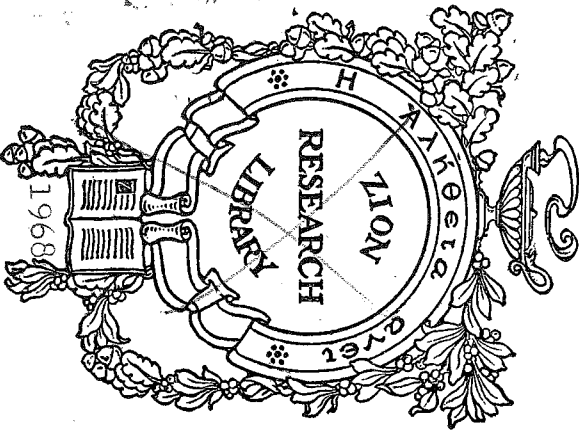


ANNA HOWARD SHAW CENTER

**Women  
in the  
Church**

Society for the Ministry of Women in the Church

261.2  
S67



ALMA LUTZ COLLECTION  
*The Church and Woman*

B.U.S. Th.  
745 Cor. Commonwealth Ave.  
Boston, MA



The Rev. Elsie D. Chamberlain

*Society for the Ministry of Women  
in the Church*

# Women in the Church

**PART I** of this pamphlet consists of short articles written by members of the Society for the Ministry of Women in the Church. They have all appeared in the Methodist Magazine and we are grateful to the Epworth Press for having produced the offprints and for allowing us to collect them together in this form.

**PART II** consists, with some explanatory comments, of the bulk of an Essay on 'The case for the ordination of women to the priesthood' written by Mrs K. M. Baxter for the Anglican Archbishops' Commission on Women and Holy Orders and printed in their Report of that name. This was published by the Church Information Office and is printed with the permission of the Holders of the copyright. We are grateful to them and to Mrs Baxter for permission to include this.

261.2  
567

# Contents

Frontispiece Photograph of Rev. Elsie Chamberlain at the microphone

**PART I**  
page 3

Brief outline of the 'service and status' of women in the history of the Church

7 The Order of Deaconesses in the Eastern Orthodox Church by Dr Nicolas Zernov

11 "By their fruits ye shall know them". A tribute to four twentieth century women by the late Charles Raven, formerly President of the Society for the Ministry of Women

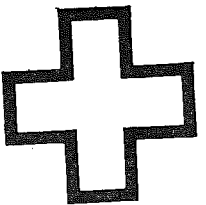
15 Brief biographical sketches

- Carol Graham of India and England
- Elsie Chamberlain of England
- Mary Ely Lyman of the U.S.A.
- Margit Sahlin of Sweden
- Hannelotte Reiffer of Germany
- Florence Lee and Jane Huang of Hong Kong
- Monica Storrs of Canada

**PART II**  
page 31

The case for the ordination of women to the priesthood' an Essay by Mrs K. M. Baxter, with some introductory and explanatory comments.

JOAN ELLIOT



## Service and status of WOMEN in the Church

spirit) between man and woman has been greatly hindered by androcentric theories of sexual status and function which are inimical to human well-being and progress. It is contrary to the best interests of a community that either sex should accumulate for itself such power as men have hitherto enjoyed. In spite of growing emancipation woman's 'direct influence in the higher counsels of Church and State is still relatively slight', but while her influence in political and social spheres is steadily increasing, in the ecclesiastical world it remains slight. The Church is, and always has been, a male dominated body.

Jesus, the Master, showed a respect for woman which was new; He treated her as a reasonable being with a personality of her own, and as a result the early Church admitted women from the first as members of the new Israel. But such respect has long struggled against the view that woman is an inferior being, a view held by the old Israel and strengthened by Oriental influence. From time to time women have played an important part in Church affairs; there was the ancient order of deaconesses in the Eastern Church; nuns and abbesses often held influential positions; since the Reformation a few groups of Christians have treated women as the equals of men, notably the Society of Friends and the Salvation Army; the early Methodists and some others have made use of women as preachers. But for the most part women have had to play a subordinate role, and with this for centuries they have been content.

### Three developments

But times have changed, and within the last hundred years or so women have begun to wish for more scope in the service of the Church. It was

IN THE BEGINNING GOD CREATED man in His own image—male and female created He them.

So states the ancient Creation narrative, enshrining in this brief sentence two fundamental principles: that human nature can in some measure reflect the divine, and that sex is part of the purpose of God. There is here no suggestion that one sex is to be subordinate to another; rather the implication is that men and women shall work together as partners in carrying out His purposes. But, alas, as Dr. Sherwin Bailey writes in his admirable book *The Man-Woman Relation in Christian Thought*: 'In the past, genuine partnership (and therefore cross-fertilisation of mind and

natural that as they emerged from their homes to play a fuller part in the service of society and state they should desire to do so in the service of the church. Nor were opportunities at first easily available. But three developments during the last century are of special interest, as showing how women are reaching out towards wider opportunities: the revival of Orders of Deaconesses; the increase in the number of women studying theology; and the work of missionaries in non-Christian lands.

### Christian context

The revival of deaconesses in Germany in the first part of the last century is, in terms of its subsequent influence, the greatest event in the life of women in the Church since the Reformation, so writes Dr Kathleen Bliss in her book *The Service and Status of Women in the Church*. It was at Kaiserswerth in the 1830s that Pastor Fliedner started his training scheme, and the movement spread with extraordinary rapidity. Recruits, who came from Holland, Switzerland and France as well as Germany, were trained as nurses within a definitely Christian context, for they studied the Bible and were helped to develop their religious life. The need for large numbers of trained and devoted women soon became obvious and today there are similar training 'houses' in most Protestant countries of Europe and in America.

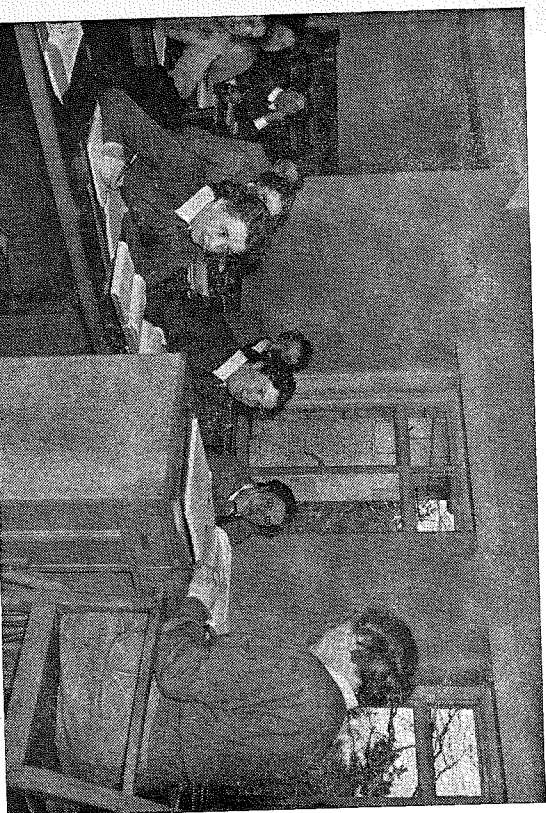
A different kind of Order has developed in the Church of England since Elizabeth Ferrard was ordained deaconess in 1862. The emphasis is on theological training; the work of these deaconesses is mainly pastoral and they are ordained by the laying on of hands, so that their ministry is definitely recognized by the Church. But their position is still somewhat anomalous: they are allowed to read the statutory services and to preach at non-liturgical services, but in practice they seldom do these things, and they are not allowed

to administer the Holy Communion. To quote once more from Kathleen Bliss: 'Much more use could be made of these very highly trained women if only there were not so rooted a conviction that the proper place for woman's work is the poor parish and the poor only'.

A third type of deaconess is to be found in the Methodist, Presbyterian and Baptist Churches, trained women who are sometimes called 'sisters' and whose work varies from parish work to institutional work of various kinds. Several of these are in charge of churches and some in the Methodist Church have the right to administer the Holy Communion.

### A steady stream

All 'church workers' receive some biblical and doctrinal training but by no means all the women interested in theology take up church work. The increase in the number of theological graduates during this century has been remarkable. For example, whereas before 1914 only one woman graduated in theology at London University, between 1923 and 1953 thirty-seven took the degree and in 1964 ten in that year alone. Again in Cambridge only one woman graduated in theology before 1913 but in the next forty years seventy-five took the tripos, nine of them in the first class. A steady stream of women have taken the Lambeth Diploma and other diplomas and degrees in theology. It is perhaps worth noting that in 1963 the only student to be placed in the first class at Cambridge was a woman. In other European countries too and in America many women of all denominations have qualified as theologians. In Finland for instance there are said to be over 300 qualified women theologians working in the Church. But most of these women take up teaching, either in schools or training colleges, because openings for definite church work are rare and often not satisfying to the graduate of high attainments. Only a



Wesley Deaconesses in training at Ilkley  
Photography by Morris Walker

few branches of the church have as yet called women to the ordained ministry. Almost certainly more women would take up theology if there were more openings.

### In sole charge

In Germany, however, there is scope for the theologically equipped woman to become a 'Vikarin', that is, an assistant to the Lutheran pastors. Such women are 'commissioned' but not ordained. However, during the war when pastors were called up for military service the Vikarinnen were often left in sole charge of a parish and carried out all ministerial functions. After the war when the clergy came back the women's activities were again restricted, except in the East, where the shortage of clergy was acute. Dr Bliss writes: 'There is no more overpowering answer to the question whether, leaving for the moment on one side the theological issue, women are able to exercise the full ministry if they are

given the opportunity, than the account of the work of a number of Vikarinnen in the East of Germany in the last part of the war and since'.

In no sphere of Church work during the last century have women had greater influence, shown more resourcefulness, and found a more satisfying vocation than on the mission field abroad. It is somewhat comical to realize that as late as 1842, Bishop Wilson of Calcutta said: 'I object from my experience of Indian life, and indeed upon principle, to ladies coming out unprotected to so distant a place with a climate so unfriendly'. Fortunately Bishop Wilson's old fashioned ideas did not prevent a constant stream of single women of all denominations from travelling to the East and to Africa to preach, teach and train new converts and thereby build up the Church in countless Christian homes where the Gospel had not been heard before. While it was being argued what women could or might do in the various climates of Europe and

America, women were performing tasks in disease ridden swamps and parched plains which put home churches to shame for the meagerness of opportunity they gave to willing hands' (Bliss, p. 23). Many of these women worked in areas distant from any priest and it would have brought blessing to the Church if they had had the grace of ordination enabling them to administer the sacraments.

In this series of articles the *Methodist Magazine* will print accounts of women's work in the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches, followed by some short biographies of notable women theologians, missionaries and pastors of other denominations. For although women cannot yet be ordained in most Episcopal churches, in many of the Reformed denominations they are accepted as ministers of Word and Sacrament. In this country the Congregational Churches have led the way and have had women ministers for

many years. Almost every year the number of churches which ordain women has steadily increased, including now most Lutheran Churches, most Baptist and some Methodist and Presbyterian Churches. The last article in this series therefore will discuss whether it might be in accordance with the will of God that all branches of the church should allow women the grace of ordination. That some women have felt called to the Ministry but have found the door closed, is certain, and their demands will be heard with increasing insistence as time goes on. But the issue raises important considerations of principle and expediency; it cannot be settled by one church alone, for it vitally affects the movement towards reunion. For this reason these articles will approach the problem from an 'ecumenical' point of view and we are grateful to the editors of the *Methodist Magazine* for their generosity in printing them.

# Women in the Church

## 2. The Order of Deaconesses in the Eastern Orthodox Church

NICOLAS ZERNOV

ONE OF THE URGENT PROBLEMS at present confronting Christendom is the fuller and better use of women in the service of the Church. Their greatly improved educational and social opportunities enable them to undertake many functions previously reserved for men only. In the light of this changed position it is useful to examine their role in the past history of the Church. One of their most remarkable contributions, still little known in the West, was the order of deaconesses which flourished in the Byzantine and Oriental Churches from the fourth to the eleventh centuries. This order, as distinct from the consecrated widows and virgins of the primitive Church, originated most probably in the Eastern province of the Empire in Mesopotamia and Syria. It spread to Palestine and to the capital, but never penetrated Egypt and was much less used in the western lands. Several of the deaconesses left their mark on the history of the Orthodox Church, some as outstanding theologians or philanthropists, others as women of spiritual discernment and wisdom; still others as defenders of the Church from its internal enemies and a considerable number were canonized.

The life story of each of these re-

markable women deserves a special study, but even a few facts reveal their vital contribution to the Church. St Nina, for instance, was instrumental in converting the Georgians to Christianity and is gratefully remembered by them as an equal to the Apostles. St Macrina was the eldest sister of a large family, and she so influenced her brothers and sisters that three of them, Basil, Gregory and Peter became bishops and were eventually canonized. All three brothers recognized their sister as their tutor in Christ, who by dedicating all her manifold gifts to the service of God helped them to grow to full spiritual stature. St Macrina was not by any means the only brilliant theologian among the deaconesses.

### Members of the clergy

In general the deaconesses attracted women of quality and the Order gave them the outlet for their desire to serve the Church. The tasks assigned to them differed considerably during the seven centuries of their Order. At first their chief purpose was to assist at the baptism of women, many of which ceremonies could not be performed by men. Later, when the practice of adult baptism became more rare, the deaconesses acquired new functions. They maintained order among women at church services, looked after the sacred vessels, and helped the bishops and priests during the administration of the sacraments.

In some churches the deaconesses read the Scriptures in public and distributed the holy gifts.

Besides these liturgical functions they were also engaged in instruction, in philanthropic work and in the care of the sick.

Most of the scholars, especially the Roman Catholics, regard the deaconesses of the Eastern churches as only possessing minor orders. They base their argument on the view that three grades of the sacred ministry

form one sacrament, and because the deaconesses were not elevated to the priesthood and episcopate their order was not the same as the diaconate for men, but ranked as one of the minor orders. Those who disagree with this view point out that deaconesses were regarded as members of the clergy. They were subject to the Bishops' Court, not to the secular tribunals. They received their subsistence from the parishes and were assigned to various churches in strictly defined numbers; so, for instance, the Cathedral of St Sophia in Constantinople had twenty deaconesses in the sixth century, and forty in the seventh. Other churches of the capital had up to ten deaconesses in each. However, the most impressive argument in favour of treating the deaconesses as ranking above the minor orders is the form of their ordination which has been preserved in many manuscripts. This rite was always performed by the bishop and its main outlines resembled that of the ordination of a deacon.

### Cultural decline

Such was briefly the place of the deaconesses in the history of the Orthodox Church. Their decline and final disappearance in the course of the twelfth century presents yet another unsolved problem. Several explanations are given: the spread of monasticism, changes in ritual, and so on. But the most important factor was undoubtedly the general cultural decline of the Byzantine Empire. At the time when the deaconesses flourished, the Empire was a highly civilized state governed by well-trained civil administrators. The status of women was well protected by law and custom, and many well-educated women were able to offer their services to the Church. The Islamic conquest arrested the growth of Byzantine civilization; the Crusaders inflicted further blows on the Eastern Christians. The pressure

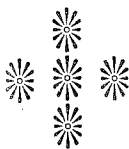
from the Oriental and Western bar-  
the barriers lowered the cultural level of  
the Empire and raised the war lords to  
the peak of political power. Under  
such changed circumstances women  
were unable to play the same role in  
the life of society, and their public  
functions were drastically curtailed.  
The outlook of Islam upon women  
as inferiors confined to domestic ser-  
vices still further unfavourably affected  
their status in the life of the Church  
in the East.

### Behind the scenes

This analysis of the decline of the  
deaconesses' order explains the desire  
to revive it which accompanied the  
rise of the social and educational stan-  
dard of women in the nineteenth and  
twentieth centuries. The pioneer in  
this field was the outstanding mission-  
ary of the Russian Church, Makary  
Glukharev (1792-1847). He was a  
prophetic man far ahead of his time  
and generation. He tried to revive the  
order of deaconesses as a missionary  
body. The ecclesiastical bureaucracy,  
suspicious of his zeal and dedication,  
presented this plan from materializ-  
ing. Another outstanding Russian  
priest, Fr Alexander Guntlevsky, also  
advocated the revival of the  
deaconesses. He intended to dedicate  
them to the works of mercy among the  
sick and the poor. Once again the  
Synod of the Russian Church stopped  
this plan (1860). On the eve of the  
Communist revolution two remark-

able women, the Grand Duchess  
Elizabeth, and the Countess of Efimov-  
sky, Abbess of Lena, again raised the  
question. At last things began to move.  
The Synod gave its preliminary appro-  
val to the project, but the Communist  
persecution of the Christians postponed  
its realization. At present there  
exists a similar desire to revive the  
Order of Deaconesses in the Greek  
Church. The political troubles which  
affect the majority of Eastern  
Christians make the restoration of the  
diaconate for women impossible for  
the time being. But the trials experi-  
enced by the Orthodox, better than  
anything else, have prepared the  
ground for this important action. The  
years of suffering and persecution have  
placed women in the front line of  
Christian defence all over the East  
and laid on them the main responsi-  
bility for the preservation of the  
Christian faith under the rule of the  
godless Communists.

Most of their work takes place be-  
hind the scenes, for it entails great  
sacrifices and often a serious danger of  
arrest and deportation. For these  
reasons the activities of these deacon-  
esses remain without proper organiza-  
tion or official recognition. Yet those  
who are familiar with the terrific  
pressure under which the Church has  
to live in Russia know well how deci-  
sive is the role of women in this  
struggle. The day will come when  
relaxation of the anti-Christian cam-  
paign will make it possible to tell the  
full story of how women have con-  
tributed to the survival of the Ortho-  
dox Church in the U.S.S.R., a story of  
heroism, endurance and sacrifice.





# Women in the Church

The subject was introduced last month by Joan Elliott and is continued in this article by the late Canon CHARLES RAVEN, sometime Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cambridge

## 1. TESTING THE FRUITS

THE DEEP SEATED PREJUDICE against the admission of women to full ministry in the Christian Church derives basically not from any logical or theological principle but from the conviction that there is something in the very nature of sex which renders a woman incapable of receiving the 'grace' of ordination. The ceremonial uncleanness associated in Scripture with menstruation, the emotional instability conventionally ascribed to hysteria regarded as a sex-linked disease, the proverbial attachment to imprisonment in the home, the judgement of women's capabilities by the application of primarily masculine tests—all these denote a tradition which still maintains much of its primitive quality.

For me, as for the majority of males, this prejudice was as a boy unquestioned, the denial of ordination was as obvious a corollary as the denial of medicine, legal or political status. Even in the matter of votes for women, many masculine supporters (and indeed some women themselves) supported it precisely because we argued that women would bring into politics a different approach and a more personal element, not because they were fully human.

But in my case at least the primary

argument for women's ordination has always been based on experience. It has been my privilege to work closely with four women each in one of the four 'departments' of religious service: the administrative, the prophetic, the mystical, and the pastoral. In planning and organizing a great campaign, in preaching and evangelism, in spiritual insight and utterance, in the care and cure of souls, these four excelled almost every one of my masculine colleagues, and convinced me that if one were loyal to the sole criterion which Jesus laid down and St Peter in the crucial case of Cornelius accepted, the test of fruits made it impossible to refuse the appropriate and sacramental recognition and that such recognition must in such cases involve not only symbolic but instrumental commissioning. Such folk, be they men or women, were God's ministers both in function and in status.

### Typical of many

The four women were typical of very many others, but, considering the prejudice already described and still strong, they were perhaps fortunate in receiving opportunities for the exercise of their gifts. For very many there mere mention of their names will be sufficient to sustain the claim that my partnership with them constrains me to make.

Lucy Gardner, the secretary and creator of the Conference on Christian Politics, Economics and Citizenship spent four years in preparation for it in the house of the Collegium (a Christian social group) in Pimlico and from it planned the production of the twelve volumes of our survey of the field; selected and convened the Commissions to compile each volume; established groups to collect and study the material all over Britain; chose and arranged the place of meeting, the choice of delegates and the hospitality and programme of the week's meetings at Birmingham, and super-

vized the publication of the Reporters of self-consciousness or of self-carried the results to America aisisplay. She was wholly transparent. I issued a condensed summary of the people who had come with a Johnson-ence on 'Life and Work' at Stockholmd and were themselves transfigured. In 1925 and the cost of the whole and yet one of the very few prophets adventure was covered by an original gift of £5000 from the Misses Daviacknowledgement by the Church to of Llandnam.

### Endlessly active

Lucy was herself a Quaker, trained by the great Lock of the C.O.S., endlessly active, with an intense concern for human relationships and a rare combination of mastery of detail with a wide range of knowledge and vision. No man could have worked her staff so hard nor exacted such loyalty and efficiency. When in 1920 she descended on us in Cambridge and demanded from my wife that I should be her assistant, she not only caused our change of residence but gave us the hardest labour of our lives. But it was immensely worthwhile — culminating in a dramatic moment on the second day of the Conference which I shall never forget.

Maude Royden, the great preacher and prophet, was condemned to exercise her unique powers of evangelism in byways and under a blaze of criticism. For mixed audiences at Student Movement Conferences or at her meeting house in Eccleston Square, she was capable of a selfless inspiration. The small, lame, soft-voiced woman could interpret the intimacies of personal religion, of social and moral problems, of the relationships of men and women, or explain the message and meaning of Christ and the significance of Christendom, with a sensitiveness and an eloquence that hardly any male preacher could equal. On the occasion when she was invited to preach at the 8.30 People's Service in Liverpool Cathedral, her native city, the building was crowded by a critical and inquisitive congregation. Few of us facing such an occasion could have avoided some

### Reality and depth

Evelyn Underhill, friend and disciple of Baron Von Hugel, poet, scholar and mystic, had a much less for harassed scope for her vocation — a combination of sensitivity from the soldanella which she saw flowering in my Surrey rectory garden to the great saints of the Catholic Church made it hard for her to limit her response to the traditional, still less to the denominational outlets permissible to her. Early in our friendship she wrote to me as 'My dear fellow heretic' and her letters, more nearly than any other influence, made me aware of the reality and depth of Catholic devotion. As a revealer of spiritual life and expert in the quiet way, a guide for Christians in quiet conference, she had few if any equals outside the 'religious orders'. When she led for me a body of clergy in retreat (and some of them were startled or even shocked), she opened to us all insights into the heavens with a gentleness of touch, a depth of sympathy and a firmness of challenge

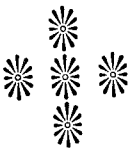
which few if any men could have equalled.

Beatrice Hankey of Walmer and Sevenocks of the 'nuts' in the First World War, and the Blue Pilgrims in the derelict areas, was, as the story of her life, *One called Help*, surely shows, a saint, a 'Mother in God'. More than anyone I have known she was 'all of a piece', natural, spontaneous, creative, an embodiment of the Pauline phrase 'in Christ'. She and the community which she had formed represented what Christendom in the twentieth century might be and disclosed a way of life authentically reflecting the quality of the New Testament.

### Blindness

These four women in their several ways guarantee for me that indeed in Christ Jesus, male and female, like Jew and Greek, can be and are One. To deny equality not only of status but of function to them is to me plainly a blindness to the facts, a sin against the Spirit.

It was interesting having arrived at this conviction, to look into the controversies about it; to study them in the history and literature of Christianity and of religion; and to discover how overwhelming becomes the verdict upon them. Even theologically it is surely evident that the universal humanity of the Christ, His body, cannot be represented by a unisexual or sex-limited Ministry.



# Women in the Church

## 4. The part being played

DURING THIS TIME OF DISCUSSION about the place of women in the ministry of the Church, it is good for us to be reminded of the part already being played by women in various kinds of ministry. In this series of articles we look at the distinctive contribution being made by some individual women in different branches of Christ's Church.

*Praying for Unity*  
Farncombe is a quiet suburb of Godalming, a gracious, residential district in Surrey. It is also one of the power centres of the contemporary movement towards Church Unity. In a spacious country house, which was once the home of Dr Somerset Ward, there live now a small community of women who have come together from different branches of the Church for the purpose of giving themselves continually to a life of prayer for Christian unity. Unique among religious communities, Farncombe was founded only two years ago and one of its pioneers was Sister Carol Graham, formerly an Anglican missionary in the Church of South India. A close friend of Sister Carol has sent this pen sketch of one whom she describes as in every way a true minister of the gospel.

The name of Carol Graham is among the best known and best loved in Christian circles throughout South India. Daughter of a Harrow schoolmaster, she first visited India with her father while she was still young, and, like many others, she was fascinated by that strangely complex country. Her plans for becoming a professional musician were given up in response to the call of India and its needs, and she returned to Andhra to work under Bishop Azariah of Dornakal. This was a diocese of villages, widely scattered in dry, arid land. Most of the Christians were poor, many of them of outcast origin, converts of the early mass movements of the twenties. Few of the women could read, and it was Carol's

far from easy task to build up Christian family life among these simple villagers. Travelling by bullock cart, or often on foot, she went from village to village, selecting the wives of pastors and teachers for training in leadership. Special courses and conferences were arranged for them, which widened their horizons and strengthened their Christian discipline, so that in time, in spite of their lack of education, groups of women were established, able to advise and guide their humbler sisters. Their influence soon made itself felt and much to strengthen the Christian community. They were especially helpful in healing the quarrels which were all too common between village families, and the bishop arranged for one of them to be present whenever the *panchayat* (village council) met to consider a case concerning a woman.

A friend who joined Carol on one of her camping expeditions describes their arrival at a village where she was expected. 'The villagers met us with garlands of marigold. We had to set down our baggage and undressed as best we could, with many faces peering in at the windows. We set up our cots with mosquito nets in the village street, to be roused at four dawn broke, the women crept one by one into the tiny church and Carol, in fluent village Telugu, told the Christmas story and led the worship.' Once she had mastered the Telugu language, she was frequently invited to conduct services and preach in village chapels too remote for a priest to visit regularly. This led the bishop to suggest that she should seek ordination as a deaconess. He foresaw that women would be accepted as leaders in the way European missionaries were accepted; so he encouraged Carol to become part of the recognized ministry of the Church and thus lead the way for Indian women to do likewise.

She was ordained deaconess at the same time as twelve deacons, and later went on to the priesthood, men, she wryly comments: 'When people tell me there is no such thing as an ordained woman in the Anglican Church, I always wonder at the moment the service began or ceased. Deaconess Carol could not be admitted to the priesthood, she exercised a very full pastoral ministry for some thirty years.'

Deaconess Carol is a many-sided and gifted person who makes her mark wherever she goes. The Church of South India, in whose service she has expended her talents, owes her a lasting debt, both in Telugu and English, she has helped and encouraged a congregation, both simple and cultured. She has frequently conducted retreats, leading devotions and addresses which have proved so 'down to earth as well as near to God.' She has a happy way of illustrating divine truth by images. Her written style is as fluent and effective as her speech. She has written a number of small books, including a life of Bishop Azariah. Her theological understanding fitted her to be closely involved in the negotiations which led to the inauguration of the Church of South India. When that Church came into existence, her skill and wisdom as an organizer proved invaluable. She moved to Bangalore and there organized one Women's Fellowship of the separate women's organizations of the four uniting Churches. This Fellowship is a living witness to the power of Christ, and exercises remarkable influence on the life of the CSI.

At the heart of the women's work is the Sisterhood, an order of dedicated women peculiar to the CSI. Again it was due to Sister Carol's imagination and initiative that certain small groups of 'deaconesses' from Anglican and Methodist Churches joined together with other

'sisters' to form this unique association of Christian men, whose lives are dedicated to the service of the Church. In the *Renewal and Advance*, their presence is mentioned with deep appreciation. Not the least tribute to Sister Carol's tact and wisdom, is the fact that a few years ago she was able to leave Bangalore and hand over all her responsibilities to her Indian colleagues, under whose guidance the Fellowship and Sisterhood continue to play an influential part in the life of the Church of South India, while she moved to Nagpur and put her experience at the service of the Anglican Church in North India.

But to those who have been privileged to know her, Sister Carol is remembered as a friend. In Bangalore, she lived with two or three Indian colleagues, at Vistranthi Nilayam (House of Peace) the headquarters of the Women's Fellowship and Sisterhood, but also used as a Guest House and Conference Centre. Here both Indians and foreigners could stay and feel at home, for the rooms were simple enough not to overawe the country-born Indian Christian, but comfortable enough for the more demanding Westerner. Sister Carol's artistic eye supervised the decorations, and under her loving care the garden blossomed with a glory of colour. Guests of many races and varied backgrounds found there a haven of peace and a home from home for Sister Carol's warm-hearted friendliness made all and sundry welcome. She is one of those to whom people naturally bring their troubles, and her ready sympathy and ripe experience make her a valuable counsellor, while her sense of fun enlivens the daily round.

Vistranthi Nilayam has come to be a veritable power house for the life of the Church. It not only runs retreats and conferences for women, but it houses groups of Church Leaders, such as the Liturgy Committee who meet there for prayer and planning. The heart of the building is little chapel, where prayers are conducted morning, midday, and evening. Visitors are conscious of an atmosphere of devotion and spiritual experience is deepened sharing in its worship. Here souls fed by the Bread of Life which is Word of God. Sister Carol, when there, acted as chaplain in but name, but though permitted to administer the Chalice in her chapel, she could not, of course, celebrate the Sacrament. In every way she has proved herself a true Minister of the Gospel and a Steward of the mysteries of Christ.

# Women in the Church

## 5. Elsie Chamberlain

Britain, because of the vast audience her work reaches in the Religious Broadcasting Department of the BBC, Elsie Chamberlain is admittedly an exceptional woman. One of the most exceptional things about her is that anyone meeting her is aware immediately that here is a woman who does not expect to have to struggle to assert her equality with men. She clearly is accepted on her own merits as a member of an interdenominational team of clergy working in one of the most important jobs in the Church—the job of interpreting the Christian faith to an unseen but vast congregation, of whom the majority are non-Church-going. In proportion to the gigantic task of communicating the gospel in terms which the 'outsider' can understand, the discussion of whether it should be a man or a woman communicating it seems of very little importance. Indeed, if the Church is to present the Faith with any effectiveness and normality to the world, then Miss Chamberlain believes that it is essential that it be presented by men and women together.

That word 'normality' expresses, significantly, a certain quality about the whole of Miss Chamberlain's ministry, which is most reassuring to any enquirer about how the ordination of women works out in practice in Britain. Though clearly she is a woman of exceptional gifts, there is something so very normal about the whole way in which her life's pattern has worked out that no one could ever regard this woman minister as a freak or an eccentric.

She began her career in a thoroughly feminine manner—as a student of music, art, and dress-designing. Only later did she decide to study theology, and that at first only part-time, to see if she could cope with academic work after doing more practical things for several years. But in her final year as a theological student at King's College, London, she was attending an SCM Conference at Annandale, where in a conversation overheard by chance at a lunch-table she first became aware

IN ALMOST EVERY DISCUSSION IN Britain concerning the ordination of women, someone supporting the cause sooner or later will say, 'Well, look at Elsie Chamberlain and all that her ministry has accomplished', and the opponent will reply, 'Well, yes, but she is exceptional'.

One of the best known of all the women Congregational ministers in

# Women in the Church

6. Mary Ely Lyman

nary in New York, where eventually she became the first woman to be called to a professorship.

Her own years of study at Union had been highly distinguished and as a result of them she won a Travelling Fellowship to continue the study of theology at Cambridge, and was eventually awarded a doctorate by examination at the University of Chicago. At this time she did not seek ordination. Her first appointments were as teacher of religion in undergraduate colleges where she felt that her position would be stronger if she were not ordained. The ordained lecturer in religion was, she felt, often suspected by other departments of having a kind of vested interest in his new truth. She first taught in the Department of Religion at Vassar College, and after her marriage to Dr Eugene Lyman, Professor of the Philosophy of Religion at the Union Theological Seminary, she went to live in New York and taught at Barnard College.

When one of the professors at Union became ill, she was asked to act as a substitute, on a very temporary and tentative basis. Each year she was doubtful whether she would be asked to continue teaching, but each year so many students registered for her courses that she was kept on as an instructor until the time when her husband retired. Then, although she was fifteen years younger than he, she was expected automatically to retire too. But the family moved to Sweetbriar College in Virginia, and there she became Dean and Professor of Religion until 1950.

After her husband's death, Dr Henry Pliney Van Dusen, who had now become President of the Union Theological Seminary, invited Dr Lyman back on to the staff there. She thought he was inviting her just to teach in the Bible Department. At the convocation when she was appointed, an announcement was made that someone had been appointed to the Jessup

of the vacancy that was her first ministry. She heard someone talking about a Congregational woman minister, the Rev. Muriel Paulden, who was in charge of a church in a really tough dock area of Liverpool. She was running not only a church, but also a training centre for Sunday school teachers and day school teachers who wanted to teach scripture, and doing a vast amount of welfare work among very needy people. She needed an assistant, but it had to be someone prepared for really hard work.

For Elsie Chamberlain, who had grown up in Congregationalism, there was nothing odd about the idea of a woman minister, and now it seemed to her perfectly normal that she should offer to go as assistant minister to Muriel Paulden. So, in 1939, she was called to the church there, and thus came under the influence of one of the finest teachers and hardest working ministers she has ever met.

Then, in time, she herself was ordained, and later was called to be the minister of the Congregational church in Friern Barnet. Her ministry there could hardly be called a 'normal' one, for it covered four and a half years of war-time, and a life in war-time London was not normal for anyone, but during those years she learned much about the pastoral work of the ministry and the vital importance of caring for people. This pastoral gift was especially valuable during her period of service as a chaplain in the Royal Air Force, where she discovered that men as well as women found it helpful to come to a woman padre to talk over many of their personal, and particularly their matrimonial, problems.

It was after this that she married, but in this event, too, the exceptional was mingled with the normal! She married an Anglican vicar and went to live in his parish at Hampton. While she was living there, a vacancy occurred at a Congregational church in Richmond, and to Elsie Chamberlain again it seemed quite within the realm of normal possibility that she

might be called to minister there. 'I haven't yet tested the reactions of this church to the idea of a woman minister,' said the Moderator. 'Whatever you do, don't!' replied Elsie Chamberlain. 'They will start imagining all kinds of tremendous problems! Just let me go there as a supply until they make up their minds whom to invite!'

So she went there and preached, and they immediately invited her to be their minister. None of the expected problems arose, even though the minister of the Congregational church combined with her charge there the care of a home, a share in her husband's work among the women of his parish, and an ever-increasing programme of speaking at various women's gatherings through the country, which she insists on treating as serious occasions for Bible study, expecting both her audience and herself to make adequate and intelligent preparation.

Well known as she had become, it is not surprising that eventually in 1950 she was appointed to a part-time post on the staff of the BBC, which meant that she had to find a co-minister to share her work at Richmond. When the proposition was put before the congregation, one of the younger deacons suggested that a man be invited to act as 'Miss Chamberlain's assistant'! But, actually, a very happy collegialship was worked out between Miss Chamberlain and the Rev. E. Stanford, who eventually became full-time Education Secretary of the British Council of Churches, when Elsie Chamberlain was appointed to full-time work at the BBC.

So, again, it did not seem extraordinary that she should be called to be Chairman of the Congregational Union for the year 1956-1957—not because she was a woman, but because her gifts as minister, preacher, pastor, and evangelist led the church to desire her leadership in their councils as much as they would have done had she been a man. And surely this is the most normal response of all.

PEOPLE SOMETIMES ARGUE THAT, although ordination has been open to women in some Churches now for almost half a century, the scarcity of distinguished women theologians indicates some lack of ability or aptitude for this kind of scholarship. It is surely as pertinent to argue that, in view of the imminence of the hurdles which any woman in the scholastic world has to overcome, it is amazing that there are any women theologians at all! One of the most outstanding of them is Dr Mary Ely Lyman, but it was almost by accident rather than by design that she came on to the staff of the Union Theological Semi-

Chair as Professor of English Bible. Dr Lyman wondered who that person would be, as she would be working under him. Imagine her amazement, therefore, when on the way to lunch that same day, Dr Tillich said to her, 'We do hope you will say "Yes" and accept the Chair.' She was so startled that she almost fell down the stairs! So she became the first woman professor at the Union Theological Seminary.

It was at this time that she decided to seek ordination. Without it, she would have been the only lay member of the senior faculty at Union. So she asked her Church to admit her to the full-ministry, and in 1949 was ordained in Massachusetts. On her return to Union in 1950, she became the first Dean of Women Students and began to understand the difficulties of young women who were being rejected for any significant post in the ministry simply because they were women. She writes, 'It did not matter how good a record a girl had at Union. She might stand at the head of her class academically. She might be, as one clearly was, the best preacher in her class. She could be placed only in tiny parishes for life. The denominations, with few exceptions, will ordain her, but the parishes will not accept her unless they cannot command a man. This injustice weighed heavily on my heart.'

Of her own work and influence, one of Dr Lyman's students writes: 'Dr Mary Ely Lyman is without question the most influential teacher in my life. Not only is she a highly competent Biblical scholar, but one felt the authenticity of the teacher who had weighed the truths and measured them in the privacy of her own soul. Her teaching was quickened by a keen sense of humour and homely illustrations. Rather than imposing her ideas, we sensed that she was a humble seeker along with her students. It was this quality that evoked amazing response. No person, no idea, was too insignificant for her to treat it with respect and discerning insight.'

Although Dr Lyman has never had a local parish, she has felt called to preaching ministry as well as to tutoring. She has spent much time counselling young women who plan to go into the ministry. She has all had a great deal of influence with the men clergy and is often found at prominent Church committees as the only woman. For her, one of her most important committees was the World Council of Churches' Commission on the 'Life and Work of Women in the Church', as it was called when it was first formed in Amsterdam in 1948. Now it is named more properly 'The Commission on the Co-operation of Men and Women in Church, Family and Society', for, as Dr Lyman herself says, 'If we have learned anything, we have learned that the co-operation of men is essential to any gains for women.'

# Women in the Church

## 7. Margit Sahlin

IT IS HARD TO IMAGINE WHEN ONE meets and talks with Dr Margit Sahlin that her ordination to the priesthood in the Lutheran Church in Sweden has made her, and the eight other women who have now also been ordained, the centre of very bitter controversy which spread not only throughout Sweden but to Britain, too, because the Church of Sweden is in communion with the Anglican Church. Despite the controversy, Margit Sahlin is very much a woman of peace. Gentle in manner, slender in build, and very feminine in dress, she speaks

quietly but with deep conviction about how God called her, even at the cost of controversy, into the sacred ministry of the priesthood.

At first, when, having studied for a doctorate in Romance languages and having written a thesis on the French carols of the medieval Church, she decided to go on to study theology, she had no thought at all of ordination. In fact, even the idea of any full-time Church work seemed impossible, for the Church of Sweden gave no kind of position to women. There was a Deaconess Order, but it was concerned with social service. There was no place for the woman theologian, and women's meetings in the church were mostly of the sewing-guild type.

Eager to inspire women to take a much more active part in church life, Margit Sahlin began work in a mission within the Diocese of Stockholm. She founded the Diocesan Board of Women's Church Work, and later the Central Council of Women's Church Work, through which she encouraged women to try to find ways of reaching women who were outside the Church. She was particularly concerned about the many women of intellectual gifts who had left the Church altogether, because they felt that its whole attitude to women was an archaic one. Ever since women in Sweden had won their full emancipation, they had been drifting away from the Church, so that, though there were several outstanding women playing a full part in society and in politics, there were scarcely any in the Church.

Dr Sahlin saw the need for training women for church work and began to search for a training centre. After much prayer, and with the gifts of many friends, she eventually founded a retreat house, known as St Catherine's Conference and Training Centre, where she began to organize courses. As principal of this house, she became a well known both as a preacher and a scholar, and was invited to hold courses not only for church groups, but also for many secular organizations wanting to know

more about the Christian faith and its relation to everyday life.

Meanwhile, the Government of Sweden had decided to remove by State Law all discrimination against women in every profession, including the priesthood of the State Church. This meant that the Church Assembly had to decide whether it would now admit women to the ordained ministry. At first, at the Assembly of 1957, it entirely refused the suggestion. Within the following year the Minister of Ecclesiastical Affairs called a special Assembly specifically to consider this issue. This Assembly, prompted by those who supported the ordination of women, did agree, by a small majority, that there was no valid theological objection, though there were those who very firmly resisted this idea.

On hearing the decision of the Assembly, Margit Sahlin began to consider offering herself for ordination, but, realizing that such an action would cause very serious division in the Church, she decided to wait before making a definite offer. Meanwhile, at St Catherine's Retreat House, a chapel had been built and the Archbishop of Sweden was invited to come and consecrate it. The secular Press, who had all along taken a very great interest in this development in the Church's life, began to ask, 'But who is to preach there in the chapel? And who is to be the priest at its altar?' Dr Sahlin was interviewed in a broadcast concerning this chapel which women had built, but which had no women to minister there, and she was asked outright, 'Why don't you offer for ordination?' She replied, 'For the sake of the peace of the Church I have refrained, but there is no peace, so perhaps the moment has come.' These words became the banner headlines of the Press the next day, and Margit Sahlin saw again and again those words printed before her—confirming her own conviction, reached after long prayer and thought—that the moment had come. So, in the chapel of her own retreat house, the Archbishop ordained

her; and on the same day, two other women were ordained by the Bishops of Stockholm and Harnosand. Their priesthood is exactly the same as that of men, in status and function, though, as women, they bring their characteristic gifts to their vocation.

There are now nine women priests in the Church of Sweden, and, although they have met with some considerable opposition, especially from some of their fellow clergy, their ministry is approved by many. There is no doubt that the ordination of women has created a revival of interest in church life throughout Sweden. Though the interest was aroused at first by the publicity given to the controversy, it has been strengthened by the growing conviction that the Church is really courageous enough to move with the times in this rapidly changing world. On occasion, when Dr Sahlin has been appointed to preach, some neighbouring clergy have prevented their congregations from going to hear her; but large numbers of non-churchgoers have come out of curiosity and have often remained to hear the word of God. For she has the gift of interpreting the Gospel in contemporary terms and of opening the ears of ordinary men and women to truths which before they had found meaningless.

# WOMEN

## Hannelotte Reiffer

# IN THE CHURCH

ONE OF THE MOST INTERESTING developments in the ministry of women in the Church has been in Germany, where, in the crisis situations of the war, new patterns of ministry became essential for the Church and have survived to these days. Most notable of all has been the work of the German *pastorinnen* and *vikarinnen*, of whom 591 were listed in 1963, 267 of them working in East Germany. It was Martin Luther himself who once said that in times of emergency it is better that a woman should preach than that the Word of God should be without a preacher. When, during the war, German clergy were compelled to go into the forces and the training of new clergy ceased, women took over the care of the parishes, a care which has continued especially in East Germany, where the lack of male clergy remains acute and where very courageous women have undertaken the care of many parishes.

Among them is Hannelotte Reiffer, who now lives on the Polish frontier, though her home was originally in Bonn, where her father was a schoolmaster. Her ordination into the ministry must have been one of the strangest ceremonies ever. It took place in secret under the strong electric lights of the concentration camp at Sachsenhausen near Berlin. Prises Kurt Scharf in Berlin gave to both Hannelotte Reiffer and her colleague, Ilse Hörter, a full ordination into the ministry of the Confessional Church, in recognition of all that these two women and others had done during the years of the intense 'church struggle' in Germany. Pastorin Reiffer had been in charge of a parish in Southern Brandenburg. There she cared not only for her congregation, but especially looked after the wives of those ministers who were away in the forces, and became greatly concerned about the fate of the Jews under the Nazi tyranny, doing all she could to rescue them.

After the war, she went to take charge of a desolate parish in the Oderbruch. The struggles in this dis-



back to continue her ministry to the flock in Macao. For this action he has been widely criticized, but for the Christians in Macao it meant that during four long years of isolation their souls were nourished, as the symbols of God's grace were made available to them regularly in the hands of a woman priest.

At the end of the war, the outcry and embarrassment created by the news of her ordination to the priesthood led the Rev. Florence Lee to 'resign' her priest's orders, and now she serves as a deaconess once again. She is now Dean of women students at the U.T.C. in Canton, where she trained. One, who knows her well writes concerning her, 'She is one of God's company of saints, humble, devoted, fearless, in the face of opposition and danger, one whose whole life is given to the proclamation of the gospel, and to caring for those to whom she is called to minister. She is the last person to wish to be the centre of controversy. She is just the sort of person one can conceive of God calling to the fullest ministry.'

The other Chinese deaconess in the same diocese, Jane Huang, is the Headmistress of St Thomas' School and in charge of St Thomas' parish in a vast resettlement area in Hong Kong. For her, too, Bishop Hall sees urgent need of being ordained to the priesthood, though it is a different kind of urgency. Her parish is not isolated as Florence Lee's was in Macao, and sacraments are regularly provided by school chaplains and priests from other churches, but the bishop argues that this very fact does serious harm to the true nature of the sacrament by making it appear not as something that the priest and people in a parish do together, each with his proper share in it, but something done by a priest for the people.

'For thirty years,' writes the bishop, 'the Diocese has worked steadily towards the principle of one priest—one congregation: working, praying and worshipping together. It was in accordance with this principle that Jane Huang was appointed "minister-in-charge" of St Thomas' church and parish, which are growing out of the school where she is headmistress. In seven years under her leadership, the congregation, still worshipping in school premises, has grown from under 100 to nearly 500, not through stunts or popular preaching, but by loving service, sympathy, wisdom, prayer and faithful teaching.'

# WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

## 10. Monica Storrs

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE world, in Western Canada, women have pioneered in missions of an unusual kind. The vast areas to be served by the Church in that land have given great scope to women of pioneer calibre, especially newly settled parts of Manitoba and British Columbia. One most enterprising venture has been the Sunday School Caravan Mission, founded more than thirty years ago by Miss Eva Hasell, and still carried on by herself and her large team of teachers and drivers in more than eighteen dioceses of the West. And out of this essentially pioneering work have developed several areas of more settled ministry, the first steps on the way to organized parish life.

The first of these, called St Faith's Mission, Swan River, was started by Miss Margarita Fowler in 1929, who was herself licensed as a Bishop's Messenger in the Diocese of Brandon. She was gradually joined by a group of younger Messengers, who, working largely in pairs, travelled by car over wide areas of the thinly settled country, and gradually formed small out-stations all in close fellowship with the mother house, fulfilling all the church functions open to lay readers in England. Later in the same year, Miss Monica Storrs was authorized by Bishop Rix of Caladonia diocese (B.C.) to make a start in the northern part of the Peace River Block of British Columbia.

This great tract of thinly settled and largely forest land was rapidly developing into a new 'homestead' country, covering about four thousand square miles, and lying immediately east of the Rocky Mountains. Its centre, a tiny settlement called Fort St John, consisted of two log stores, a small log hotel, a policeman's house and a log school containing about forty children drawn from miles around. The 'homesteads' were free grants (160 acres) of virgin land (rough forest and prairie), which the settlers with colossal effort and courage were clearing, breaking, and turning into farms. There were no roads or bridges, nor of course any form of mechanization, except one government ferry across the broad Peace River. About 30 per cent of the settlers came from the United Kingdom, the rest from Eastern Canada, the United States and many European countries. There was at first no hospital or doctor, and the nearest railway station was 120 miles south of the river. Altogether very upspoil country!

Miss Hasell reconnoitred this district (on her feet), and found there was no church building or work of any Denomination. So, back at home, she visited St Christopher's College, Blackheath, where Miss Storrs was training, and spoke to her about it.

Monica Storrs is described by a friend as a 'brilliant meteor', who, even in her younger days in the comfortable Rochester Deanery conveyed

the impression that life was a tremendous adventure. A born pioneer, with the temperament of an explorer, she was at once attracted by the possibilities of service in those remote Canadian wilds. She agreed to go and her brothers remarked: 'Now Monica will be perfectly happy. She will be able to be as uncomfortable as she likes.'

West she went and lived at first with one of the homesteaders, in the wild, partially cultivated country. She travelled far and wide on horseback (woe betide the traveller if his horse lost the trail), visiting the scattered families, whose farms were usually some ten miles apart from each other. Travelling in summer was exhausting enough, but in winter there was real danger and most women hibernated. Not so Miss Storrs, however. The families in the lonely homesteads gave her a warm welcome and wherever she went she distributed Sunday school magazines, held classes for the children and conducted simple services in the log homes. At first no other church was represented, though a year later a Roman Catholic priest arrived. So Monica conducted services on 'ecumenical' lines.

Within two years she was joined by a companion from England, and a succession of workers followed, known as Companions of the Peace. Next a large log house was built with a little chapel to be the home of the Mission—and because this small group of women were at that time the only spinsters known in the country, some-one facetiously called their home the 'Abbey', and this of course became its permanent and much-loved name. This little group of Companions at no time numbered more than four—they were all volunteers, but a generous grant for maintenance of the Abbey and for honorariums was supported throughout the years by the Fellowship of the Maple Leaf in England.

A friend who visited the Abbey during the thirties recalls the excitement of life in the backwoods,

'Monica's spiritual home'. 'It certainly was a rough life—asceticism sweetened by Bach records and Monica's wit and her racy comments on all her many interests, from theology to a dear neighbour whose hobby was horse-riding'. And all the time this little band of devoted women was keeping alight the flame of church life without the help of a priest. Without them there would have been no services, except burial services which had formerly been conducted by a reluctant policeman or game warden. After the arrival of the Companions one of them was always asked to conduct funeral services, which took place in the settlers' own houses with the burial on their own land. These services gave a wonderful opportunity for wider witness: everybody from miles around attended, an address was always expected, and so they afforded a splendid opportunity of proclaiming Christ and the resurrection.

Meanwhile, new schools were being built in the outlying districts and these became available for services, meetings, Sunday school classes, scout and guide troops, and so on. An increasingly vigorous Christian community had come into existence. But still there were no sacraments. So it was a great joy to all when the Fellowship of the West at Montreal decided to adopt the North Peace as a Mission District, and sent out a Mission Priest, the first of a splendid series to be maintained by them, until after many fresh developments, the Mission District became a self-supporting parish, later divided into three under its own parish priests.

But it was Monica Storrs and her companions who first took the Gospel to these remote areas and built up a virile congregation. The Abbey is still kept as a chapel and occasional services are held there. The Companions of the Peace are peacefully superannuated to less romantic forms of service. They themselves are thankful to God for having allowed them to build something into the spiritual foundations of this great North Land.

## PART II

### Introductory note on the present position

Since the war, and especially during the years 1963-7, there has been much discussion of the position of women in the Church and of the possibility of their ordination to the full ministry of Word and Sacrament. Most Reformed and many Lutheran Churches (including the episcopal Church of Sweden) have admitted women to the ministry. The World Council of Churches published a pamphlet, 'Concerning the Ordination of Women', in 1964 and delegates to the Conference on Church and Society were urged to study the matter. Even within the Roman Catholic Church pressure is being brought to bear on the hierarchy for a drastic reconsideration of women's position in the Church.

In this country the Church of Scotland admitted women to the eldership in 1966 and is now considering whether to ordain them. The Methodist Conference of 1966 voted by a large majority that there is no insuperable theological reason why women should not be ordained. Their deaconesses already play a considerable part in the leadership of their community and in some instances have sole pastoral charge of a congregation.

Meanwhile the Archbishops of Canterbury and York set up a Commission to consider the whole question of 'Women and Holy Orders'. Their Report, published in 1966, moved considerably in public interest, probably than the Commission had expected. While in itself inconclusive it is known that most members of the Commission hold the view that there are no sound theological reasons why women should not be ordained to the priesthood, but that it is nevertheless inexpedient to take such a step at the present time. Two debates led in July, to a majority vote for the resolution that there are no conclusive theological reasons why women should not be ordained to the priesthood, but that the majority of the House of Clergy having voted against this the resolution was not carried. However, a Working Party has been set up to make recommendations; representatives of the Church of England are meeting with representatives of the Methodist Church to discuss the matter in view of hoped for union; and the question will be studied by the Anglican bishops at the Lambeth Conference in 1968.

This, therefore, is a time when Christians everywhere are called to consider the matter. The following Essay Orders' is a clear statement of the 'Case for' as seen by one member of the Commission. When read in conjunction with the preceding short biographical sketches it surely suggests that the Church has much to gain and nothing to lose by opening the doors of the priesthood to women.

# The case for the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood

by K. M. Baxter

The essence of the argument for thinking it is now right for the Church to go forward and to ordain women to the priesthood is based on the conviction that this is a part of what is involved in adapting the forms of the church's ministry to the situation of the time. It is involved, that is, in a true *aggiornamento*. For it is a personal temptation for the church to identify itself with a particular way of ordering society, or with a particular metaphysic, or with a particular cosmology, which then becomes obsolete. It becomes the continual duty of the church to be on its guard and to keep itself free in relation to what is obsolescent and merely transitory, and to strip itself of dying attitudes that have become attached to it through the accidents of the historical process. And today, as at no previous time, it has laid on it the urgent task of adapting the forms of its ministry to the needs of the contemporary world. The social environment in which the church has now to do its work is as different as possible from that of the first century or of the middle ages and the Reformation. To the church fathers, as to Dr Johnson, the proposition that women are inferior to men had all the force of a self-evident axiom. For modern western society it is no longer self-evident. In consequence the movement for feminine emancipation has now opened to women many professions that were once rigidly closed to them and were regarded as a male citadel. Women are doctors, lawyers, accountants, university professors,

mayors, diplomats, cabinet ministers, and members of the House of Lords. Their admission to these professions was at one time regarded with distaste and fear. It is now accepted as natural and right. The more widely this acceptance is diffused, the more anomalous appears the continued exclusion of women from the ordained ministry of the Church. If the exclusion is to remain, at least it ought to be given some justification which carries conviction. On the face of it, there is no apparent reason why a person, on the sole ground of having been born female, should be debarred from a pastoral function and office for which she believes she has the inward calling, the natural ability and capacity, and even the professional training.

The argument so stated may look feminist and therefore secular in spirit. It does not however, depend on the assumption found in some feminist writers, that men and women are really wholly identical in their essential humanity, and that masculinity and femininity are mere accidents, external characteristics imposed by social environment, which individuals may overcome in asserting their personal freedom. Nor does it presuppose that the ministry does not belong to a divinely given order within the church and may therefore be treated on a level with any lay profession. The argument presupposes that the difference between the sexes is not one upon which there can be based the difference between capacity and incapacity for ordination. Just as men are not *ipso facto* capable of ordination by being male, so also women ought not to be declared incapable by the mere fact of being female. Just as there are many men without the gifts and qualifications which would make ordination appropriate, so also there are some women with these gifts and qualifications who would be very appropriately ordained to the priesthood if this were held to be possible and right. There is no dispute that there are many women who for one reason or another would be unsuitable for

ordination. The sole question at issue is whether this bar applies to all members of the female sex.

These considerations eliminate entirely the argument that women are unfitted to be leaders in the way that a parish priest is expected to be; or that 'women are too emotional, too touchy, too deficient in personality and drive'. No generalisation about women is universally true. There are many men, including a large number who have been ordained, in whom the same frailties could be found.

*Mrs Baxter then refers to the familiar arguments against their ordination—traditional and biblical—and argues that none of these is decisive. She continues:*

The priesthood is sought now because some people believe that some women are 'truly called'. These women already perform a ministry of reconciliation in Christ's name, but they ask for the grace of orders to strengthen their ministry. They need to be able to speak, with the full authority of the Church, the word of God in absolutism; to preach the word of God, and to be able to consecrate bread and wine to be the spiritual food of the family of God, in the given power of the Sacrifice of Christ. They can, they do, reconcile and feed souls, without this grace, but their ministry is weakened and they themselves suffer through lack of this assurance of the Church's authorisation. They know that men, quite ordinary men, are strengthened for service by the grace of ordination.

Another reason why women ask for ordination now is that they believe the constantly re-iterated assertion that the clergy are too few to serve God in his Church as he should be served. Women offer their help, but if it is to be real help, it must be on equal terms or the burdens cannot be shared. This is not to say that a woman priest's priesthood would be identical with that of a man. It would, as in all other shared tasks, be complementary. But the training, the level of professional competence, the line of respon-

sibility, and (since we are *all* worldlings) the status, must be equal. There is no way of achieving equal and shared responsibility except by accepting full interchangeability of function. This has been proved over and over again by the preference for a curate rather than a woman parish worker 'because a curate can "take services"'. That, in the event, a woman's priesthood might prove to be exercised more in pastoral, while a man's was in liturgical, offices, is perfectly possible. Women seek ordination now because they wish to follow what they profoundly believe to be a vocation to the priesthood at a time when the Church asserts that it is critically short of priests.

The arguments against the ordination of women are indeed based upon Scripture and tradition. But Scripture requires interpretation and tradition is the reflection in the social pattern of those of the interpreters' views which have gained acceptance at a given moment in history. Until this century, scriptural interpretation and the formation of the consequent tradition has for the most part been in masculine hands, and those, almost exclusively, of ordained clergy. It is therefore hardly surprising that (since it was also men who set down the word of the Lord as it came to them) the interpretation and the tradition should have been in favour of male government in society generally and religion in particular.

The question arises, why has this been so? Why has the Word and its interpretation been entrusted solely to men? The answer of course ultimately is 'we don't know'. When the Word of God became flesh he entrusted himself solely to a woman, a mystery at least equally impenetrable, for once from a male would have been no more miraculous birth is accepted, birth But, practically, women were for centuries so deeply involved in the maternal duties, child-bearing and home-making, that their life had to be limited to these duties. This limita-

tion was inevitable so long as the only route to survival in a sparsely populated country lay in the rising fertility of the race. Judaism, in rejecting the cults which allowed women any authority was no doubt taking its proper route to survival as a nation under constant threat from foreign attack or infiltration.

A great gulf yawns between such a society and the interpretation its way of life would necessarily impose upon the practical relationship of the sexes, and our own urban society and the place of women within it. Much has already been discarded from Biblical modes of worship and the Biblical social pattern. The priestly caste, the legalistic ritual, the spiritual primacy of the first-born male; all these have long disappeared, at least from Anglican Christianity. The paternalism remains however; and with it the desire to retain leadership for the male. This desire is shared by most men and many women; but not by all of either sex. Conservatives dislike change and the Church of England is conservative. Yet the Church of England does accept change. Its priesthood is no longer celibate. Priests are fathers now in fact as well as in title. Anglicans have accepted contraceptive methods of family planning, and no Anglican can legitimately claim it to be a religious duty to have an unlimited number of children. Even in the ordinary family the Father-image has lost much of its remote authoritarianism and is being replaced by the image of parenthood which is one of partnership in equality. Setting aside all questions of laboratory techniques for the production of human life, since the impact of such techniques, though profound, is unlikely to have immediate influence on family life, yet already, in the world outside the home, the necessity for partnership rather than dominance increases with every advance in the education of young people and with every invention which, rather than limiting the need for specifically 'male' or 'female' attributes, demands that both male and

female co-operate in creating our complex environment. The Church must look forward not back in the matter of sex relationships unless it really wants all its wives to be pillars of salt. It will be almost as difficult to persuade women of the necessity for partnership as it will be to persuade men, for the conditioning to the present mode has been continuous and on the whole successful, but (in words submitted to the Commission in evidence by the Anglican Group for the Ordination of Women to the Historic Ministry of the Church):

'Women are fully human beings: male and female members of the human species are two significant orientations of one human kind.

'Women are, and have been from the beginning, admitted as full members of the Christian Church: as members of the Body of Christ they severally and together share in his prophetic and priestly ministry in the life and work of society as well as in the organised life of the Church.

'While women are excluded from Holy Orders the ordained ministry of the Church is "lame": it is enriched by the experience of men—as men, husbands and fathers; it is lacking the experience of women—as women, wives and mothers. Holy Orders are not truly representative of the Body of Christ.

'Women have been debarred from Holy Orders through the Christian centuries because of traditional custom but Christian custom may be varied as circumstances demand. The responsible part now played by women in all the offices and functions of our society constitute such changed circumstances. Since the new understanding of partnership between men and women in society and in the family has come about, at least in part, under Christian influence, it is now imperative for the Church to take significant action so that the new possibilities may make for the renewal of Church and society, both in this country and

throughout the world. Thus, the Church of England should take this decisive step in leading the Christian Church as a whole into that renewal which is essential for unity in holiness and in truth. Only so could the Church of England proclaim to the world its conviction that the new situation is God, Holy Spirit, leading the Church and society into new birth. Only by such renewal will the Church be able to undertake her task of ministry to men and women in all their new offices, roles and functions in society and in their new partnership in the family.'

Yet it may be that the real point at issue in the question of ordination is not one of sex relationship at all. Is it not possible that the whole of the debate about women as priests comes from a misapprehension of the rôle of the priest? Priesthood is not a rôle of domination. It is a ministry. A vocation to be in command, though priests must be clear channels of an authority not their own; they are not called as 'men born to be King' but as 'men for others'. Women are as capable of providing this service as men are, without themselves becoming dominant. It may well be that in a new concept of lay ministry most women (like most men) could find acceptable fields of service in ordained ministries other than the priesthood. A great deal of the work of a priest is pastoral and requires the gifts traditionally associated with women's gifts. It would be easy to agree that, in their child-bearing decade, women were not available as active parish priests; but it becomes increasingly difficult to defend a position where women, solely on the grounds of sex and without any consideration whatever of their social, intellectual, or spiritual gifts or the circumstances of their life, are debarred from serving wherever those gifts can be of most use.

To attempt to fight this battle on the arguments of temperament, or intelligence, or tenacity of purpose, or the depth of spiritual gifts, is sheer

absurdity. Women are no more touchy than men, no more easily despondent, no more prone to slander or silly quarrelling; no less capable of endurance. They are as prone to all vices, as susceptible of all heroisms as men are. They can be as useful as men in all professions if given the necessary training and if entrusted with the necessary responsibility to test that training. All public skills need their appropriate education and the appropriate education for public service has for centuries been available predominantly to royal women. But among educated women there have been not many, but always a few, who have believed themselves to have been truly called to the priesthood, but who, because of the certainty of rejection, have turned their energies to other channels. They minister, but their ministry is maintained because they are denied the grace of ordination. It may indeed be held by some that ordination itself is a relic of a 'magical' view of priesthood. One of the greatest difficulties facing those who press for a clear definition of what ordination is. There is a clear relation between ecclesiastical office and spiritual power. Not all those who are appointed to the office show evidence of the power and there are many of high spiritual power who hold no office. There is evidence that the grace of ordination is a reality of experience for some men, though others see a danger in the individualising of grace apart from its relationship to community. Some of the deepest understanding women have received in this debate has come from men who, re-

membering the access of strength their priesting gave them, recognise the deprivation women suffer in being refused ordination for service. The experience may be regarded as identical with the access of confidence experienced by those who attain full professional status and are received among their peers, as doctors, lawyers, or teachers. Or it can be dismissed as just the satisfaction of gaining desired membership of an 'in-group'. But however it is described, ordination is the rule of the Church for its clergy. It is thought to confer some gift which helps them to serve the Church. It does confer the right to practise the office, and the potentiality to receive the power of grace to serve. It is therefore understandable that women who seek to share in this service should ask for the help they think men receive from their ordination.

Nor is this service to be envisaged as purely towards the laity. The present alleged discontent experienced by some of the clergy will not be alleviated until there is achieved a real sense of human partnership in the extremely hard ministry of the Church, without false distinctions of greater and less, male or female, bond or free. If it could even begin to practise this partnership, the Church might experience the birth of that new creature (a live, loving, faithful, Christian community) towards which Christians are undoubtedly groaning and travelling at this hour. But it cannot be accomplished by women alone, nor by clergy alone, nor by any separatist movement or lay group. It must be a willed co-operation free of fear and irradiated by hope.