

## COMMENTARY

### ON THE DECLARATION OF THE SACRED CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH ON THE QUESTION OF THE ADMISSION OF WOMEN TO THE MINISTERIAL PRIESTHOOD

#### Circumstances and origin of the Declaration.

The question of the admission of women to the ministerial priesthood seems to have arisen in a general way about 1958, after the decision by the Swedish Lutheran Church in September of that year to admit women to the pastoral office. This caused a sensation and occasioned numerous commentaries.<sup>1</sup> Even for the communities stemming from the sixteenth-century Reformation it was an innovation: one may recall, for example, how strongly the *Confessio Fidei Scotiae* of 1560 accused the Roman Church of making improper concessions to women in the field of ministry.<sup>2</sup> But the Swedish initiative gradually gained ground among the Reformed Churches, particularly in France, where various National Synods adopted similar decisions.

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In reality, the admission of women to the pastoral office seemed to raise no strictly theological problem, in that these communities had rejected the sacrament of Order at the time of their separation from the Roman Church. But a new and much more serious situation was created when ordinations of women were carried out within communities that considered that they preserved the apostolic succession of Order:<sup>3</sup> in 1971 and 1973 the Anglican Bishop

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<sup>1</sup> Note especially: J. E. HAVEL, *La question du pastoral féminin en Suède*, in *Archives de sociologie des religions*, 4, 1959, pp. 207-249; F. R. REFOULE, *Le problème des femmes-prêtres en Suède*, in *Lumière et Vie*, 43, 1959, pp. 65-99.

<sup>2</sup> No. 22 (W. NISEL, *Bekenntnisschriften und Kirchenordnungen...*, München, 1939, p. 111): "quod... foeminis, quae Spiritus sanctus ne docere quidem in Ecclesia patitur, illi (papistae) permittunt ut etiam Baptismum administrarent."

<sup>3</sup> The position of the Catholic Church on this point was made clear by Leo XIII in the Letter *Apostolicae Curae* of 13 September 1896 (*Leonis XIII Acta*, 16, 1897, pp. 258-275).

of Hong Kong ordained three women with the agreement of his Synod;<sup>4</sup> in July 1974 at Philadelphia there was the ordination in the Episcopal Church of eleven women — an ordination afterwards declared invalid by the House of Bishops. Later on in June 1975, the General Synod of the Anglican Church in Canada, meeting in Quebec, approved the principle of the accession of women to the priesthood; and this was followed in July by the General Synod of the Church of England: Dr. Coggan, Archbishop of Canterbury, frankly informed Pope Paul VI "of the slow but steady growth of a consensus of opinion within the Anglican Communion that there are no fundamental objections in principle to the ordination of women to the priesthood".<sup>5</sup> These are only general principles, but they might quickly be followed by practice, and this would bring a new and serious element into the dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church on the nature of the ministry.<sup>6</sup> It has provoked a warning, first by the Archbishop for the Orthodox in Great Britain, Athenagoras of Thyateira,<sup>7</sup> and then, more recently, by Pope Paul VI himself in two letters to the Archbishop of Canterbury.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the ecumenical sectors brought the question to the notice of all the Christian denominations, forcing them to examine their positions of principle, especially on the occasion of the Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Nairobi in December 1975.<sup>9</sup>

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A completely different event has made the question even more topical: this was the organization under United Nations' auspices

<sup>4</sup> Earlier, in 1944, his predecessor Bishop Hall called a woman to the priesthood, but she had to refrain from exercising the ministry because of the energetic intervention of the Archbishops of York and Canterbury, who for ecumenical motives repudiated the action of the Bishop of Hong Kong.

<sup>5</sup> Letter of 9 July 1975 to the Pope, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (English edition), 2 September 1976.

<sup>6</sup> Cardinal Willebrands stated this to some United States Episcopal Bishop in September 1974, according to the account published in *Origins — NC Documentary Service*, 9 October 1975.

<sup>7</sup> Italian translation published in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 16-17 June 1975.

<sup>8</sup> Letters of Paul VI to Dr. Coggan, 30 November 1975 and 10 February 1976: cf. *AAS* 68 (1976), pp. 599-601.

<sup>9</sup> At the WCC's Assembly in New Delhi in 1961, the Department on Faith and Order was asked to prepare, in collaboration with the Department on Cooperation of Men and Women in Church, Family and Society, a study on theological questions raised by the problem of women's ordination (cf. *Nouvelle-Delhi 1961*, Neuchâtel, 1962, pp. 166, 169). On the discussion of the problem at the Nairobi Assembly, see E. LANNE, *Points chauds de la V Assemblée mondiale du Conseil oecuménique des Eglises à Nairobi...*, in *Revue théologique de Louvain*, 7, 1976, pp. 197-199: *Les Femmes dans l'Eglise*.

of International Women's Year in 1975. The Holy See took part in it with a Committee for International Women's Year, which included some members of the Commission for the Study of the Role of Women in Society and in the Church, which had already been set up in 1973. Ensuring respect for and fostering the respective rights and duties of men and women leads to reflection on participation by women in the life of society on the one hand, and in the life and mission of the Church on the other. Now, the Second Vatican Council had already set forth the task: "Since in our times women have an ever more active share in the whole life of society, it is very important that they participate more widely also in the various fields of the Church's apostolate".<sup>10</sup> How far can this participation go?

It is understandable that these questions have aroused even in Catholic quarters intense studies, indeed passionate ones: doctoral theses, articles in reviews, even pamphlets, propounding or refuting in turn the biblical historical and canonical data and appealing to the human sciences of sociology,<sup>11</sup> psychology and the history of institutions and customs. Certain famous people have not hesitated to take sides boldly, judging that there was "no basic theological objection to the possibility of women priest".<sup>12</sup> A number of groups have been formed with a view to upholding this claim, and they have sometimes done this with insistence, as did the conference held in Detroit (U.S.A.) in November 1975 under the title "Women in Future: Priesthood Now, A Call for Action".

The Magisterium has thus been obliged to intervene in a question being posed in so lively a fashion within the Catholic Church and having important implications from the ecumenical point of view. Archbishop Bernardin of Cincinnati, President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, declared on 7 October 1975 that he found himself "obliged to restate the Church's teaching that women are not to be ordained to the priesthood"; Church

<sup>10</sup> Second Vatican Council, Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 9.

<sup>11</sup> This intrusion of sociology into hermeneutics and theology is perhaps one of the most important elements in the controversy. This has been rightly stressed by B. LAMBERT, *L'Eglise catholique peut-elle admettre des femmes à l'ordination sacerdotale*, in *Documentation Catholique* 73, 1976, p. 774: "en corrigeant dans l'interprétation de la Tradition et de l'Écriture ce qui était lié à des formes socio-culturelles, historiquement nécessaires et conditionnées, mais aujourd'hui dépassées, à la lumière de l'évolution de la société et de l'Église".

<sup>12</sup> The very phrase (reported in *Le Monde* of 19-20 September 1965) used by J. DANIELOU during the Council at a meeting of the Alliance Internationale Jeanne d'Arc. He returned to the subject, introducing perhaps more shades of meaning, in the interview he gave at the time of his promotion to Cardinal, *L'Espresso*, 936, 16-22 June 1969, pp. 122, 124: "I' faudrait examiner où sont les vraies raisons qui font que l'Église n'a jamais envisagé le sacerdoce des femmes."

leaders, he said, should "not seem to encourage unreasonable hopes and expectations, even by their silence".<sup>13</sup> Pope Paul VI himself had already recalled the same teaching. He did so at first in parenthetical fashion, especially in his address on 18 April 1975 to the members of the Study Commission on the Role of Women in Society and in the Church and the Committee for the Celebration of International Women's Year: "Although women do not receive the call to the apostolate of the Twelve and therefore to the ordained ministries, they are nonetheless invited to follow Christ as disciples and co-workers... We cannot change what our Lord did, nor his call to women".<sup>14</sup> Later he had to make an express pronouncement in his exchange of letters with Dr. Coggan, Archbishop of Canterbury: "Your Grace is of course well aware of the Catholic Church's position on this question. She holds that it is not admissible to ordain women to the priesthood, for very fundamental reasons".<sup>15</sup> It is at his order that the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has examined the question in its entirety. The question has been complicated by the fact that on the one hand arguments adduced in the past in favour of the traditional teaching are scarcely defensible today, and on the other hand the reasons given by those who demand the ordination of women must be evaluated.

To avoid the rather negative character that must mark the conclusions of such a study, one could have thought of inserting it into a more general presentation of the question of the advancement of women. But the time is not ripe for such a comprehensive exposition, because of the research and work in progress on all sides. It was difficult to leave unanswered any longer a precise question that is being posed nearly everywhere and which is polarizing attention to the detriment of more urgent endeavours that should be fostered. In fact, apart from its non-acceptance of the ordination of women, the document points to positive matters: a deeper understanding of the Church's teaching and of the ministerial priesthood, a call to spiritual progress, an invitation to take on the urgent apostolic tasks of today. The bishops, to whom the document is primarily addressed, have the mission of explaining it to their people with the pastoral feeling that is theirs and with the knowledge they have of the milieu in which they exercise their ministry.

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<sup>13</sup> *Origins* — NC Documentary Service, 16 October 1975: "Honesty and concern for the Catholic community... require that Church leaders not seem to encourage unreasonable hopes and expectations, even by their silence. Therefore I am obliged to restate the Church's teaching that women are not to be ordained to the priesthood."

<sup>14</sup> AAS 67 (:975), p. 265.

<sup>15</sup> Letter for 30 November 1975: AAS 68 (1976), p. 599.

The Declaration begins by presenting the Church's teaching on the question. This in fact has to be the point of departure. We shall see later how necessary it is to follow faithfully the method of using *loci theologi*.

### Tradition

It is an undeniable fact, as the Declaration notes, that the constant tradition of the Catholic Church has excluded women from the episcopate and the priesthood. So constant has it been that there has been no need for an intervention by a solemn decision of the Magisterium.

"The same tradition", the document stresses, "has been faithfully safeguarded by the Churches of the East. Their unanimity on this point is all the more remarkable since in many other questions their discipline admits of a great diversity. At the present time these same Churches refuse to associate themselves with requests directed towards securing the accession of women to priestly ordination".<sup>10</sup>

Only within some heretical sects of the early centuries, principally Gnostic ones, do we find attempts to have the priestly ministry exercised by women. It must be further noted that these are very sporadic occurrences and are moreover associated with rather questionable practices. We know of them only through the severe disapproval with which they are noted by Saint Irenaeus in his *Adversus Haereses*,<sup>17</sup> Tertullian in *De Praescriptione Haereticorum*,<sup>18</sup> Firmilian of Caesarea in a letter to Saint Cyprian,<sup>19</sup> Origen in a commentary on the First Letter to the Corinthians,<sup>20</sup> and especially by Saint Ephiphanius in his *Panarion*.<sup>21</sup>

How are we to interpret the constant and universal practice of the Church? A theologian is certain that what the Church does she can in fact do, since she has the assistance of the Holy Spirit. This is a classical argument found again and again in Saint Thomas

<sup>10</sup> Cf., for example, the theological conversations between Catholics and Russian Orthodox at Trent, 23-28 June 1975; *L'Osservatore Romano*, 7-8 July 1975; *Documentation Catholique*, 71, 1975, p. 707.

<sup>17</sup> 1, 13, 2; *PG* 7, col. 580-581; Harvey edition 1, 114-122.

<sup>18</sup> 41, 5; *CCL* 1, p. 221.

<sup>19</sup> In the Letters of Saint Cyprian, 75; *CSEL* 3, pp. 817-818.

<sup>20</sup> Fragments published in *Journal of Theological Studies*, 10 (1909), pp. 41-42 (No. 74).

<sup>21</sup> *Panarion*, 49, 2-3; *GCS* 31, pp. 243-244; — 78, 23 and 79, 2-4; *GSC* 37, pp. 473, 477-479.

with regard to the sacraments.<sup>22</sup> But what the Church has never done — is this any proof that she cannot do it in the future? Does the negative fact thus noted indicate a norm, or is it to be explained by historical and by social and cultural circumstances? In the present case, is an explanation to be found in the position of women in ancient and medieval society and in a certain idea of male superiority stemming from that society's culture?

It is because of this transitory cultural element that some arguments adduced on this subject in the past are scarcely defensible today. The most famous is the one summarized by Saint Thomas Aquinas: *quia mulier est in statu subiectionis*.<sup>23</sup> In Saint Thomas' thought, however, this assertion is not merely the expression of a philosophical concept, since he interprets it in the light of the accounts in the first chapters of Genesis and the teaching of the First Letter to Timothy (2:12-14). A similar formula is found earlier in the *Decretum* of Gratian,<sup>24</sup> but Gratian, who was quoting the Carolingian Capitularies and the false Decretals, was trying rather to justify with Old Testament prescriptions the prohibition — already formulated by the ancient Church<sup>25</sup> — of women from entering the sanctuary and serving at the altar.

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The polemical arguments of recent years have often recalled and commented on the texts that develop these arguments. They have also used them to accuse the Fathers of the Church of misogyny...It is true that we find in the Fathers' writings the undeniable influence of prejudices against women. But it must be carefully noted that these passages had very little influence on their pastoral activity, still less on their spiritual direction, as we can see by glancing through their correspondence that has come down to us. Above all it would be a serious mistake to think that such considerations provide the only or the most decisive reasons

<sup>22</sup> St. Thomas, *Summa Theol.*, 2 2, q. 10, a. 12; 3 pars. q. 66, a. 10; q. 72, a. 4 and a. 12; q. 73, a. 4; q. 78, a. 3 and a. 6; q. 80, a. 12; q. 82, a. 2; q. 83, a. 3 and a. 5; — cf. *In IV Sent. Dist. 20, q. 1, a. 4, q. 1 ff.*; *Dist. 23, q. 1, a. 4, q. 1, etc.*

<sup>23</sup> St. Thomas, *In IV Sent. Dist. 19, q. 1, a. 1, q. 3 ad 4-um*; *Dist. 25, q. 2, a. 1, q. 1*; cf. q. 2, a. 2, q. 1, ad 4; *Summa Theol.*, 2 2, q. 177, a. 2.

<sup>24</sup> *Dictum Gratiani in Caus. 34, q. 5, c. 11*, ed. FRIEDBERG, t. 1, col. 1254; cf. R. METZ, *La femme en droit canonique médiéval*, in *Recueil de la société Jean Bodin*, 12, 1962, pp. 59-113.

<sup>25</sup> Canon 44 of the collection called after the Council of Laodicea: H.T. BRUNS, *Canones Apostolorum et Conciliorum...* t. 1, Bertolini, 1839, p. 78; St. Gelasius, *Epist. 14, ad universos episcopos per Lucaniam, Brutios et Siciliam constitutos*, 11 March 494, no. 26; A. THIEL, *Epistolae Romanorum pontificum...*, t. 1, Brunsbergae, 1868, p. 376.

against the ordination of women in the thought of the Fathers, of the medieval writers and of the theologians of the classical period. In the midst of and going beyond speculation, more and more clear expression was being given to the Church's awareness that in reserving priestly ordination and ministry to men she was obeying a tradition received from Christ and the Apostles and by which she felt herself bound.

This is what had been expressed in the form of an apocryphal literature by the ancient documents of Church discipline from Syria, such as the *Didascalia Apostolorum* (middle of the third century)<sup>26</sup> and the *Apostolic Constitutions* (end of the fourth or beginning of the fifth century),<sup>27</sup> and by the Egyptian collection of twenty pseudo-apostolic canons that was included in the compilation of the *Alexandrian Synods* and translated into many languages.<sup>28</sup> Saint John Chrysostom, for his part, when commenting on chapter twenty-one of John, understood well that women's exclusion from the pastoral office entrusted to Peter was not based on any natural incapacity, since, as he remarks, "even the majority of men have been excluded by Jesus from this immense task".<sup>29</sup>

From the moment that the teaching on the sacraments is systematically presented in the schools of theology and canon law, writers begin to deal *ex professo* with the nature and value of the tradition that reserved ordination to men. The canonists base their case on the principle formulated by Pope Innocent III in a letter of 11 December 1210 to the Bishops of Palencia and Burgos, a letter that was included in the collection of *Decretals*: "Although the Blessed Virgin Mary was of higher dignity and excellence than all the Apostles, it was to them, not her, that the Lord entrusted the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven".<sup>30</sup> This text became a *locus communis* for the *glossatores*.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Chap. 15; ed. R. H. Connolly, pp. 133 and 142.

<sup>27</sup> Lib. 3, c. 6, nn. 1-2; c. 9, 3-4; ed. F. X. Funk, pp. 191, 201.

<sup>28</sup> Can. 24-28; Greek text in F. X. FUNK, *Doctrina Duodecim Apostolorum* Tübingen, 1887, p. 71; T. SCHERMANN, *Die allgemeine Kirchenordnung...*, t. 1, Paderborn, 1914, pp. 31-33; — Syriac text in *Oclateuque de Clément*, Lib. 3, c. 19-20; Latin text in the Verona ms., *Bibl. capit. LV*, ed. F. TIDNER, *Didascaliae Apostolorum, Canonum Ecclesiasticorum, Traditionis Apostolicae Versiones Latinae*. Berlin, 1965 (TU 75), pp. 111-113. The Coptic, Ethiopian and Arabic versions of the *Synodus* have been translated and published chiefly by G. HORNER, *The Statutes of the Apostles or Canones Ecclesiastici*, Oxford University Press, 1915 (= 1904).

<sup>29</sup> *De Sacerdotio* 2, 2: PG 48, 633.

<sup>30</sup> *Decretal. Lib. V. tit. 38, De paenit.*, can. 10 Nova A. FRIEDBERG, t. 2, col. 886-887: *Quia licet beatissima Virgo Maria dignior et excellentior fuerit Apostolis universis, non tamen illi, sed istis Dominus claves regni caelorum commisit.*

<sup>31</sup> e.g., *Glossa in Decretal. Lib. I, tit. 33, c. 12 Dilecta, V. Iurisdictioni*,

As for the theologians, the following are some significant texts: Saint Bonaventure: "Our position is this: it is due not so much to a decision by the Church as to the fact that the sacrament of Order is not for them. In this sacrament the person ordained is a sign of Christ the mediator".<sup>32</sup> Richard of Middleton, a Franciscan of the second half of the thirteenth century: "The reason is that the power of the sacraments comes from their institution. But Christ instituted this sacrament for conferral on men only, not women".<sup>33</sup> John Duns Scotus: "It must not be considered to have been determined by the Church. It comes from Christ. The Church would not have presumed to deprive the female sex, for no fault of its own, of an act that might licitly have pertained to it".<sup>34</sup> Durandus of Saint-Pourcain: "...the male sex is of necessity for the sacrament. The principal cause of this is Christ's institution... not even his Mother... It must therefore be held that women cannot be ordained, because of Christ's institution".<sup>35</sup>

So it is no surprise that until the modern period the theologians and canonists who dealt with the question have been almost unanimous in considering this exclusion as absolute and having a divine origin. The theological notes they apply to the affirmation vary from "theologically certain" (*theologicæ certæ*) to, at times, "proximate to faith" (*fidei proxima*) or even "doctrine of the faith" (*doctrina fidei*).<sup>36</sup> Apparently, then, until recent decades no theo-

<sup>32</sup> In *IV Sent.*, *Dist.* 25, art. 2, q. 1; ed. Quaracchi, t. 4, p. 649: *Dicendum est quod hoc non venit tam ex institutione Ecclesiae, quam ex hoc quod eis non competit Ordinis sacramentum. In hoc sacramento persona quae ordinatur significat Christum mediatorem.*

<sup>33</sup> In *IV Sent.* *Dist.* 25, a. 4, n. 1; ed. Bocatelli, Venice, 1499 (PELLECHET-POLAIN, 10132/9920), f. 177-R: *Ratio est quod sacramenta vim habent ex sua institutione: Christus autem hoc sacramentum instituit conferri masculis tantum, non mulieribus.*

<sup>34</sup> In *IV Sent.*, *Dist.* 25, *Opus Ozoniense*, ed. Vivès, t. 19, p. 140; cf. *Reportata Parisiensis*, ed. Vives, t. 24, pp. 369-371, *Quod non est tenendum tamquam praecise per Ecclesiam determinatum, sed habetur a Christo: non enim Ecclesia praesumpsisset sexum muliebrem privasse sine culpa sua actu qui posset sibi licite competere.*

<sup>35</sup> In *IV Sent.*, *Dist.* 25, p. 2; ed. Venice, 1571, f. 364-v: *...sexus virilis est de necessitate sacramenti, cuius causa principalis est institutio Christi... Christus non ordinavit nisi viros... nec matrem suam... Tenendum est igitur quod mulieres non possunt ordinari ex institutione Christi.*

<sup>36</sup> Details of these theological notes can be found in E. DORONZO, *Traetatus Dogmaticus de Ordine*, t. 3, Milwaukee, Bruce, 1962, pp. 395-396; Cf. also F. HALLER, *De Sacris Electionibus*, 1636, quoted in J. P. MIGNE, *Theologiae Cursus Completus*, t. 24, col. 821-854; many present-day objections are surprisingly anticipated in this work, which goes so far as to qualify as *periculosa in fide* the opinion that would admit women's ordination in general, and as *haeretica* that which would admit them to the



logian or canonist considered that it was a matter of a simple law of the Church.

In some writers of the Middle Ages however there was a certain hesitancy, reported by Saint Bonaventure without adopting it himself<sup>37</sup> and noted also by Joannes Teutonicus in his gloss on Caus. 27, q. 1, c. 23.<sup>38</sup> This hesitancy stemmed from the knowledge that in the past there had been deaconesses: had they received true sacramental ordination? This problem has been brought up again very recently. It was by no means unknown to the seventeenth and eighteenth-century theologians, who had an excellent knowledge of the history of literature. In any case, it is a question that must be taken up fully by direct study of the texts, without preconceived ideas; hence the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has judged that it should be kept for the future and not touched upon in the present document.

### The attitude of Christ

In the light of tradition, then, it seems that the essential reason moving the Church to call only men to the sacrament of Order and to the strictly priestly ministry is her intention to remain faithful to the type of ordained ministry willed by the Lord Jesus Christ and carefully maintained by the Apostles. It is therefore no surprise that in the controversy there has been a careful examination of the facts and texts of the New Testament, in which tradition

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priesthood, col. 824; cf. also H. TOURNELY, *Praelectiones Theologicae de Sacramento Ordinis*, Parisii, 1729, p. 185, notes as an error *contra fidem* this assertion with regard to episcopate, priesthood and diaconate. Among canonists: X. WERNZ, *Ius Decret.*, t. 2, Romae, 1906, p. 124: *iure divino* (he quotes several writers): P. GASPARRI, *Tractatus Canonice de Sacra Ordinatione*, t. 1, Parisiis, 1893, p. 75; *Et quidem prohibentur sub poena nullitatis: ita enim traditio et communis doctorum catholicorum doctrina interpretata est legem Apostoli: ed ideo Patres inter haereseas recensent doctrinam qua sacerdotatis dignitas et officium mulieribus tribuitur.*

<sup>37</sup> St. BONAVENTURE, *In IV Sent.*, Dist. 25, art. 2, q. 1, ed Quaracchi, t. 4 p. 650. *Omnes consentiunt quod promoveri non debent, sed utrum possint, dubium est* (the doubt arises from the case of the deaconesses); he concludes: *secundum sanioerem opinionem et prudentiorum doctorum non solum non debent vel non possunt de iure, verum etiam non possunt de facto.*

<sup>38</sup> This canon deals with deaconesses. At the word *ordinari*, Johannes Teutonicus states: *Respondeo quod mulieres non recipiunt characterem, impediende sexu et constitutione Ecclesiae: unde nec officium ordinum exercere possunt. . . nec ordinatur haec: sed fundebatur super eam forte aliqua benedictio, ex qua consequeretur aliquod officium speciale, forte legendi homilias vel evangelium ad matutinas quod non licebat aliis. Alii dicunt quod si monialis ordinetur, bene recipit characterem, quia ordinari facti est et post baptismum quilibet potest ordinare.*

has seen an example establishing a norm. This brings us to a fundamental observation: we must not expect the New Testament on its own to resolve in a clear fashion the question of the possibility of women acceding to the priesthood, in the same way it does not on its own enable us to give an account of certain sacraments, and especially of the structure of the sacrament of Order. Keeping to the sacred text alone and to the points of the history of Christian origins that can be obtained by analyzing that text by itself would be to go back four centuries and find oneself once more amid the controversies of the Reformation. We cannot omit the study of tradition: it is the Church that scrutinizes the Lord's thought by reading Scripture, and it is the Church that gives witness to the correctness of its interpretation.

It is tradition that has unceasingly set forth as an expression of Christ's will the fact that he chose only men to form the group of the Twelve. There is no disputing this fact, but can it be proved with absolute certainty that it was a question of a deliberate decision by Christ? It is understandable that the partisans of a change in discipline bring all their effort to bear against the significance of this fact. In particular they object that, if Christ did not bring women into the group of the Twelve, it was because the prejudices of his time did not allow him to; it would have been an imprudence that would have compromised his work irreparably. However, it has to be recognized that Jesus did not shrink from other "imprudences", which did in fact stir up the hostility of his fellow citizens against him, especially his freedom with regard to the rabbinical interpretations of the Sabbath. With regard to women his attitude was a complete innovation: all the commentators recognize that he went against many prejudices, and the facts that are noted add up to an impressive total.

For this reason greater stress is laid today on another objection: if Jesus chose only men to form the group of the Twelve, it was because he intended them to be a symbol representing the ancestors of the twelve tribes of Israel ("You who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Israel": Mt. 19:28; cf. Lk. 22:30); and this special motive, it is added, obviously referred only to the Twelve and would be no proof that the apostolic ministry should thereafter always be reserved to men. It is not a convincing argument. We may note in the place how little importance was given to this symbolism: Mark and John do not mention it. And in Matthew and Luke this phrase of Jesus about the twelve tribes of Israel is not put in the context of the call of the Twelve (Mt. 10:14) but at a relatively late stage of Jesus' public life, when the Apostles have long since been given their "constitution": they have been called by Jesus, have worked

with him and been sent on missions. Furthermore, the symbolism of Mt. 19:28 and Lk. 22:30 is not as certain as is claimed: the number twelve could designate simply the whole of Israel. Finally, these two texts deal only with a particular aspect of the mission of the Twelve: Jesus is promising them that they will take part in the eschatological judgment.<sup>39</sup> Therefore the essential meaning of their being chosen is not to be sought in this symbolism but in the totality of the mission given them by Jesus: "he appointed twelve; they were to me his companions and to be sent out to preach" (Mk. 3:14). As Jesus before them, the Twelve were above all to preach the Good News (Mk. 3:14; 6:12). Their mission in Galilee (Mk. 6:7-13) was to become the model of the universal mission (Mk. 12:10; cf. Mt. 28:16-20). Within the messianic people the Twelve represent Jesus. That is the real reason why it is fitting that the Apostles should be men: they act in the name of Christ and must continue his work.

It has been described above how Pope Innocent III saw a witness to Christ's intentions in the fact that Christ did not communicate to his Mother, in spite of her eminent dignity, the powers which he gave to the Apostles. This is one of the arguments most frequently repeated by tradition: from as early as the third century the Fathers present Mary as the example of the will of Jesus in this matter.<sup>40</sup> It is an argument still particularly dear to Eastern Christians today. Nevertheless it is vigorously rejected by all those who plead in favour of the ordination of women. Mary's divine motherhood the manner in which she was associated with the redeeming work of her Son, they say, put her in an altogether exceptional and unique position; and it would not even be fair to her to compare her with the Apostles and to argue from the fact that she was not ranked among them. In point of fact these assertions do have the advantage of making us understand that there are different functions within the Church: the equality of Christian is in harmony with the complementary nature of their tasks and the sacramental ministry is not the only rank of greatness, nor is it necessarily the highest: it is a form of service of the Kingdom. The Virgin Mary does not need the increase in "dignity" that was once attributed to her by the authors of those speculations on the priesthood of Mary that formed a deviant tendency which was soon discredited.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. J. DUPONT, *Le Logion des douze trônes*, in *Biblica*, 45, 1964, pp. 355-392.

<sup>40</sup> The documents cited in notes 26-28 above. Note also the curious *Mariale*, falsely attributed to Albert the Great, quaest. 42, ed. Borgnet, t. 37, pp. 80-81.

### The Practice of the Apostles

The text of the Declaration stresses the fact that, in spite of the privileged place Mary had in the Upper Room after the Ascension, she was not designated for entry into the College of the Twelve at the time of the election of Matthias. The same holds for Mary Magdalen and the other women who nevertheless had been the first to bring news of the Resurrection. It is true that the Jewish mentality did not accord great value to the witness of women as is shown by Jewish law. But one must also note that the Acts of the Apostles and the Letters of Saint Paul stress the role of women in evangelization and in instructing individual converts. The Apostles were led to take a revolutionary decision when they had to go beyond the circle of a Jewish community and undertake the evangelization of the Gentiles. The break with Mosaic observances was not made without discor. Paul had no scruples about choosing one of his collaborators, Titus, from among the Gentile converts (Gal. 2:3). The most spectacular expression of the change which the Good News made on the mentality of the first Christians is to be found precisely in the Letter to the Galatians: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:27-28). In spite of this, the Apostles did not entrust to women the strictly apostolic ministry, although Hellenistic civilization did not have the same prejudices against them as did Judaism. It is rather a ministry which is of another order, as may perhaps also be gathered from Paul's vocabulary, in which a difference seems to be implied between "my fellow workers" (*synergoi mou*) and "God's fellow workers" (*Theou synergoi*).<sup>41</sup>

It must be repeated that the texts of the New Testament, even on such important points as the sacraments, do not always give all the light that one would wish to find in them. Unless the value of unwritten traditions is admitted, it is sometimes difficult to discover in Scripture entirely explicit indications of Christ's will. But in view of the attitude of Jesus and the practice of the Apostles as seen in the Gospels, the Acts and the Letters, the Church has not held that she is authorized to admit women to priestly ordination.

<sup>41</sup> I. DE LA POTTERIE, *Titres missionnaires du chrétien dans le Nouveau Testament* (Rapports de la XXXIème semaine de Missiologie, Louvain, 1966), Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1966, p. 29-46, cf. pp. 44-45.

**Permanent value of this practice**

It is the permanency of this negative decision that objected to by those who would have the legitimacy of ordaining women admitted. These objections employ arguments of great variety.

The most classic ones seek a basis in historical circumstances. We have already seen what is to be thought of the view that Jesus' attitude was inspired solely by prudence, because he did not want to risk compromising his work by going against social prejudices. It is claimed that the same prudence was forced upon the Apostles. On this point too it is clear from the history of the apostolic period that there is no foundation for this explanation. However, in the case of the Apostles, should one not take into account the way in which they themselves shared these prejudices? Thus Saint Paul has been accused of misogyny and in his Letters are found texts on the inferiority of women that are the subject of controversy among exegetes and theologians today.

It can be questioned whether two of Paul's most famous texts on women are authentic or should rather be seen as interpolations, perhaps even relatively late ones. The first is 1 Cor. 14:34-35: "The women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate as even the Law says". These two verses, apart from being missing in some important manuscripts and not being found quoted before the end of the second century, present stylistic peculiarities foreign to Paul. The other text is 1 Tim. 2:11-14: "I do not allow a woman to teach or to exercise authority over men". The Pauline authenticity of this text is often questioned, although the arguments are weaker.

However, it is of little importance whether these texts are authentic or not: theologians have made abundant use of them to explain that women cannot receive either the power of magisterium or that of jurisdiction. It was especially the text of 1 Timothy that provided Saint Thomas with the proof that woman is in a state of submission or service, since (as the text explains) woman was created after man and was the person first responsible for original sin. But there are other Pauline texts of unquestioned authenticity that affirm that "the head of the woman is the man" (1 Cor. 11:3; cf. 8-12; Eph. 5:2, 24). It may be asked whether this view of man, which is in line with that of the books of the Old Testament, is not at the basis of Paul's conviction and the Church's tradition that women cannot receive the ministry. Now this is a view that modern society rejects absolutely, and many present-day theologians would shrink from adopting it without qualifying it. We may note however that Paul does not take his stand on a

philosophical level but on that of biblical history: when he describes, in relation to marriage, the symbolism of love, he does not see man's superiority as domination but as a gift demanding sacrifice, in the image of Christ

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On the other hand there are prescriptions in Paul's writings which are unanimously admitted to have been transitory, such as the obligation he imposed on women to wear a veil (1 Cor. 11:2-16). It is true that these are obviously disciplinary practices of minor importance, perhaps inspired by the customs of the time. But then there arises the more basic question: since the Church has later been able to abandon prescriptions contained in the New Testament, why should it not be the same with the exclusion of women from ordination? Here we meet once again the essential principle that it is the Church herself that, in the different sectors of her life, ensures discernment between what can change and what must remain immutable. As the Declaration specifies, "When she judges that she cannot accept certain changes, it is because she knows that she is bound by Christ's manner of acting. Her attitude, despite appearances, is therefore not one of archaism but of fidelity: it can be truly understood only in this light. The Church makes pronouncements in virtue of the Lord's promise and the presence of the Holy Spirit, in order to proclaim better the mystery of Christ and to safeguard and manifest the whole of its rich content."

Many of the questions confronting the Church as a result of the numerous arguments put forward in favour of the ordination of women must be considered in the light of this principle. An example is the following question dealt with by the Declaration: why will the Church not change her disciplines, since she is aware of having a certain power over the sacraments, even though they were instituted by Christ, in order to determine the sign or to fix the conditions for their administration? This faculty remains limited, as was recalled by Pius XII, echoing the Council of Trent: the Church has no power over the substance of the sacraments.<sup>42</sup> It is the Church herself that must distinguish what forms part of the "substance of the sacraments" and what she can determine or modify if circumstances should so suggest.

On this point, furthermore, we must remember, as the Declaration reminds us, that the sacraments and the Church herself are closely tied to history, since Christianity is the result of an event:

<sup>42</sup> Council of Trent, sess. 21, c. 2 and Pius XII, Constitution *Sacramentum Ordinis*, 30 November 1947, quoted in the Declaration.

the coming of the Son of God into time and to a country, and his death on the Cross under Pontius Pilate outside the walls of Jerusalem. The sacraments are a memorial of saving events. For this reason their signs are linked to those very events. They are relative to one civilization, one culture, although destined to be reproduced everywhere until the end of time. Hence historical choices have taken place by which the Church is bound, even if speaking absolutely and on a speculative level other choices could be imagined. This, for instance, is the case with bread and wine as matter for the Eucharist, for the Mass is not just a fraternal meal but the renewal of the Lord's Supper and the memorial of his Passion and thus linked with something done in history.<sup>43</sup>

It has likewise been remarked that in the course of time the Church has agreed to confer on women certain truly ministerial functions that antiquity refused to give them in the very name of the example and will of Christ. The functions spoken of are above all the administration of baptism, teaching and certain forms of ecclesiastical jurisdiction.

As regards baptism, however, not even deaconesses in the Syriac-speaking East were permitted to administer it, and its solemn administration is still a hierarchical act reserved to bishop, priest and, in accessory fashion, deacon. When urgently required, baptism can be conferred not only by Christians but even by unbaptized people whether men or women. Its validity therefore does not require the baptismal character, still less that of ordination. This point is affirmed by practice and by theologians. It is an example of this necessary discernment in the Church's teaching and practice, a discernment whose only guarantee is the Church herself.

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As regards teaching, a classical distinction has to be made, from Paul's Letters onwards. There are forms of teaching or edification that lay people can carry out and in this case Saint Paul expressly mentions women. These forms include the charisms of "prophecy" (1 Cor. 11:15). In this sense there was no obstacle to giving the title of Doctor to Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena, as it was given to illustrious teachers such as Albert the Great or Saint Laurence of Brindisi. Quite a different matter is the official and hierarchical function of teaching the revealed message, a function that presupposes the mission received from Christ by the Apostles and transmitted by them to their successors.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Ph. DELHAYE, *Rétrospective et prospective des ministères féminins dans l'Eglise*, in *Revue théologique de Louvain* 3, 1972, pp. 74-75.

Examples of participation by women in ecclesiastical jurisdiction are found in the Middle Ages: some abbesses (not abbesses in general, as is sometimes said in popularizing articles) performed acts normally reserved to bishops, such as the nomination of parish priests or confessors. These customs have been more or less reprovved by Holy See at different periods: the letter of Pope Innocent III quoted earlier was intended as a reprimand to the Abbess of Las Huelgas. But we must not forget that feudal lords arrogated to themselves similar rights. Canonists also admitted the possibility of separating jurisdiction from Order. The Second Vatican Council has tried to determine better the relationship between the two; the Council's doctrinal vision will doubtless have effects on discipline.

In a more general way, attempts are being made, especially in Anglican circles, to broaden the debate in the following way: is the Church perhaps bound to Scripture and tradition as an absolute, when the Church is a people making its pilgrim way and should listen to what the Spirit is saying? Or else a distinction is made between essential points on which unanimity is needed and questions of discipline admitting of diversity: and if the conclusion reached is that the ordination of women belongs to these secondary matters, it would not harm progress towards the union of the Churches. Here again it is the Church that decides by her practice and Magisterium what requires unanimity, and distinguishes it from acceptable or desirable pluralism. The question of the ordination of women impinges too directly on the nature of the ministerial priesthood for one to agree that it should be resolved within the framework of legitimate pluralism between Churches. That is the whole meaning of the letter of Pope Paul VI to the Archbishop of Canterbury.

#### **The ministerial priesthood in the light of the mystery of Christ**

In the Declaration a very clear distinction will be seen between the document's affirmation of the datum (the teaching it proposes with authority in the preceding paragraphs) and the theological reflection that then follows. By this reflection the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith endeavours "to illustrate this norm by showing the profound fittingness" to be found "between the proper nature of the sacrament of Order, with its specific reference to the mystery of Christ, and the fact that only men have been called to receive priestly ordination". In itself such a quest is not without risk. However, it does not involve the Magisterium. It is well known that in solemn teaching infallibility affects the doctrinal affirmation, not the arguments intended to



explain it. Thus the doctrinal chapters of the Council of Trent contain certain processes of reasoning that today no longer seem to hold. But this risk has never stopped the Magisterium from endeavouring at all times to clarify doctrine by analogies of faith. Today especially, and more than ever, it is impossible to be content with making statements, with appealing to the intellectual docility of Christians: faith seeks understanding, and tries to distinguish the grounds for and the coherence of what it is taught.

We have already discarded a fair number of explanations given by medieval theologians. The defect common to these explanations is that they claimed to find their basis in an inferiority of women vis-a-vis men; they deduced from the teaching of Scripture that woman was "in a state of submission", of subjection, and was incapable of exercising functions of government.

It is very enlightening to note that the communities springing from the Reformation which have had no difficulty in giving women access to the pastoral office are first and foremost those that have rejected the Catholic doctrine on the sacrament of Order and profess that the pastor is only one baptized person among others, even if the charge given has been the object of a consecration. The Declaration therefore suggests that it is by analyzing the nature of Order and its character that we will find the explanation of the exclusive call of men to the priesthood and episcopate. This analysis can be outlined in three propositions: 1) in administering the sacraments that demand the character of ordination the priest does not act in his own name (*in persona propria*), but in the person of Christ (*in persona Christi*): 2) this formula, as understood by tradition, implies that the priest is a sign in the sense in which this term is understood in sacramental theology; 3) it is precisely because the priest is a sign of Christ the Saviour that he must be a man and not a woman.

That the priest performs the Eucharist and reconciles sinners in the name and place of Christ is affirmed repeatedly by the Magisterium and constantly taught by Fathers and theologians. It would not appear to serve any useful purpose to give a multitude of quotations to show this. It is the totality of the priestly ministry that Saint Paul says is exercised in the place of Christ: "We are acting as ambassadors on behalf of Christ, God, as it were, appealing through us" — in fact this text 2 Corinthians has in mind the ministry of reconciliation (5:18-20) — "you have received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus" (Gal. 4:14). Similarly Saint Cyprian echoes Saint Paul: "The priest truly acts in the place

of Christ".<sup>44</sup> But theological reflection and the Church's life have been led to distinguish the more or less close links between the various acts in the exercise of the ministry and the character of ordination and to specify which require this character for validity:

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Saying "In the name and place of Christ" is not however enough to express completely the nature of the bond between the minister and Christ as understood by tradition. The formula *in persona Christi* in fact suggests a meaning that brings it close to the Greek expression *mimema Christou*.<sup>45</sup> The word *person* means a part played in the ancient theatre, a part identified by a particular mask. The priest takes, the part of Christ, lending him his voice and gestures. Saint Thomas expresses this concept exactly: "The priest enacts the image of Christ, in whose person and by whose power he pronounces the words of consecration".<sup>46</sup> The priest is thus truly a sign in the sacramental sense of the word. It would be a very elementary view of the sacraments if the notion of sign were kept only for material elements. Each sacrament fulfils the notion in a different way. The text of Saint Bonaventure already mentioned affirms this very clearly: "the person ordained is a sign of Christ the mediator".<sup>47</sup> Although Saint Thomas gave as the reason for excluding women the much discussed one of the state of subjection (*status subiectionis*), he nevertheless took as his starting point the principle that "sacramental signs present what they signify by a natural resemblance",<sup>48</sup> in other words the need for that "natural resemblance" between Christ and the person who is his sign. And, still on the same point, Saint Thomas recalls: "Since a sacrament is a sign, what is done in the sacrament requires not only the reality but also a sign of the reality".<sup>49</sup>

It would not accord with "natural resemblance", with that obvious "meaningfulness", if the memorial of the Supper were to be carried out by a woman; for it is not just the recitation involving

<sup>44</sup> *Epist.* 63, 14; ed. Hartel, CSEL t. 3, p. 713: *sacerdos vice Christi vere fungitur.*

<sup>45</sup> *St. Theodore the Studite, Adversus Iconomachos cap. 4; PG 99, 593; Epist. lib. 1, 11; PG 99, 945.*

<sup>46</sup> *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 83, a. 1, ad 3-um.

<sup>47</sup> Above, note 32: *persona quae ordinatur significat Christum mediatorem.*

<sup>48</sup> *In IV Sent., Dist. 25, q. 2, a. 2, q. 1, ad 4-um: signa sacramentalia ex naturali similitudine repraesentet.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid. in corp. quaestiuiculae: Quia cum sacramentum sit signum, in eis quae in sacramento aguntur requiritur non solum res, sed significatio rei.*

the gestures and words of Christ, but an action, and the sign is efficacious because Christ is present in the minister who consecrates the Eucharist, as is taught by the Second Vatican Council, following the Encyclical *Mediator Dei*.<sup>50</sup>

It is understandable that those favouring the ordination of women have made various attempts to deny the value of this reasoning. It has obviously been impossible and even unnecessary for the Declaration to consider in detail all the difficulties that could be raised in this regard. Some of them however are of interest in that they occasion a deeper theological understanding of traditional principles. Let us look at the objection sometimes raised that it is ordination — the character — not maleness, that makes the priest Christ's representative. Obviously it is the character, received by ordination, that enables the priest to consecrate the Eucharist and reconcile penitents. But the character is spiritual and invisible (*res et sacramentum*). On the level of the sign (*sacramentum tantum*) the priest must both have received the laying on of hands and take the part of Christ. It is here that Saint Thomas and Saint Bonaventure require that the sign should have natural meaningfulness.

In various fairly recent publications attempts have been made to reduce the importance of the formula *in persona Christi* by insisting rather on the formula *in persona Ecclesiae*. For it is another great principle of the theology of the sacraments and liturgy that the priest presides over the liturgy in the name of the Church, and must have the intention of "doing what the Church does". Could one say that the priest does not represent Christ, because he first represents the Church by the fact of his ordination? The Declaration's reply to this objection is that, quite on the contrary, the priest represents the Church precisely because he first represents Christ himself who is the Head and Shepherd of the Church. It indicates several texts of the Second Vatican Council that clearly express this teaching. Here there may well be in fact one of the crucial points of the question, one of the important aspects of the theology of the Church and the priesthood underlying the debate on the ordination of women. When the priest presides over the assembly, it is not the assembly that has chosen or designated him for this role. The Church is not a spontaneous gathering. As its name of *ecclesia* indicates, it is an assembly that is convoked. It is Christ who calls it together. He is the head of the Church, and the priest presides "in the person of Christ the Head" (*in persona*

<sup>50</sup> II Vatican Council, Constitution *Sacrosanctum* on the Liturgy, no. 7; Pius XII, Encyclical *Mediator Dei*, 20 November 1947, *AAS* 39 (1947), p. 528.

**Christi capitis**). That is why the Declaration rightly concludes "that the controversies raised in our days over the ordination of women are for all Christians a pressing invitation to meditate on the mystery of the Church, study in greater detail the meaning of the episcopate and the priesthood, and to rediscover the real and pre-eminent place of the priest in the community of the baptized, of which he indeed forms part but from which he is distinguished because, in the actions that call for the character of ordination, for the community he is — with all the effectiveness proper to the sacraments — the image and symbol of Christ himself who calls, forgives, and accomplishes the sacrifice of the Covenant."

However, the objectors continue: it would indeed be important that Christ should be represented by a man if the maleness of Christ played an essential part in the economy of salvation. But, they say, one cannot accord gender a special place in the hypostatic union: what is essential is the human nature — no more — assumed by the Word, not the incidental characteristics such as the sex or even the race which he assumed. If the Church admits that men of all races can validly represent Christ, why should she deny women this ability to represent him? We must first of all reply, in the words of the Declaration, that ethnic differences "do not affect the human person as intimately as the difference of sex". On this point biblical teaching agrees with modern psychology. The difference between the sexes however is something willed by God from the beginning, according to the account in Genesis (which is also quoted in the Gospel), and is directed both to communion between persons and to the begetting of human beings. And it must be affirmed first and foremost that the fact that Christ is a man and not a woman is neither incidental nor unimportant in relation to the economy of salvation. In what sense? Not of course in the material sense, as has sometimes been suggested in polemics in order to discredit it, but because the whole economy of salvation has been revealed to us through essential symbols from which it cannot be separated, and without which we would be unable to understand God's design. Christ is the new Adam. God's covenant with men is presented in the Old Testament as a nuptial mystery, the definitive reality of which is Christ's sacrifice on the Cross. The Declaration briefly presents the stages marking the progressive development of this biblical theme, the subject of many exegetical and theological studies. Christ is the Bridegroom of the Church, whom he won for himself with his blood, and the salvation brought by him is the New Covenant: by using this language, Revelation shows why the Incarnation took place according to the male gender, and makes it impossible to ignore this historical reality. For this reason, only a man can take the part of

Christ, be a sign of his presence, in a word "represent" him (that is, be an effective sign of his presence) in the essential acts of the Covenant.

Could one do without this biblical symbolism when transmitting the message, in contemplating the mystery and in liturgical life? To ask this, as has been done in certain recent studies, is to call into question the whole structure of Revelation and to reject the value of Scripture. It will be said, for example, that "in every period the ecclesial community appeals to the authority it has received from its founder in order to choose the images enabling it to receive God's revelation". This is perhaps to fail even more profoundly to appreciate the human value of the nuptial theme in the revelation of God's love.

### The ministerial priesthood in the mystery of the Church

It is also striking to note the extent to which the questions raised in the controversy over the ordination of women are bound up with a certain theology of the Church. We do not of course mean to dwell on the excessive formulas which nonetheless sometimes find a place in theological review. An example is the supposition that the primitive Church was based on the charisms possessed by both women and men.<sup>51</sup> Another is the claim that "the Gospels also present women as ministers of unction".<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, we have already come across the question of the pluralism that can be admitted in unity and seen what its limits are.

The proposal that women should be admitted to the priesthood because they have gained leadership in many fields of modern life today seems to ignore the fact that the Church is not a society like the rest. In the Church, authority or power is of a very different nature, linked as it normally is with the sacrament, as is underlined in the Declaration. Disregard of this fact is indeed a temptation that has threatened ecclesiological research at all periods: every time that an attempt is made to solve the Church's

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. *Concilium* 111, 1976, *La femme dans l'Eglise*, French edition, pp. 19, 20, especially 23: "Au temps de Paul, les fonctions de direction étaient réparties et reposaient sur l'autorité charismatique".

<sup>52</sup> *Theological Studies* 36, 1975, p. 667.

problems by comparison with those of States, or to define the Church's structure by political categories, the inevitable result is an impasse.

The Declaration also points out the defect in the argument that seeks to base the demand that the priesthood be conferred on women on the text Galatians 3:28, which states that in Christ there is no longer any distinction between man and woman. For Saint Paul this is the effect of baptism. The baptismal catechesis of the Fathers often stressed it. But absolute equality in baptismal life is quite a different thing from the structure of the ordained ministry. This latter is the object of a vocation within the Church, not a right inherent in the person.

A vocation within the Church does not consist solely or primarily in the fact that one manifests the desire for a mission or feels attracted by an inner compulsion. Even if this spontaneous step is made and even if one believes one has heard as it were a call in the depths of one's soul, the vocation is authentic only from the moment that it is authenticated by the external call of the Church. The Holy Office<sup>53</sup> recalled this truth in its 1912 letter to the Bishop of Aire to put an end to the Lahitton controversy.<sup>54</sup> Christ chose "those he wanted" (Mk. 3:13).

Since the ministerial priesthood is something to which the Lord calls expressly and gratuitously, it cannot be claimed as a right, any more by men than by women. Archbishop Benardin's declaration of October 1975 contained the sound judgment: "It would be a mistake . . . to reduce the question of the ordination of women to one of injustice, as is done at times. It would be correct to do this only if ordination were a God-given right of every individual; only if somehow one's human potential could not be fulfilled without it. In fact, however, no one, male or female, can claim a 'right' to ordination. And, since the episcopal and priestly office is basically a ministry of service, ordination in no way 'completes' one's humanity".<sup>54</sup>

The Declaration of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith ends by suggesting that efforts in two directions should be fostered, efforts from which the pastors and faithful of the

<sup>53</sup> AAS 4, 1912, p. 485.

<sup>54</sup> In *Origins* — NC Documentary Service, 16 October 1975.

Church would perhaps be distracted if this controversy over women's ordination were prolonged. One direction is in the doctrinal and spiritual order: awareness of the diversity of roles in the Church, in which equality is not identity, should lead us — as Saint Paul exhorts us — to strive after the one gift that can and should be striven after, namely love (1 Cor. 12-13). "The greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven are not the ministers but the saints", says the Declaration. This expression deserves to be taken as a motto.

The other direction for our efforts is in the apostolic and social order. We have a long way to go before people become fully aware of the greatness of women's mission in the Church and society, "both for the renewal and humanization of society and for the rediscovery by believers of the true countenance of the Church". Unfortunately we also still have a long way to go before all the inequalities of which women are still the victims are eliminated, not only in the field of public, professional and intellectual life, but even within the family.