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SUPPLEMENT

TO

"THE COMING MINISTRY," DECEMBER 1935.

THE REPORT OF THE ARCHBISHOPS' COMMISSION ON THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN.

(To be obtained from the Press and Publications Board of the Church Assembly, Church House, Westminster, S.W.1. Price 1s., postage 1½d. or from Miss Pryke, St. Multose, Newcombe Park, Mill Hill, N.W.7.)

After an Extraordinary Meeting of the Executive of the Society for the Ministry of Women, held on December 6th, at which Dr. Royden was present, the following statement was issued to the Press.

On receiving the Report of the Archbishops' Commission on the Ministry of Women, we note certain positive recommendations for the extended use of the ministry of women.

The Commissioners recognise the diaconate for women as making the Deaconess "one of the clergy," and as involving her admission to Holy Orders and her right to the title "Reverend." Her fitness to administer the chalice in Holy Communion is also conceded. Moreover, lay women are to be eligible for all offices open to lay men, and the Commissioners "do not deny that a re-united Church may in the future have the power to contradict its past, and to declare that women can be priests."

We realise that such a Report marks the beginning of the end of the opposition which has been so stubbornly offered to the ordination of women to the priesthood; and as such, we welcome it.

We must, nevertheless, record our profound disappointment at the grudging spirit and fumbling logic with which these concessions are made. The Commission object to the ordination of women to the priesthood, yet admit their inability to base their decision on theological principles. Their decision is in fact governed by expediency and tradition.

The most important contribution to the whole Report is the Note written by the Dean of S. Paul's. We record our deep appreciation of his outspoken support of the principles for which we stand and maintain with him that "the Ministry of the Church is so high and arduous a vocation that the full resources of humanity ought to be available for its fulfilment."

A. MAUDE ROYDEN,

President, The Society for the Ministry of Women.
(Interdenominational).

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CLERGY, BUT NOT PRIESTS.

Although the irrational and, as some think reactionary, refusal by the Commissioners to recognize the diaconate for women as part of the Third Order of the Ministry is much to be regretted, yet the concession that the deaconess might be licensed to administer the Chalice at Holy Communion in cases of special need is viewed by most of the Executive of THE SOCIETY FOR THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN as an advance of very great importance. In spite of the grudging limitations, the general principle has been admitted: women are no longer to be regarded as unfitted by virtue of their sex to enter the Sanctuary or to touch the holy vessels in the administration of the Sacrament. There seems good hope that what is now admitted to be largely a non-rational sex-taboo will die away as Churchpeople become familiarized with a deaconess who is regarded as a fit person to administer the Chalice, who is ordained to Holy Orders by the grace of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands, who is addressed as "Reverend," who ranks among the clergy in the prayers offered in Church, and who attends the Church Assembly "on a clerical basis." If there is admittedly nothing in womanhood which renders a woman in the nature of things unfit to administer the Chalice, it cannot for long be maintained that there is something in womanhood which renders her in the nature of things unfit to celebrate the Eucharist. The sight of her doing the one (even if at first only in girls' schools) will be of striking value in emphasising the irrationality of the limitation. It should, moreover, soon become evident how much greater is the need of help in Administration in churches than in boarding-schools.

The explicit recommendation that lay women should be eligible for all such offices and duties in the Church as are open to laymen would cover not only the office of lay-reader, but also such offices as those of server and cross-bearer. The use of women's services in these capacities should greatly help towards the further breakdown of the taboo.

The opinion of the Commission that it would be open to a reunited Church to declare that women could be priests is of very much greater significance than might appear to those who first turn their thoughts to the difficulties that lie in the way of reunion. That a Commission constituted as this Commission is constituted should be unanimous in holding such a view is indeed remarkable. The mere fact that the opinion has been expressed by such authorities relegates most of the opposition to which we have been accustomed in the past to the same lumberheap as the pronouncement of St. Thomas Aquinas to the effect that women could not be priests because they were incapable of receiving the tonsure.

It is not only by implication that the familiar arguments are demolished. Definitely and deliberately the Commission proceeds to formulate and then to set aside the so-called theological prin-

ciples the existence of which was alleged at the Lambeth Conference of 1930 to constitute an insuperable obstacle to the ordination of women to the priesthood. In future when arguments are brought forward by our opponents we shall no longer find ourselves relying on counter-arguments which we ourselves must formulate, we shall be able to refer to the actual words of those Bishops, Deans, and Canons, who have been appointed by the Archbishops as fit persons to pronounce upon the question.

This will be the case as regards all questions whatsoever of principle. The only arguments with regard to which we shall in future be unable to quote the Commission's Report as our authority will be those concerned with practical considerations and questions of expediency and of tradition. Not even the justifiability of the Church of England advocating a reform while the universal Church is disunited can rightly be described as a question of principle. Clearly the crux of the matter is not 'Can the Church of England make an important decision on her own responsibility?' but 'What are the important decisions which the Church of England is prepared to make?' Those who believe that no important question can be decided without the sanction of Rome have an uncertain place in a Church which has made her own decision on such questions as the infallibility of the Pope and the celibacy of the clergy.

Some of the practical difficulties touched on by the Commission have already been set aside for special consideration by our Society. The publication of the Report should give a new impetus to the Subcommittee appointed "to take any action considered advisable with a view to elucidating the difficulties of married women in the ministry."

The Commission has, however, anticipated our Society in the minuteness of its concern for such arrangements as those for the occupation of the parsonage house and the payment of a substitute's stipend during intervals of withdrawal due to child-bearing and child-rearing. That no Sub-Committee of our Society has as yet been appointed to enquire into these questions is no indication that the difficulties are regarded as insoluble by Christian goodwill combined with commonsense.

These questions of stipend and vicarage seem to be of very much the same character as those which exercised the minds of hesitating Christians in the days when the abolition of slavery seemed for many an enterprise too complicated to be undertaken. Indeed the present attitude of the Commission is in general very similar to that of the bishops and other Church dignitaries who opposed the anti-slavery movement. The maintenance of the slave-trade, it will be remembered, was advocated a hundred years ago on the ground that slavery had been acquiesced in by the Church since the days of the Apostles and that it must, therefore, be the will of God that it should still exist.

It is, then, evident, as has been indicated in the statement

issued to the Press, that the Report, in spite of its very remarkable advance is yet open to serious criticism. It is, indeed, timid, vague, vacillating, and inconsistent. The impression given is of Commissioners admitting reluctantly that their prejudices have no basis either in reason or in Christianity, but still clinging to those prejudices on the plea that since they have been cherished by so many people and for so long they must be regarded as deriving from the Holy Spirit and as revealing the will of God. Surely nothing but Christ Himself, and the principle of oneness in Him transcending all differences of sex, as of race and class, could have had the power even to shake a paganism so deeply rooted in the stubborn subsoil of our humanity? It has been deeply-rooted through many generations, pre-Christian and post-Christian, but at last the soil is crumbling from its roots. How long it will be before it is uprooted and has made way for the free growth of more wholesome grain it is impossible to foretell, but the Note of the Dean of St. Paul's gives us promise of sound harvestry ahead. It would be difficult to overrate the value of what the Dean has done for the Church by his uncompromising logic and his loyalty to Christian principle. It remains for those of us who are convinced that he is right to see that the Report containing his note is not put upon the shelf and left there. Although the constitution of the Commission does not ensure that its findings will be automatically brought before the notice of any Ecclesiastical body yet the importance of the Report is such that it must not be allowed to be forgotten. Not all of us can directly exert influence to ensure that it is discussed in Convocation or the Church Assembly, but every Anglican member of the Society should do what can be done to get a discussion on to the Agenda of his or her Parochial Church Council or Ruri-decanal Conference. There is work ahead, and in plenty, for us all, even if only in talking among our fellows at group meetings in our own houses.

Those who have not already seen Dr. Royden's leaflet " 'Special' Order or Holy Order " should obtain a copy without delay (price $\frac{1}{2}$ d. postage $\frac{1}{2}$ d.) from Miss Pryke, St. Multose, Newcombe Park, Mill Hill, N.W.7. (Hon Sec., Society for the Ministry of Women.)