the case against the ordination of women fails), it is seldom possible for a man to understand completely the outlook, emotions and motives of women. A woman priest is more likely to have the sympathetic understanding necessary for a right handling of the situation.

There is the further point that women are often deterred from seeking from a man the help they need because of their knowledge that the unconscious motive

in the case of some women is really sex interest, and they shrink from being associated with this kind of thing.

It is not suggested in the foregoing that women should not seek the advice of men or *vice versa*. A woman may often need the advice a man can give just as a man may desire counsel from a woman.

We are convinced that the challenge of Christianity is incomplete unless it takes account of the statement that "in Christ there is neither male nor female." This is shown in relation to the position of women in the East and among uncivilised peoples, for example in the greater part of Africa. At the Jerusalem Conference in 1928 this point was brought out with convincing clearness by the women delegates. Miss P. S. Tseng, founder and principal of the girls' school at Changsha, said:—

"The Confucian message is not enough for China, because it only touches half of the nation. The Chinese women can only find full life in the message of Christ, who was born of a woman, revealed his Messiahship to a woman, and showed his glorified body after his resurrection to a woman. In Christ there is no distinction between men and women, and He has set the same moral standard for both sexes. Christ has given woman life, soul, and the way to come to God. In Christ the women of China will find their right position, not only as citizens of China, but as citizens of the Christian world."

And Miss Helen Kiduk Kim, of Korea, stated:—

"The secular system of life in Korea, influenced largely by the teachings of Confucius, fully recognises the instrumental value of women in the maintenance of homes and society. But only when the

life and message of Christ were brought to Korea did the women find themselves to have intrinsic values. Christ has shown clearly both in his life and in his teachings that to God one human personality, whether it be man's or woman's, bond or free-man's, is just as valuable as any other. Christian young women, and men as well, of Korea have learned this lesson and are diligently seeking to apply this teaching consistently in their lives."

It is a tragedy that these women and men in China, Japan and elsewhere find that the Church which preaches Christ is opposed to Him in that it maintains the distinction between men and women, and that no woman, however Christlike, is allowed to enter the ministry of the Church or even act as server at the Holy Communion. How can they believe that the Church regards their personalities as sacred in the face of this object lesson on the inferiority of their womanhood? We believe that this divorce between principle and practice restricts the influence of the Church in the mission field as well as at home. Miss Akle, of Syria, said at the Jerusalem Conference in 1928: "Women ought to be free to tell the Church what the Lord has done for her," and added that the growth of the indigenous Church, indeed of the Church everywhere, would always be cramped in so far as women are excluded from its activities.

It was to a woman that Christ said "God is Spirit," and this is our charter. We ask for admission of women to the priesthood because we desire to see the acceptance of spiritual values—the recognition that the only real power in the universe is Spirit. The world has relied in the past on physical force and on material

things on which Christ never relied. He is our Master and we would serve Him, and we ask the Church to give us the help and inspiration we need.

With regard to the effect that any proposals for the admission of women to the priesthood might have on the question of Reunion, we feel bound to urge that, as our claim for the full ministry of women is based on principle, it cannot be set aside in the fear that its acceptance would retard Reunion. We believe that there is no ground for this fear in regard to the Free Churches, as many of them have accepted the principle and have admitted women to the full ministry of their respective Communions. In the case of the Churches where the principle is not conceded, we submit that the only bond of union is the truth, and to attempt to unite on anything but the truth will result in a further disruption. We seek the judgment not of any Church, but of Christ, and in seeking union with Christ we shall find union with each other.