

Agreed Statement of the Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue of Canada on the Experience of the Ministries of Women in Canada

Introduction

Great mutual understanding has been achieved in ecumenical dialogue between the Anglican and the Roman Catholic communions. This mutual understanding impelled Pope John Paul II and Archbishop Robert Runcie in their visit a year ago to say, "We here solemnly recommit ourselves and those we represent to the restoration of visible unity and full ecclesial communion in the confidence that to seek anything less would be to betray Our Lord's intention for the unity of his people".¹ At the same time, they urged our two communions not to be "unrealistic about the difficulties facing our dialogue at the present time." And they continued, "The question and practice of the admission of women to the ministerial priesthood in some Provinces of the Anglican communion prevents reconciliation between us even where there is otherwise progress towards agreement in faith on the meaning of the eucharist and the ordained ministry."²

Yet they urged those working for visible unity of our communions "not to abandon either their hope or work for unity," and noted, "While we ourselves do not see a solution to this obstacle, we are confident that through our engagement with the matter our conversations will in fact help to deepen and enlarge our understanding."³

It is in this spirit of realism and of hope that the Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue of Canada offers this reflection on the experience of the ministries of women in Canada. Our aim is to contribute toward overcoming all that prevents reconciliation between us. We have set

ourselves a twofold task in this agreed statement: to survey the various ministries of women as they have evolved in our two communions in Canada, and to consider the present state of our Canadian theological reflection on the role of women in the Church. We intend this discussion to assist Anglicans and Roman Catholics who are carrying on ecumenical dialogue here in Canada and in other parts of the world. Since we are aware that in many respects our Canadian cultural context contributes distinctively both to the practice of women in ministry and to theological reflection on their role in the Church, we wish to pay special attention to that context. We do so with the expectation that reflection on our experience of women in ministries in Canada may help to show a way past our present disagreements and differences.

Canadian women have offered a wide range of Christian service in both our communions, and in general it has been experienced positively. An important dimension of their apostolate has naturally been "in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life" and "in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations."⁴ Here their contribution has inevitably changed as the place of women in the family and in the world has changed. Women have also long served in more specifically ecclesiastical contexts, for instance, as religious, Christian teachers, fund-raisers, administrators, providers of hospitality, theological scholars, liturgical leaders, and pastors. Here too in recent years there have been changes in the roles and expectations of women. Some have favoured such changes, and some have not. There have also

1. John Paul II and Robert Runcie, "Common Declaration [2 October 1989]," *Origins* 19 (1989-90) 316-17.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 317.

3. *Ibid.*

4. Vatican II, *Lumen gentium*, in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott (New York: Guild, 1966), #31.

been pressures to promote and pressures to resist the admission of women to additional contexts of leadership, including, for Roman Catholics, the priesthood, and, for Canadian Anglicans, the episcopate.

In referring to the service offered by women, Anglicans are more likely to speak of the "ministries" of women, Roman Catholics of the "apostolate" of women. In this document we use both these terms, mindful that the word *ministerium* was not often used among Roman Catholics to include lay service before the *motu proprio* of Paul VI, *Ministeria quaedam*, in 1972. Sometimes we follow his usage and use "ministry" to refer to some forms of lay service. But in doing so we intend no collapse of the distinction between lay and ordained ministries. On the contrary, we presuppose here the common understanding of our two churches: that the ministry of the ordained "is not an extension of the common Christian priesthood but belongs to another realm of the gifts of the Spirit."⁵

1. Circumstances Underlying the Status and Function of Women in our Communion in Canada

Underlying the changing ways in which women are ministering and seeking to minister in our communions in Canada are the geography of the land, the development of distinctly Canadian ecclesiastical institutions, the experience of women in other Christian contexts in Canada, the role of women in Canadian society, emerging understandings of ministry, the impact of Christian feminism, and the personnel needs of the Church.

1.1 Geography

Canada is one of the least densely populated countries in the world: the second largest nation in the world in physical size, we have a population (1981 census) of only about 24 million. (Of these, 11.2 million are Roman Catholics, half of them in the officially francophone province of

Quebec, and 2.4 million are Anglicans.) About two-thirds of the population is concentrated within 100 miles of the United States, along a border over 3000 miles long. In the vast territory outside our population clusters, the Church is called to serve many hundreds of sparsely populated and isolated towns and villages. In these places especially, clergy are frequently in short supply and gravely overworked, and laypeople or religious may well be commissioned to share in their ministry.

1.2 Our National Identity

In addition to our original native peoples, Canada is a country of two founding nations, French and British, with a significant multicultural immigration since the end of the nineteenth century. It was settled by French pioneers in the seventeenth century, began to be governed by the British during the eighteenth, acquired an independent national parliamentary government in 1867, and "repatriated" its constitution in 1982. Since the 1960s, Canadian nationalism—and, in Quebec, Quebec nationalism—have been significant political and cultural realities. The Church in Canada, too, has in many ways reflected this political and cultural change from colonialism to sovereign nationhood. In the days when French and British settlers regarded themselves essentially as colonists from Europe, the Canadian Church remained in Europe's shadow. For instance, the first Roman Catholic bishop in Quebec, François de Laval, consecrated in 1685, remained a vicar apostolic; and it was not until 1908 that parts of Canada began to be removed from the mission jurisdiction of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. And Anglicans could not consecrate bishops without the royal mandate until 1867, had no national synod until 1893, and used the English Prayer Book until 1921. Since then, however, it has been increasingly appropriate to speak of "Canadian Catholics" or "Canadian Anglicans." The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops began meeting annually in 1944, one of the first national conferences of Roman Catholic bishops. The "Church of England in Canada" became the "Anglican Church of Canada" in

5. Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, "Ministry and Ordination," *The Final Report* (London: SPCK & Catholic Truth Society, 1982), #13.

1958. Both our communions have therefore been increasingly sensitive to the national context in which we proclaim and minister the Gospel, and have been increasingly willing to adapt the patterns of Christian ministry to that context rather than simply repeating European traditions. One result is that the roles and expectations of women in ministry in the Canadian Church may differ somewhat from what one would find in the European Churches. On the other hand, since the Canadian Church itself reflects regional and multicultural diversity, there is also within it a diversity in the roles and expectations of women in ministry.

1.3 Social Activism

Both communions in Canada have developed a tradition of Christian social activism. In the Roman Catholic Church "Catholic social action" can be traced to Bishop Armand François Marie de Charbonnel of Toronto in the mid-nineteenth century, but the tradition grew dramatically after *Rerum Novarum* (1891). Catholic Action groups emerged, especially in Quebec, for farmers, workers, and youth; Catholic trade unions, the Catholic Family Movement, credit unions, newspapers, academic programs of social analysis, the Antigonish Movement of community organization, the urban apostolate connected with Madonna House in the small town of Combermere, Ontario, and similar organizations in the past century, attest the social conscience of Canadian Catholicism. The broad range of Catholic Action organizations prior to Vatican II, especially Young Christian Workers and Young Christian Students, provided a context of prayer, study and Christian formation for the lay apostolate to society. And for at least forty years the agenda of Catholic activists has included concern with the oppression and mistreatment of women in the community. Among Anglicans, a vigorous Christian social activism in the late nineteenth century was institutionalized in the Council of Social Service in 1917. During World War II, in the Diocese of Montreal a movement began of socially-conscious clergy and laity called the Anglican Fellowship for Social Action which challenged the labour exploitation of the Quebec government. By the 1970's, coalitions of the various Canadian churches—United, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, etc.—had organized to

provide research and theological critique of major Canadian issues (Northern Development, Native Rights, the Economy, Poverty, Immigration), and the role of Canadian Churches in advocating social justice is well known. Here, too, justice for women has been a part of the Church's witness, with numerous committees, task forces, and ministries devoted to it. There have been those in both communions who have applied their critique of the status of women in Canadian society also to the Church.

1.4 Women's Christian Movements

Long before there were secular feminist movements, Christian women in Canada were organizing for social and religious purposes. In the nineteenth century Churchwomen were organizing to welcome fugitive slaves from the United States, campaigning for alcoholic temperance and prohibition and for moral reform, advocating women's suffrage, and administering educational and social agencies such as the Young Women's Christian Association. There were some Christian movements in which women gave conspicuous leadership, such as the Holiness Revival beginning in the 1850s, and the Salvation Army. In all these areas Churchwomen understood themselves as being constrained by the love of Christ. In our own century these examples multiplied still more, and some Christian groups began commissioning or ordaining women to various ministries; particularly notable is the ordination of a woman in 1936 in the United Church of Canada, then and now the country's largest Protestant denomination. These examples have helped some Canadian Anglicans and Roman Catholics envision and apply new possibilities for the ministry of women in their own communions, although it has also strengthened others in their resolve to resist these models.

1.5 The Experience of Women in Canadian Society

It may be that frontier experience tended to collapse roles based on gender distinctions and to erode European patterns of subordinate roles for women. Studies of the colonial days of New France indicate that women were accorded considerable social and religious authority and influence, far more than they enjoyed in the

mother country. In the past century, women have been gradually admitted to previously all-male professions: Emily Stowe in 1880 was the first woman to be licensed to practice medicine in Canada, Clara Brett Martin in 1897 was the first woman to be admitted to a Law Society, female suffrage in federal elections was granted in 1918, and women became eligible for the House of Commons in 1919 and for the Senate in 1929. Since then industrialization has brought women increasingly into the economic mainstream of society. Most Canadian women between 18 and 65 now have jobs outside the home, and the proportion of women in the traditionally male professions and in upper levels of corporate management has risen dramatically in the past generation. The growing understanding that discrimination on the basis of gender is a violation of natural justice was entrenched in 1982 in the constitution of the country. Various federal and provincial enactments of human rights legislation outlaw discrimination on the basis of gender in a variety of areas.

All these developments have inevitably had consequences for the way in which Canadian Christians perceive the role of women in the Church, and many have contrasted the role of women in the Church and their role in the community. As the Anglican rector of St. James' Cathedral, Toronto, Canon Plumtre, was writing already in 1922, "Young women by the score, who see that in the church more than in any other sphere their sex is a discount, if not a discredit, are seeking other fields for their life's work." Many identify certain policies of the churches regarding women as discriminatory. Of these, some have left the Church altogether; some others have changed denominations; still others, while remaining loyal to their communion, have joined groups seeking change; and many are simply quietly resentful. On the other hand, other Canadian Christians argue that there is no necessary analogy between what the secular world considers the proper status of women and what divine revelation establishes as the proper status of women.

1.6 Promotion of Lay Ministries and Lay Apostolates

Both our communions have in our generation given new expression to the Gospel's proclamation that all the baptized belong to the priestly people redeemed by Jesus Christ, thus reaffirming the value of the ministry of women. Among Roman Catholics the Vatican II decree *Lumen gentium* (1964) associated "the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood;" each "in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ".⁶ By baptism all the faithful, and not only men, are consecrated to participation in the liturgy, the prophetic office of Jesus Christ, and the mission of the Church. Since Vatican II the Roman Catholic Church has made distinct progress, and in some cases dramatic progress, towards declericalization. In the Anglican communion, similarly, the bishops have reminded their people through the resolutions of the Lambeth Conference that "the Christian ministry is committed to the whole people of God; and not, as is often believed, to the ordained ministry alone,"⁷ and have recommended "that no major issue in the life of the Church should be decided without the full participation of the laity in discussion and in decision."⁸ It is proper to acknowledge, however, that the funding, accountability, and recognition of lay ministries in the Anglican Church have been poor. This may have been a factor contributing to the increase in female candidates for ordination within the Anglican Church of Canada.

The fresh recognition of the common priesthood of the faithful has been explicitly applied to women's Christian service. The decree *Apostolicam actuositatem*, on the apostolate of the laity, stated, "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."⁹ At the close of Vatican II, the Council Fathers strongly affirmed woman's "basic equality with man", her fuller

6. *Lumen gentium*, #10.

7. *The Report of the Lambeth Conference 1978* (London: CIO Publishing, 1978), Report of Section 2, p. 82.

8. *The Lambeth Conference 1968: Resolutions and Reports* (New York: SPCK and Seabury Press, 1968), #24, p. 37.

9. "Decree of the Apostolate of the Laity [*Apostolicum actuositatem*]," in *The Documents of Vatican II*, #9.

realization of her vocation, and her increasing influence in the world. In 1984 the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops has devoted a plenary session to the role of women in the Church, and in 1985 it recommended that the Synod of Bishops be developed into a synodal process, with the participation at various levels of lay men and lay women, since they are "responsible with us for the mission of Christ entrusted to the Church." In the Anglican Church of Canada, General Synod affirmed in 1965 that "men and women are called to share a common concern for the life and mission of the Church and have a common responsibility to fulfil this mission." It asked the Church to offer leadership in winning equal status for women, urged diocesan synods to permit women the right of election to all the lay offices of the Church, and recommended equal pay for work of equal value for male and female lay ministers.

1.7 Academic Scholarship

In both our secular and Christian academic institutions there has been an explosion of scholarship in the past generation on women's issues, women's history, and the role of women in Bible, doctrine, and tradition. Some, but not all, of this scholarship accepts the description "feminist," in that it posits that historical documents created by those in power tend to neglect, downplay, or marginalize those who are not in power, women among them. While some radical feminists have concluded that sexism is so inextricably woven into the fabric of Christian Scripture and doctrine that they can no longer participate with integrity in the Church, more moderate writers in this area have concluded that the New Testament takes an essentially egalitarian view of men and women, that women in the primitive Church were generally admitted to roles of influence, and that women, however invisible in tradition, have taken real leadership in the churches throughout their history.

1.8 Personnel Shifts and New Opportunities in the Church

A shortage of ordained men has sometimes opened new doors to women's ministries. In 1928, in the Anglican diocese of Brandon, Bishop W.W.H. Thomas was unable to find any men to minister in the extremely remote Swan River Valley, and appointed Marguerite Fowler to what would become St. Faith's Mission. The results were, he said, "so remarkable," that he established an Order of voluntary "messengers". The Bishops's Messengers were commissioned to take services, baptize in cases of emergency, and bury the dead. Archbishop Carrington, in *The Anglican Church in Canada*, wrote, "They were put in charge of isolated settlements; they did the work that the men couldn't be got to do, one of them gently explained to me."¹⁰ Roman Catholic religious orders of women in sparsely populated Canadian regions frequently would find themselves offering the majority of ministries in that area because few priests were available. Today the Anglican Church still has many small congregations that have no resident priest, although this is largely due to limited diocesan funding and the difficulty of deployment of priests in sparsely populated areas. And personnel needs in many parts of the Roman Catholic Church in Canada have recently become intense. A published 1984 study of human resources for the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops suggested that the number of priests had dropped 9% between 1977 and 1983, and projected that the number of priests under the age of 65 would drop a further 22% by 1993. This situation of shortage is intensified by the requirement of celibacy for Catholic priests and bishops of the Latin rite. Of 4692 Roman Catholic parishes (excluding missions), 17% had no resident priest. A 1984 presentation to the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops based on submissions of English-speaking Canadian women claimed widespread concern that, because of limitations placed by the Church upon women's opportunities to minister to others, many "might not experience ... needed healing ministry." The increase in women pastoral associates in parish settings may be seen as in part a result of a shortage of male clergy.

10. Phillip Carrington, *The Anglican Church in Canada: A History* (Toronto: Collins, 1963), p. 262.

2. Areas of Women's Apostolate in our Communion

In the past generation women in both our communions have undertaken an increasing number of tasks of ministry and roles of Christian leadership, primarily in the secular world and family, but also, and increasingly, in more specifically ecclesiastical contexts.

2.1 Callings in the Secular World and in the Family

Both our communions recognize that women with responsibilities in families, in community activities, and in secular occupations, are, like men, "called there by God so that by exercising their proper function and being led by the spirit of the gospel they can work for the sanctification of the world from within, in the manner of leaven."¹¹ Most women (and most men) exercise by far the largest part of their apostolate and their Christian leadership in non-ecclesiastical arenas, and are satisfied that in doing so they are being entirely faithful to God's calling.

2.2 Religious Orders

Many Roman Catholic women, and some Anglican women, have committed themselves to community religious life, variously emphasizing common prayer, study, and ministries in ecclesiastical and secular settings. Many religious communities begin as groups of laywomen working together on a common Christian task, and progress by degrees towards recognition as self-governing communities under Church-approved structures of oversight. Most in Canada are active rather than cloistered, and contribute to many areas of Christian service, including education, medicine, the care of orphans and the destitute, social work, housekeeping, and so on. Roman Catholic religious orders for women have existed in Canada since 1639, when two cloistered orders arrived in Quebec, one founding a hospital and the other a school. Several women religious have been particularly honoured in Canada, such as the Ursuline Marie de l'Incarnation (1599-1672), a theological and

devotional writer. Anglophone religious orders in Canada date from 1847, when the Loretto Sisters in Toronto and the Sisters of Charity at Red River began educational work. In 1986 there were reportedly 34,895 women religious in a Roman Catholic population of 11 million (0.3%), down sharply from 1966, when there were recorded 51,770 women religious in a Catholic population of under 9 million (0.6%).

In Canada the "institutional face" of the Roman Catholic Church, its vital infrastructure of services, has been provided in great part by the apostolic endeavours of women. The typical Catholic experience of "official" church, outside of the immediately sacramental, was frequently by way of a sister. These ministrations were very much at the heart of the living, worshipping church, and not some accidental appendage. The contributions of sisters to the liturgical worship of local parishes as teachers of prayer and through the development and direction of choirs is too obvious to require comment. The less public benefaction afforded by the personal and communal prayer of such communities and the essential spiritual endowment of contemplative orders, is not so immediately appreciated without reflection. In more recent years a number of religious communities have committed themselves to develop, staff, administer and financially sustain prayer centres. At this point the role of woman as teacher of prayer assumed new dimensions through increased activity in spiritual counselling and retreat work, traditional church activities more commonly exercised by clergy prior to Vatican Council II. The networking of women's religious communities was advanced considerably with the foundation of a national, bilingual organization and office, the Canadian Religious Conference, in 1950. For some time now the President of the Canadian Religious Conference has sat as an observer in the regular meetings of the Canadian Catholic Conference of Bishops. The regional divisions of the Canadian Religious Conference have assisted individual religious communities with research and reporting facilities on church and social questions. As well, they have helped to develop stimulating educational and formation programmes.

11. *Lumen gentium*, #31.

In the Anglican communion, religious orders, which had been suppressed at the Reformation, began to be revived in the mid-nineteenth century, in the wake of the Anglo-Catholic Movement. The Sisterhood of St. John the Divine, founded in 1884 in Toronto with Hannah Grier Coome as first superior, and the Sisters of the Church, who began Canadian work in 1891, exist to this day, but there are only two other women's communities in the Anglican Church of Canada. Although the numbers of formally professed Anglican religious in Canada are very small, it may be argued that many Anglican women for whom religious orders have not been a practical option have nevertheless had comparable but less structured experiences of cooperative ministry, mutual accountability in Christ, and corporate prayer.

2.3 Deaconesses

The first Anglican deaconesses in Canada were "set apart" by the bishop of Toronto with the laying on of hands in 1894; the deaconess movement was favoured by Anglican evangelicals as an alternative to women's religious orders. Deaconesses functioned in many ways similarly to Roman Catholic sisters, with particular responsibility for Christian education and youth work, and the care of immigrants, the unemployed, and the socially marginalized. Deaconess training schools and community houses in Toronto and Saskatoon also served a role as Church social service and Christian education centres.

2.4 Parish-based Women's Organizations

Of all the Church-related structures, these are the ones in which the largest number of laywomen have been active in both our communions. Among Anglicans the Woman's Auxiliary (WA) was founded in Ottawa in 1885 by Roberta Elizabeth Tilton, inspired by a U.S. Episcopal precedent. It quickly expanded to other dioceses and became a national organization in 1905. Until the early 1940s its focus was mission. It mobilized women parishioners to raise funds for missions, gathered food and clothing for the needy, oversaw the education of the children of missionaries, publicized the mission of the Church, maintained an ambitious publishing program, and recruited, trained, paid,

and pensioned women missionaries. It was relatively independent, and in its heyday was the strongest and most efficiently administered organization in Canadian Anglicanism. Through an amalgamation of parish organizations in 1968, the WA became the Anglican Church Women (ACW), and broadened its understanding of mission. A typical parish ACW might sponsor study groups, social projects, fund-raising drives, or hospitality at parish functions and other events. In recent years many ACW parish chapters have closed, reflecting partly the more complete integration of women into the formerly male-dominated structures of the Church, partly changing expectations of women, partly the professionalization of church work, and partly shifting demographics, as most younger women work outside the home and have limited time for charitable activity. In 1974 the national structure of ACW was disbanded, and the Women's Unit of the Program Committee was formed to coordinate all women's groups and concerns for the Anglican Church of Canada.

The Catholic Women's League of Canada (CWL) was formed nationally in 1920, with parish, diocesan, provincial, and national levels of organization. Since the 1950s it has also had chapters for business and professional women. It is "committed to the upholding of Christian values and education in the modern world." It has published a journal, called *The Canadian League*, since about 1926. It organizes fund-raising, hospitality, and social projects, and, like the National Women's Unit of the Anglican Church, it has also taken a keen advocacy role on issues of peace and justice. In 1983 its membership was 130,000. Both the ACW and the CWL currently reflect tensions on issues relating to women like inclusive language and women's ministries.

2.5 Women in Administration

Anglican women who owned or rented pews were admitted to parish vestries as early as the 1870s, as a result of decisions in the civil courts, but the eligibility of women for most administrative positions had to be won by diocesan canon, which did not widely happen until the 1920s or later. A recommendation of the Lambeth Conference in 1918 that women should be admitted

to the lay councils of the Church on equal terms with men was not widely honoured in Canada for several decades. Rural dioceses, such as the diocese of Caledonia, in northern British Columbia, might send a woman delegate to General Synod as early as 1924 (she was refused her seat), but in urban areas like Toronto and Montreal women were not admitted to diocesan synods until the 1950s or later. It was not until 1965 that General Synod passed a resolution in line with the Lambeth recommendation of 1920. General Synod and most diocesan synods now generally attempt to give women significant representation on committees, and it is no longer unusual for women to serve as wardens or in other parish offices, as diocesan program staff, or in other appointments.

In the Roman Catholic Church in Canada, women have been admitted to positions of administrative authority in diocesan or national structures in significant numbers only since Vatican II. A 1977 survey indicated that 27% of diocesan office directors across Canada were women, and 60% of diocesan assistant directors. A number of women are functioning as chaplains and as judges in church courts. Under the new code of canon law women are eligible to be appointed chancellors of dioceses, and some serve this role in Canada. The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops has recommended that women be included in formalized consultative processes leading up to each Synod of Bishops.

2.6 Pastoral Roles in Parishes

In both our communions women have been appointed to pastoral roles in parish or school settings, particularly in outlying areas. Among Anglicans, in addition to the Bishop's Messengers in the dioceses of Brandon and Athabasca, there have been since the 1920s women lay readers to lead church services and women with licence to administer the eucharistic elements. Women in these roles are now extremely common indeed. A particular kind of parish leadership has frequently fallen on clergy wives in Anglicanism, who often have acted as honorary ACW presidents, parish secretaries, inter-

mediaries between priest and people, Bible study leaders, musicians, and pastoral counselors. However, the expectation that the clergy wife will be her husband's unpaid assistant appears to be dying.

Roman Catholic parishes have increasingly invited women to serve on pastoral teams and as pastoral associates in vacant parishes. A study for the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops in 1984 indicated that of 825 vacant parishes in Canada, 84 were entrusted to sisters. Since then the use of lay people and sisters in pastoral ministry is a growing phenomenon. Religious and lay women are in many of these cases authorized to preside over the liturgy of the Word and to administer communion from reserved elements. The practice of ministry illustrates a trend in the Roman Catholic Church in Canada: the partnership of women and men in the mission of the Church is emphasized, and programmes of diocesan renewal bring together priests and chairpersons of various parish committees—many of them women—into common projects of proclamation and service. In the Archdiocese of Montreal, for example, women with particular liturgical or pastoral responsibilities may follow the same programme of studies as diaconal candidates and be initiated into the Order of Service. It is reported to us that some clergy have resisted these developments, but other clergy and most lay people welcome them. A recent sociological profile of the average woman in pastoral work in Quebec portrayed her as 47 years old, who in half the cases was a religious; in the other half she was a married woman with two or three children who previously had been in school for fifteen years, had worked for another employer for thirteen years, and had been working for the Church for five years.¹²

2.7 Ministries in Specialized Settings

Lay women in both our communions have been appointed to hospital, correctional, military, or educational chaplaincies, peace and justice ministries, Church-sponsored social agencies, resource services, Christian journalism, and other situations. A growing number

12. Sarah Bélanger, *Portrait du personnel pastoral féminin au Québec* (Montréal: Bellarmin, 1988).

of women are attracted to such ministries in our country.

2.8 Education

Roman Catholic religious had founded and were running schools in New France already in the seventeenth century, and today thousands of lay and religious women as well as men teach in the various provincial confessional and secular school systems. The development of colleges and universities run by and for women provided opportunities at this level which were both scarce and restricted until the twentieth century. Most routine educational work among youth at the parish level appears to be done by women. An increasing number of women teach in Roman Catholic universities, and women began appearing on the faculties of seminaries and theological colleges in about 1970. In the three Roman Catholic colleges in the Toronto School of Theology, for example, nine women teach as full-time faculty members. The Dominican College of Philosophy and Theology was the first pontifical faculty to appoint a woman as dean. Like male faculty in theological colleges, women faculty members are generally seen as filling not only academic but also pastoral roles in the community, and may preach at non-eucharistic services, counsel, and lead prayer.

Anglican women were by the 1880s being sent as missionaries to undertake educational work in the North West among settlers and indigenous peoples. Women have been prominent also in Sunday Schools, which became increasingly common in Canadian Anglican parishes after the middle of the nineteenth century. On the prairies, women organized family clusters to receive Sunday School by post and caravans to the women and children of outlying areas. There are very few Anglican primary or secondary schools in Canada, but women play a full role in them. Anglican theological colleges, unlike their Roman Catholic counterparts, have found it difficult to find qualified women or men to appoint to their faculties, largely because the Anglican Church of Canada has not sufficiently encouraged or supported advanced theological study. Thus Anglican women with a basic theological degree currently are more likely to seek ordination and relatively few proceed to doctoral studies.

2.9 Care of Those in Need

Since 1639 a commitment to the healing sciences, most frequently overseen by women, has characterized the Roman Catholic Church in Canada. A network of orphanages, hospitals, and gerontology services has been developed across the country. These institutions, created by Catholic women and staffed, directed and administered by them, offered unparalleled opportunity in Canadian society prior to the 1960s, for the development and application of intellectual, administrative and other talents. There was no other area of Canadian society which regularly prepared, called for and expected the level of leadership by women at senior and executive positions in very complex institutions of central significance to church and society. Frequently these facilities represented the first such institutions in their locale. In the Anglican Church of Canada, the Sisters of the St. John the Divine have long had an involvement in health care, which began with the opening of a surgical hospital in Toronto in 1885. They continue to work in the area of geriatric care.

2.10 Mission Work

The Roman Catholic Church in Canada has been regarded as contributing generously to foreign missionary activities. Particularly in this century women have played a key role in this work, exercising a ministry of loving presence. Several thousand women have spent years working in other lands. Religious women especially, but during the last generation, many lay women as well, have been an integral part of this effort. They have served as catechists, health care workers, educators, and in a wide variety of development undertakings, including the initiation of credit union and cooperative activity.

2.11 Ordained Ministries

The one area of Christian service to which Canadian Anglican but not Roman Catholic women have been admitted is ordained ministry. Since the 1890's, some Anglican women with vocations were "set apart" to the ministry of deaconess. The 1930 Lambeth Conference recognized the "Order of Deaconess" as for women the one and only Order of the ministry which we can recommend our branch of the

Catholic Church to recognize and use."¹³ It involves a dedication to lifelong service, but not to celibacy.¹⁴ But Lambeth Conference 1968 went further and proposed "that those made deaconesses by laying on of hands with appropriate prayers be declared to be within the diaconate."¹⁵ By the early 1970's, women were being ordered to the diaconate in Canada. Some but by no means all of those deaconesses were willing to be ordained priest when this became canonically possible in 1975. Others retained their identity as deaconesses, while still others saw themselves as lay pastoral workers in the Church.

Serious but isolated proposals to ordain women to the Anglican priesthood can be traced to the nineteenth century. In 1928 the idea was discussed at greater length in the Anglican newspaper the *Canadian Churchman*. "A living Church, if it is to remain alive and develop, must take risks," wrote the editor of the women's page in the newspaper. The ordination of women was proposed in a speech at the synod of the Diocese of Toronto in 1948. Momentum developed in the 1960s and early 1970s, with theological and historical studies commissioned by General Synod and other bodies, while numerous articles and books on the subject were appearing throughout English-speaking Anglicanism. In 1975 General Synod came to the understanding that there were no canonical obstacles preventing diocesan bishops from ordaining women to the priesthood. Shortly afterwards, the same General Synod adopted a "conscience clause", whose precise meaning remains controversial, seeking to protect those not agreeing with its decision. The first ordinations took place in 1976, making Canada the first Anglican province to ordain women in a fully recognized, procedurally regular way. More recently the Church has sharply criticized the Church of England for refusing to recognize the orders of its women clergy. In 1991 there are 275 women clergy in the Anglican Church of Canada. In some dioceses women have been nominated to the episcopate. Strains between

Anglican provinces which do ordain women to the priesthood and those which do not are a matter of public record.

Ordained women have ministered in every Canadian Anglican diocese, and the ordination of women no longer appears as a serious controversy in the Anglican mainstream in Canada. Conversation has moved to new issues, such as relations with Anglican provinces which do not recognize the ministries of Canadian women priests; alternative models of authority in Church structures; the distinctive contributions, if any, which women may make to Christian spirituality, liturgy, and ministry; and the role of women priests in imaging God and healing women's experiences of isolation and rejection.

The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops has repeatedly taken leadership on questions related to women; in particular, it encouraged the formation of study groups on the topic of women in the Church which had a widespread effect in parish life in Canada, and it recommended the use of inclusive language in church communities.

But the further issue of whether women should be ordained in the Roman Catholic Church remains a question in Canada; unofficial advocacy groups take both sides on the issue.

2.12 Summary

Roman Catholics and Anglicans in Canada have lived out their faith in the same social and cultural context, but within different institutional and devotional settings. In our two communions women have had ministries that have been very similar, and that similarity is in large part a reflection of our common Gospel and our common geography, national history and identity, Christian social conscience, and commitment to lay ministry. In both our communions, most women (and most men) live out their faith predominantly in their families and in their secular occupations. There have been particular

13. *The Lambeth Conference 1930: Encyclical Letter from the Bishops with Resolutions and Reports* (London: SPCK & New York: Macmillan, 1930), #67, p. 60.

14. *Ibid.*, #69, pp. 60-61.

15. *The Lambeth Conference 1968: Resolutions and Reports*, #32, p. 39.

opportunities for celibate women to commit themselves to lives of Christian service, either as religious or, among Anglicans, as deaconesses, since most deaconesses remained single during the course of their ministry. Women have had significant ministries in parish-based women's organizations, particularly in mission work, youth work, hospitality, fund raising, and issues of social justice. Some women have assisted in Church administration and institutional decision-making; some have given pastoral leadership; many have been teachers and school administrators; some have been appointed to specialized ministries. All this we share. What divides us, in what we understand of the calling of women in Christian service, is the single but important issue of whether Church is authorized to admit women to priestly ordination.

In seeking the reconciliation of Roman Catholics and Anglicans in Jesus Christ, therefore, we need to confirm and celebrate our common understanding and practice in these very large areas, but also to evaluate the reasons for our disagreement over the ordination of women. To what extent are the reasons matters of Christian doctrine, and which parts of Christian doctrine are implicated? To what extent are they, on the other hand, matters involving the enculturation of the Gospel? In order to answer these questions we will need to consider the theological implications of the role of women in our two communions.

3. Theological Implications of the Ministries of Women

In Canada the ministries of women have not only developed and flourished in the practice of our two communions: in addition, they have been the subject of theological reflection. What is the significance of the service women have rendered to Christ in the past and present life of the Church? What does it mean that they have taken a significant role in evangelization, teaching, care for the poor and sick, prophetic denunciation of injustice, and other Christian works? How should our proclamation of the Gospel through the ministries of women adopt and transform Canadian cultural insights, and how should it challenge and criticize these insights? These questions are at the centre of lengthy and

serious theological discussion in our two communions in Canada.

In this section we want briefly to describe the atmosphere of theological discussion on women within which our two communions find themselves in Canada as they reflect upon these questions.

3.1 *Affirmation of the Variety of Gifts Given to Women*

Both of our communions rejoice today at the recognition of the variety of gifts that the Holy Spirit has given to women as well as to men for the proclamation of the Gospel and the building up of the Church of Christ. Women have always been involved in a variety of ministries of the Church, but their contributions have not always been recognized clearly or welcomed fully. In our churches today there is a sharp sense of the injustice of such oversight and a determination to proclaim in our practice "there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit ... varieties of service, but the same Lord" (1 Cor. 12:4-5).

In our churches, it is understood that those involved in evangelization must have an understanding of the experience of women. This includes not only the positive experiences of women, but also in a special way women's experiences of poverty, sexual abuse, or prejudiced mistreatment based on their gender. In addition, including the voices of women within the voice of the Church is considered essential if the witness of the Church in our culture is to be effective in announcing, "Now whoever is in Christ is a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:7). Canadian culture already has a very strong sense of the equality of women and men, stretching from the experience of the frontier when survival demanded that men and women work closely together—often in similar tasks—in order to accomplish whatever jobs needed doing. Any perceived failure by the Church to celebrate and serve women's equality in Christ is experienced by Canadian Christians as foreign or wrong. Archbishop Louis-Albert Vachon of Quebec (now retired) reflected a viewpoint prevalent in our churches when, serving as a delegate for the Roman Catholic bishops at the 1983 Synod of bishops, he commented, "...appeals of the church to the world for the advancement of the status of women are on the

point of losing all impact unless the recognition of women as full members becomes simultaneously a reality with the church itself."¹⁶

Hence there is a cultural predisposition to welcome and affirm gifts of the Spirit given to women for centuries but not always celebrated. In addition, there is a readiness not only to appreciate women's contributions to ministries they have traditionally held—such as catechetical instruction of children and care for the sick—but also to welcome women into ministries they have not held as frequently in Christian history. So, for example, the ministries of Roman Catholic and Anglican women who administer parishes, sit on church marriage tribunals, serve as prison or hospital chaplains, teach theology to divinity students, or conduct retreats are for the most part well received in our two communions in Canada. Even people who are doubtful about such new experiences often report that the competence of a woman minister and her evident desire to serve the Gospel persuade them to recognize God's hand in her ministry and to know that women and men are "fellow workers in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 16:3).

Archbishop Vachon underlined the need for reconciliation between men and women arising out of the nature of our baptism. "A new humanity is being realized in Jesus Christ in which internal conflicts of racial, social and sexual origin are abolished; a new humanity, responsible for bringing about its own historical and cultural existence," he said. "In this humanity man and woman come into being and recognize each other on a basis of equality of origin and destiny, and equality in mission and involvement."¹⁷

3.2 Reflection on the Meaning of the Man/Woman Distinction.

Besides theological reflections on women's ministries, our churches are also filled with discussion and scholarly research on the significance for the orders of creation and redemption that "God created humanity in God's own image... male and female God created

them" (Gen. 1:27). While these reflections have different concerns and take often contradictory positions, certain themes are emerging as consensus positions within the theological community of our two churches in Canada.

3.2.1 In the area of *theological anthropology*, theologians draw attention to the ambivalent role that cultural stereotypes about men and women have played in the history of Christian thought on the theological meaning of gender difference. The identification of maleness with spirit and femaleness with matter, for example, which Christian thinkers appropriated from first century neoplatonic thinkers, is often cited as a damaging principle to use in elaborating a doctrine of creation about men and women. Such an identification led some Christian theologians in the past to conclude that men are by nature more rational, more constant, or more suited to give leadership, while women are by nature more emotional, more changeable, and less able to lead. Some used this understanding as a basis for arguments against giving women positions of leadership in the community and the Church. Today theologians in our churches—whether they see the psychological differences between men and women as more due to nature or to culture—nevertheless are agreed in trying to avoid the use of a stereotyped list about men and women.

3.2.2 Secondly, theologians in Canada have reflected on the witness of the New Testament to *Jesus' treatment of women* during his earthly ministry. They have been concerned to show the openness toward the concerns and the collaboration of women that is revealed in the New Testament account of Jesus. He healed the woman with the flow of blood (Mark 5:25-34) and he included women such as Mary and Martha as well as Lazarus among his friends (John 11:5). He forgave the woman taken in adultery (John 7:53-8:11) and he revealed himself to the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:7-42). Mary is praised for her faith (Luke 11:27-28) and honoured in a special way by being chosen to give birth to the Saviour (Luke 1:46-49), and women disciples are the first to receive the

16. Louis-Albert Vachon, "Male and Female Reconciliation in the Church", *Origins* 13 (1983): 334.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 335.

revelation of the Resurrection of their Lord (Matthew 28:1-8; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 23:55-24:12). The attitude of Jesus toward women is often contrasted with attitudes they experience in our society.

3.2.3 In addition to reflecting such experiences of Jesus with women, theologians in Canada in our two churches have reflected on the *significance of the maleness of Christ* for his saving work. They have underlined the heritage we have both received from the first four ecumenical councils of the Church. Confessing the full divinity of Jesus Christ, they confess anew as well his full humanity. While not questioning the maleness of Christ, they emphasize that Christ's saving work transcends all racial, sexual, social, and economic barriers—since, in the words of the patristic axiom, “what is not assumed is not saved.”

3.2.4 Finally, theological discussion has focussed on our *understanding of God*. When continuing—with the Scriptures and the history of the Christian tradition—to use the language of “Father” to refer to the one whom Jesus called “Abba,” our two communions in Canada strive to clarify the metaphorical character of that language. Theologians and liturgists have tried to collaborate in order to avoid the use of language about God that would so anthropomorphize God as to suggest that God is more like men than like women, or that women are not made in the image of God. Hence they have emphasized, along with major theologians of both the East and the West, that God's nature cannot be captured or exhausted by our true confessions about God. In addition, they have reminded us that the Scriptures sometimes describe God with female imagery, for example, as a woman groaning in labor (Deut. 32:18), as the female figure of Wisdom (Prov. 8:22-31; Job 28:20-23), as a mother weeping for her children (Jer. 31:20), as a mother carrying a child in her womb (Is. 46:3), as a mother nursing her child (Psalm 131:2), as a midwife (Psalm 22:9), as the mistress of a household (Prov. 9:1-6), as a

woman searching for her lost coin (Luke 15:8-10). Scripture also ascribes to God traits often stereotypically used to characterize women, such as tenderness, gentleness, and the capacity for nurture. By emphasizing that God has such characteristics, our two communions hope also to criticize abuses in practice that would misuse faith in God to justify violence or unfair treatment of women in society.¹⁸

3.2.5 We have summarized very briefly an emerging theological consensus on theological anthropology, on christology, and on God in relationship to the question of women. But interest in these discussions is not limited to theologians or to church workers. Both of our communions are filled with *widespread popular concern* about the theological understanding of women and about the practice of the churches toward women. Popular lectures and books, media coverage, and debates over church policy about women draw an increasing number of people into discussion of these theological questions. This has become part of the atmosphere of church life for our two communions in Canada.

3.3 The Canadian Context for the Question of the Ordination of Women

When the question of the ordination of women (to the diaconate, the presbyterate, or the episcopate) arises in our two communions in Canada, it arises within the context we have been describing. The question about women's ordination, which has been answered differently by our two communions, is located in the midst of this broad spectrum: the recent celebration of the wide variety of women's ministries, the affirmation of the legal equality of women in Canadian society, the shortage of ordained ministers to serve Canadian congregations, the experience of other churches' ordaining women for many decades in Canada, the widespread interest in theological questions about women, and the sense that unequal treatment of women is un-

18. Taskforce Report to General Synod 1986 of the Anglican Church of Canada, *Violence Against Women: Abuse in Society and Church and Proposals for Change* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1987), pp. 42-45; cf. Social Affairs Committee of the Assembly of Quebec Bishops, *A Heritage of Violence? A Pastoral Reflection on Conjugal Violence*, trans. Antoinette Kinlough (L'Assemblée des Évêques du Québec: Montréal, 1989).

just. The location of the question of women's ordination within this context contributes toward making it a volatile and controversial topic within both of our communions.

At the same time, the question appears as a small point within the sweep of our history of the many ministries of women. Women have had many ministries within the Church, and this experience continues in a particularly rich way within both of our communions in Canada.

3.3.1 The similarities and differences between our two communions in Canada in the concrete exercise of women's ministries show the *complexity of the actual practice regarding the ministries of women in the Canadian churches*.

On the one hand, in the Roman Catholic communion lay women and members of women's religious communities have been involved in a wider variety of lay ministries for a longer time than in the Anglican communion. In one sense, they experience this wide variety of women's ministries as nothing new, though they welcome the recent recognition being given more publicly to women's substantial involvement in such ministries. In addition, within the Roman Catholic Church—where women cannot be ordained—a large number of women have recently made themselves qualified professionally for ministries of leadership in the Church newly open to them, such as chaplaincy in prisons or hospitals, administration of diocesan offices, teaching of divinity students, leadership by women's religious congregations in the work of justice, etc. The Anglican Church, which ordains women, finds that it is not as successful in drawing its women into full-time professional lay ministries, since many of its qualified women seek ordination. Some Anglican lay women have the perception that their ministry is not accorded sufficient authority unless they are ordained.

At the same time, the Anglican Church reports a very positive experience of the ministry by ordained women in their midst. Despite

some tensions and even initial resistance by some persons to ordained women, most Anglicans report that the ordination of women is experienced as a grace of God to the Church, a proclamation of the Gospel about the full involvement of all persons in the redemptive work of Christ, and a source of fresh approaches to pastoral care and decision-making in the Church. The 1986 General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada affirmed its "positive experience in Canada with women in priesthood" and urged the Canadian bishops to carry to the Lambeth Conference "our conviction that the priesthood of women has indeed been blessed and has enriched our common life".¹⁹ Meanwhile, both of our communions in Canada have suffered from a shortage of ordained ministers. In the Roman Catholic communion this shortage is more pronounced, so that many Roman Catholic congregations in Canada are no longer able to celebrate the eucharist together even once a week. While lay ministers seek to respond to the needs of these congregations, the congregations are in fact denied the nourishment of the weekly eucharist; and their church does not feel authorized to ordain the women or married men who are entrusted with all of the other ministries of leadership in their community except this one. In Canada, this situation is perceived as a growing pastoral crisis for the work of evangelization. Some Roman Catholics fear that their people will lose the experience of the centrality of the eucharist in their lives because they do not celebrate it even once a week.

3.3.2 In addition, in Canada the theological discussions about women also affect the question of women's ordination and they show the *complexity of the theoretical question regarding the ministries of women in the Canadian churches*.

Some Anglicans and Roman Catholics see in the ordination of women a capitulation to cultural pressures, a confusion of the Church with the world and its values. They stress that at times the Church must stand in prophetic contrast to the culture in which it finds itself, and they see the ordination of women as the failure

19. Anglican Church of Canada, *Journal of the Thirty-First General Synod* (Toronto: Anglican Church of Canada, 1986), Act 65, p. 85.

to maintain such a countercultural position. In a culture which can confuse equality with sameness, a stand in favor of the difference between male and female roles seems a witness to the Gospel. They emphasize the differences between men and women, and in particular they draw attention to the beauty and dignity of the God-given role of motherhood. In addition, some emphasize that a practice such as women's ordination should not be started unless and until the whole Church of Christ, including the Orthodox Church, has come to a consensus that would allow this step to be taken together. They welcome the stand taken by the Roman Catholic Church against the ordination of women, and they regret the beginning of this practice by the Anglican Church to ordain women. Why should the Roman Catholic Church seek full communion with a church that would simply imitate the modern liberal culture in which it finds itself, they ask. While this position is held by more Roman Catholics than Anglicans in Canada, it is not absent from either of our churches.

A second group of Roman Catholics and Anglicans, while emphasizing the specific characteristics of women, emphasizes as well the full equality of women with men. This group remains divided among themselves over the ordination of women.

A third group of Roman Catholics and Anglicans sees in the refusal to ordain women a denial of the full equality of women and men in Christ. They fear that this refusal is based on the cultural stereotypes about men and women that the Christian tradition inherited somewhat unreflectively from Graeco-Roman culture, rather than on a real discernment of the demands of the Gospel. In addition, they fear that the failure to ordain women may imply—though unintentionally—a soteriology that truncates the inclusiveness of Christ's saving work. Anglicans who have these views wonder why they should seek full communion with a church that endangers these aspects of the Gospel so important for our day and culture. Anglicans and Roman Catholics who see the question this way applaud the or-

dination of women in the Anglican Church and regret the continuing refusal of the Roman Catholic Church to begin this practice.

3.4 *The Reception of Authoritative Teaching For and Against the Ordination of Women in Canada.*

Both of our communions have given official authoritative teachings to explain their practice with regard to the question of the ordination of women.

3.4.1 Some Protestant churches began the practice of ordaining women in the nineteenth century. The first woman ordained in the Anglican communion was Florence Li, who was ordained under wartime emergency conditions by Bishop R.O. Hall of Hong Kong in the Holy Catholic Church in China during World War II in 1944. Since that time some provinces of the Anglican communion have begun to ordain women to the diaconate and the presbyterate. The Anglican Church of Canada began ordaining women as presbyters in 1976. Recently the Anglican provinces in the United States and New Zealand have each ordained a woman as bishop.

3.4.2 In 1976 in the "Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood (*Inter Insigniores*)", the *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith* set out reasons for the Roman Catholic communion's continuing practice of restricting ordination to men. While noting the dignity of women and the decisive role they have played in the Church, the declaration stated that "the Church, in fidelity to the example of the Lord, does not consider herself authorized to admit women to priestly ordination."²⁰ Noting that this is the constant tradition of the Church, the declaration explains that it is based on the attitude and practice of Jesus, who did not call women to be among the Twelve, and on the attitude and practice of the apostles, who did not confer ordination on women. When the Church judges "that she cannot accept certain changes," the declara-

20. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood (*Inter Insigniores*)," *Origins* 6 (1976-77): 519.

tion continues, "it is because she knows that she is bound by Christ's manner of acting."²¹

In addition, the declaration offered as an explanatory reason that, "in actions which demand the character of ordination and in which Christ himself, the author of the Covenant, the Bridegroom and Head of the Church, is represented, exercising his ministry of salvation—which is in the highest degree the case of the Eucharist—his role (this is the original sense of the word *persona*) must be taken by a man."²²

3.4.3 In an explanation of the practice of the Anglican communion that permits the ordination of women, the Most Rev. Robert Runcie, then *Archbishop of Canterbury*, wrote to John Paul II that—"although Anglican opinion is itself divided—those Churches which have admitted women to priestly ministry have done so for serious doctrinal reasons."²³ Explaining this practice further in a letter to Cardinal Jan Willebrands, he notes the growing Anglican conviction that "there exists in Scripture and Tradition no fundamental objections to the ordination of women to the ministerial priesthood."²⁴ Furthermore, Anglican provinces that ordain women argue that a substantial doctrinal reason not only justifies the ordination of women, but actually requires it. "The fundamental principle of the Christian economy of salvation—upon which there is no question of disagreement between Anglicans and Roman Catholics—is that the Eternal Word assumed our human flesh in order that through the Passion, Resurrection and Ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ this same humanity might be redeemed and taken up into the life of the Triune Godhead," he writes. "It is also common ground between us that the humanity taken by the Word, and now the risen and ascended humanity of the Lord of all creation, must be a humanity inclusive of women, if half the human race is to share in the Redemption he won for us on the Cross."²⁵

In addition, he continues, some Anglicans would go on "to point to the representative nature of the ministerial priesthood. They would argue that priestly character lies precisely in the fact that the priest is commissioned by the Church in ordination to represent the priestly nature of the whole body and also—especially in the presidency of the eucharist—to stand in a special sacramental relationship with Christ as High Priest in whom complete humanity is redeemed and who ever lives to make intercession for us at the right hand of the Father. Because the humanity of Christ our High Priest includes male and female, it is thus urged that the ministerial priesthood should now be opened to women in order the more perfectly to represent Christ's inclusive High Priesthood." He continues, "This argument makes no judgement upon the past, but is strengthened today by the fact that the representational nature of the ministerial priesthood is actually weakened by a solely male priesthood, when exclusively male leadership has been largely surrendered in many human societies." Despite the tensions associated with this issue, he adds, Anglican provinces that ordain women report "that their experience has been generally beneficial."²⁶

3.4.4 In 1986, Jan Cardinal Willebrands, *President of the Pontifical Council [then called Secretariat] for Promoting Christian Unity*, explained the Roman Catholic position further in a letter responding to Archbishop Runcie. "The ordination only of men to the priesthood has to be understood in terms of the intimate relationship between Christ the Redeemer and those who, in a unique way, cooperate in Christ's redemptive work," Willebrands explains. "The priest represents Christ in His saving relationship with His Body the Church. He does not primarily represent the priesthood of the whole People of God. However unworthy, the priest stands *in persona Christi*. Christ's saving sacrifice is made present in the world as a sacramental reality in and through the ministry

21. *Ibid.*, p. 522.

22. *Ibid.*

23. Robert Runcie to John Paul II, 11 December 1985, *Origins* 16 (1986): 155.

24. Robert Runcie to Jan Willebrands, 18 December 1985, *Origins* 16 (1986): 156.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 157.

26. *Ibid.*

of priests. And the sacramental ordination of men takes on force and significance precisely within this context of the Church's experience of its own identity, of the power and significance of the person of Jesus Christ, and of the symbolic and iconic role of those who represent Him in the eucharist." He noted that the topic of women's ordination "will, of course, continue to be a matter of discussion...."²⁷

3.4.5 Finally, an additional reflection on this understanding was offered by Pope John Paul II in his meditation "On the Dignity and Vocation of Women (*Mulieris Dignitatem*)," published in 1988. In pondering the symbolic significance of Christ's self-offering, he writes, "As the redeemer of the world, Christ is the bridegroom of the Church." He continues, "Since Christ in instituting the eucharist linked it in such an explicit way to the priestly service of the apostles, it is legitimate to conclude that he thereby wished to express the relationship between man and woman, between what is "feminine" and what is "masculine." It is a relationship willed by God both in the mystery of creation and in the mystery of redemption. It is the eucharist above all that expresses the redemptive act of Christ, the bridegroom, toward the church, the bride. This is clear and unambiguous when the sacramental ministry of the eucharist, in which the priest acts *in persona Christi*, is performed by a man. This explanation confirms the teaching of the declaration *Inter Insigniores*...."²⁸

3.4.6 How are these official explanations of church practice received in Canada? As to the Anglican statement, Anglicans among us report that most Canadian Anglicans find the theological explanation of Archbishop Runcie persuasive or at least satisfactory. While ordained Anglican women report initial resistance at times to their priestly ministry from individuals within a congregation, in general the ordination of women has been welcomed within the Anglican Church of Canada as a grace of God to the Church and a sign of the new creation in

Christ. The 1986 General Synod of the Anglican Church voted to "reaffirm its acceptance of ordination of women to the priesthood." Furthermore, it ruled that future candidates for ordained ministry would no longer be able to avail themselves of a clause that had earlier permitted bishops not to ordain women if their conscience did not allow it.²⁹ In accord with this reaffirmation of the value of women's ordination, the National Executive Council of the Anglican Church of Canada at their November 1986 meeting also criticized the Church of England for its decision to deny the exercise of sacramental ministry to Anglican women ordained in Canada. "Such a decision threatens the unity of the Anglican Communion by extending the privilege of ecclesiastical hospitality to some of our clergy and not to others," they wrote.³⁰

At the same time, Anglicans are concerned about the impact of women bishops on the bonds of communion. They cannot yet know what the long-term impact will be when women become bishops in provinces of the Anglican communion.

In regard to the explanations given by the "Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood," the correspondence of Cardinal Willebrands, and "On the Dignity and Vocation of Women," Roman Catholics among us report that the reception in their communion is more varied. On the one hand, there is in general the submission of mind and will that Roman Catholics in Canada spontaneously give to the ordinary teachings of the magisterium. This is combined with a widespread sense of perseverance regarding this issue and a sense of loyalty to the Roman Catholic Church. Many Roman Catholics in Canada hear in the teaching and practice of their Church on this issue a preservation of the apostolic faith, for the reasons we mentioned above. Many others do not. Speaking as delegate of the Canadian Roman Catholic bishops to the 1987 Synod, Bishop Jean-Guy

27. Jan Willebrands to Robert Runcie, 17 June 1986, *Origins* 16 (1986): 160.

28. John Paul II, "On the Dignity and Vocation of Women (*Mulieris Dignitatem*)," *Origins* 18 (1988-89): 279.

29. *Journal of the Thirty-First General Synod*, Act 91, pp. 116-17.

30. Statement of the National Executive Council of the Anglican Church of Canada to the Officers of the General Synod of the Church of England, Minutes, November 1986.

Hamelin of Rouyn-Noranda, Quebec, drew attention to this response: "We know that this synod on the laity is not the appropriate forum for dealing specifically with the question of the ordination of women. But we cannot avoid underlining in this assembly that the reasoning used so far to explain the reservation of sacred orders to men has not seemed convincing, especially not to young people."³¹

The variety of responses to official teaching and practice on this question is an emerging issue within the Roman Catholic Church in Canada. The fact that the very same practice causes scandal to some while being welcomed by others in the same communion is a source of pain and polarization. Some Roman Catholics perceive this polarized situation as a growing pastoral problem.

4. Our Proposal for a Way Forward: Discernment on the Gospel and Culture for the Sake of Evangelization in Canada

We propose that the issue of women's ordination be approached as a disputed question about the enculturation of the Gospel; and we suggest this approach in particular to the Second Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, which is charged with considering this question.

4.1 An Urgent Question in Canada for the Mission of the Church to World-wide Evangelization

In this perspective, the question assumes urgency, because it deals with the removal of a two-fold obstacle. On the one hand, the different understandings and practice of our two communions constitutes an obstacle between us in the very close fellowship we experience in

Canada in the work of evangelization. At the same time, evangelization in Canada demands a careful theology and practice about women and their gifts within the Church, as we have suggested above. Addressing the issue of women is actually part of evangelization within Canada. Hence it is urgent that we benefit from each other's experience in order to fulfill our common vocation of spreading the Gospel in this place. As *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* points out when discussing the ordination of women, "Openness to each other holds the possibility that the Spirit may well speak to one church through the insights of another."³²

4.2 The Gospel and Culture

What is the significance of the experience of the growing affirmation of women's ministries in Canada? This question is part of the larger question: how is the Gospel related to cultures? We believe that the Church is called to proclaim the Gospel in every culture in such a way that the culture is taken up and transformed. The Gospel is not opposed to culture, said Pope John Paul II when he visited Canada in 1984; Christians should not accept a "divorce between faith and culture."³³ At the same time, they are called to "evangelize in depth ... culture and cultures," he said.³⁴ The Gospel challenges and criticizes cultural practices, calling for their reform. Christian proclamation calls every culture to repentance for its collective sins and sets forth a prophetic call that may meet resistance and hostility in a culture because of the Gospel's high demands. "God's love extends to people of every culture," the 1988 Lambeth Conference said, "and ... the Gospel judges every culture according to the Gospel's own criteria of truth, challenging some aspects of culture while endorsing and transforming others for the benefit of the Church and society."³⁵

31. Jean-Guy Hamelin, "Access of Women to Church Positions", *Origins* 17 (1987): 347.

32. World Council of Churches, "Ministry", *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), #54.

33. John Paul II, "In a Changing Society the Faith Must Learn to Speak Out and Be Lived", *Canada: Celebrating our Faith* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1986), #6, p. 21.

34. John Paul II, "In the Civil Order, Too, the Gospel is at the Service of Harmony", *Canada: Celebrating our Faith*, #3, p. 257.

35. Lambeth Conference (1988), *The Truth Shall Make You Free* (London: Church House Publishing, 1988), #22, p. 219.

Sometimes, then, the Gospel transforms culture. Sometimes it challenges and criticizes culture. We believe that the issue of women in our culture and our communions in Canada must be examined within this context of Gospel and culture. It is a question of the indigenization of the Gospel in Canada for the sake of the mission of the Church for the whole world: but to what is the Gospel calling us on this matter?

We agree with the comments of Bishop Hamelin: "We must begin by facing some facts. The affirmation movement of women, with its strengths and its limitations is incontestably one of the facts that shapes social evolution in our day. In *Pacem in Terris*, Pope John XXIII invited us to see in it a 'sign of the times.' Are we not faced with a major development within our civilization—as massive as the industrial revolution of the 19th century?"

"It follows that our duty is to exercise discernment. The women's movement carries some precious seeds for the humanization of culture. It also carries with it built-in risks. At present, we are right in the midst of a collective effort of discernment in society and also in the church. We must continue in that effort with openness and with tenacity. We must draw insights even from the tensions and differences of interpretation that are among us."³⁶

4.3 An Invitation to Discernment

We invite Anglicans and Roman Catholics throughout the world to join Canadian Anglicans and Roman Catholics in this process of discernment about the meaning of these developments within Canadian culture. We suspect that they have significance for the Church throughout the world; but we must discover together, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, what exactly that significance is.

In this process of discernment, each of us must wrestle with some difficult questions.

4.3.1 Anglicans must face some *difficult questions* in their dialogue with Roman Catholics and in their own internal discussions. Have they sufficiently explained their decision to ordain women in relation to the whole Church with its many cultures? If this decision has caused and continues to cause such deep divisions within their own communion between provinces from different cultures, what does it mean for the work of evangelization throughout the world? This is even more painfully important since the Lambeth Conference of 1988 recognized the possibility of the consecration of women bishops; and in fact since then two women have been consecrated to the episcopate in the Anglican communion. If an initiative drastically breaks the *koinonia* in the Gospel, can it be the work of the Spirit? Or are those Anglicans right who believe that short-term strain on relationships will lead to long-term strengthening and extension of the gift of fuller communion to the whole of humanity? In addition, Roman Catholics would be troubled if they sensed that the ordination of women was simply an affirmation of certain First World cultural emphases on individual rights. They ask the Anglican communion: how does the decision to ordain women not simply repeat in a new key cultural presuppositions about men and women popular in North America today, presuppositions which may be no closer to the Gospel than were those operative at an earlier stage in the Graeco-Roman world? Finally, they wonder whether the ordination of women increases the perception that one must be ordained in order to minister.

4.3.2 In their own process of discernment, Roman Catholics also face some *difficult questions*. They need to consider whether the experience of new cultural understandings of the equality of women, such as those that permeate the Canadian church continually, could be a sign of the times to which the Roman Catholic Church must respond more fully in its understanding and practice about women. We are aware that the Roman Catholic position is that "it does not consider herself authorized to admit women to priestly ordination."³⁷ We wonder if

36. Hamelin, *op. cit.*, p. 347.

37. "Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood [*Inter Insigniores*]", p. 519.

thought might be given to the conditions under which the Roman Catholic Church would feel authorized for such a change. We suggest that the experience of the Roman Catholic Church in Canada could contribute to such a reflection. When women assume an increasing number of ministries within our communion for the sake of Gospel, it becomes hard to explain why they should be kept from this one ministry—especially when the shortage of ordained ministers, the cultural sensitivity to the equality of women, the theological discussions about women, the positive experience of the Anglican and other churches in ordaining women, and the impression of giving scandal by not ordaining women: all raise the question of whether the Holy Spirit might be leading us to a new enculturation of the Gospel in this place. The urgency with which the question is perceived in Canada leads us to suspect the question might be a sign of the times with significance for the whole Church, which recognizes that “diversity of customs and observances only adds to [the Church’s] comeliness, and contributes greatly to carrying out her mission.”³⁸ Could this be an issue which would allow a diversity of practices in recognition of diverse cultural customs? The Roman Catholic bishops of Canada have called for [such] a reexamination of the question of the ordination of women in their response to *The Final Report* of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission. Noting the urgency of Christ’s mandate for unity, they continue, “We call for a concerted and whole-hearted effort, under the guidance of the Spirit, to discern the mind of Christ for his entire Church today on this issue

[the question of the ordination of women], so as to bring to completion our mutual recognition of orders.”³⁹ Speaking more generally about our two communions in Canada, they noted that “the Canadian experience of cultural dialogue, a long and unique one, as well as the close acquaintance of our Conference with the life and work of Anglicans in Canada make us well disposed to accept their witness about their own faith. We invite others to be open to a similar experience as our journey of convergence continues.”⁴⁰

Conclusion

We have tried to discuss the issue of the ministries of women—including the question of the ordination of women—as it looks from the perspective of the experience of the Anglican and Roman Catholic communions in Canada. We have done so with a sense of the urgency that this issue poses for the work of evangelization here. It is our hope that our reflections will serve efforts to bring the Anglican Church and Roman Catholic Church into full communion. We have learned urgency from our common Lord, to whose prayer we join our own: “I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (John 17:20-21).

Toronto and Ottawa
11 April 1991

38. *Decree on Ecumenism [Unitatis redintegratio]*, #16.

39. Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Response of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops to the ARCIC-I ‘Final Report’.” *Ecumenism* (Dec. 1987), p. 15.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

