

THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN

Mr President I wish to support this canon which seeks to allow the ordination of women as (deacons/ priests). I do so aware that many arguments have been put forward both for and against the ordination of women - some of them theological and others for more practical reasons.

I think the easiest way is to tackle the objections and see if they are valid.

1. The call of women

It is true that many women have given outstanding service in the church without wishing to be ordained. I am sure they will continue to do so. It would also be true that some women have not expressed this wish in the past because it was impossible.

Some men, while claiming that they were called to be priests, deny that women could have that same calling, suggesting they are mistaken.

But many men and women believe that some women are being called AT THIS TIME to be ordained. Indeed, the Anglican church in Canada, America and New Zealand have been ordaining women for many years.

2. The assertion that the church in America is dying.

In 1992 I had the opportunity of speaking to The Primate of Canada, Archbishop Peers and the Presiding Bishop of America, Bishop Browning. Bishop Browning was concerned that false information was being spread about the church in America dying. He said the church was seeing a steady though not dramatic rise in numbers. Further, he said that only 5 out of 98 dioceses were against the ordination of women, and these to varying degrees. Uruguay has recently separated so that it can ordain women.

It is now twenty years later.

3. This brings me to timing

Some people say they are not against the ordination of women entirely, ONLY NOT NOW.

Both the above mentioned bishops made the point that it is experiencing women priests that acceptance came. I understand that Bishop Walden would say the same thing now. This can be seen in Australia where women are ordained.

4. This will delay unity (with Rome)

When I moved in ecumenical circles I became aware of people in both the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, both ordained and lay, who were indeed looking forward to the day when they would have ordained women. There are ordained women in some protestant churches and have been for some time.

But even if this was not so the Anglican Church does ordain women in many places so it is too late for this thought unless a splinter group leaves the Anglican Church of Australia as has the Traditional Anglican Church.

In any case if we believe it is the Holy Spirit calling women to this vocation we should not deny this truth, for the sake of convenience.

5. Historical Sense.

The question arises that if Jesus chose 12 Jewish men to be the apostles then he only wanted men to be ordained.

My view is that this was an historical issue because of the position of men at that time in the Jewish race and in the synagogues. Also many priestesses were pagan and often were prostitutes in those days. After all Jesus and Paul both spoke about slavery as if it was perfectly alright too, because it was the accepted custom of the time, but no one would suggest that we go back to slavery. Nor do we insist on Priests being Jewish.

It seems to me that to say 2000 years ago this was not right so it will always be the same denies the fact that God is alive and working in today's world. An historical God is not enough.

6. Its a feminist Plot.

I do not see this issue as a feminist issue and I think that the word 'feminist' is used in a derogatory way to dismiss the whole subject. It could be seen to be a

sexist issue, however. Sexism is the denial of the truth of the full humanity of women, a matter of injustice, exploitation and impoverishment.

Women do not seek to be carbon copies of men, they will bring their own unique gifts to enrich the ordained ministry of both men and women.

It is a pity that some women have been aggressive in the quest to be ordained but no doubt this has been caused by years of frustration and hurt. No doubt there are aggressive women on any issue as there are aggressive men.

7. They will call God 'Mother God'

Although this has been said to me I do not see any direct connection. I, personally, am in favour of women's ordination but not in favour of calling God 'mother'. If Jesus taught us to say 'Our Father' that is good enough for me.

BUT when some women say that their own father was so awful that they could not call God 'Father' because of it, then the church should listen and help these women through their distress to an understanding of the difference.

8. The Bridegroom (Christ) and his Bride (the Church)

If one believes that the importance of this statement lies in the maleness of Christ, as Bishop Walden suggested, then it must follow that that the church must all be female – all men must leave the church. One cannot insist on half an analogy without giving equal weight to the other half!

I understand this analogy to refer to the mystical, spiritual union between Christ and his church (the people of God) for which the closest human relationship Christ could use as an example was the marriage relationship - not the sexual part, but something hard to put into words.

Jesus points out the interconnectedness of God, the father, and himself and between himself and his people – “I am in my father and you in me and I in you”.(John 14 v:20)

Further, I would see the fact that Christ is the celebrant of the eucharist as not being communicated by the maleness of the priest, but by his/her priestly office and possibly by the anonymity of his robes.

9. Tradition

While tradition plays a valuable part we need to be wary of it. A story illustrates the point:

A woman was preparing a roast. She carefully cut two inches off the end of it and put it in the baking dish. Her mother asked her “why did you cut two inches of the end of the roast?” “Oh”, replied the woman “you used to always do that”. “Yes” her mother replied “because my baking dish was not large enough”.

So tradition is born of practical necessity, which, over time, loses its meaning. Jesus said “ You abandon the commandment of God and hold on to human tradition” (Mark 7 v:8). Are we guilty of that – His command is to go out and spread the Good News to all people.

I attended a lecture some years ago which sought to explain the part of Tradition and traditions in our beliefs and am aware of the differences but I do not believe that this is an unmovable tradition.

10. Teaching (Timothy 2 v:23)

Please note that Paul did not say “Jesus said..” – here he is saying I permit no woman.....This needs to be understood in the context of this epistle – there are many other things said here which to most, if not all of us would be ridiculous. So why do we take this out of context and believe it.

Finally Gamaliel said ‘If this plan or this undertaking is of men, it will fail; but if it is of God you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God! (Act5, v:30)