The Case for the Ordination of Women:
reasons for acting now

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In July 1975 the General Synod, after one of its more impressive debates, expressed the view that there are 'no fundamental objections to the ordination of women to the priesthood.' The over-all majority of those present and voting was 58.6 per cent; in a division by Houses the motion came nearest to defeat in the house of Clergy. Previous to the debate the Standing Committee had tabled a motion to follow a favourable vote on the issue of principle. It was to the effect that 'in view of the significant division of opinion reflected in the diocesan voting' the removal of the legal and other barriers to the ordination of women would not be right. No reference to any future action was included. In the end the House of Laity vote defeated that motion. A private member's motion requiring the Standing Committee immediately to prepare for the removal of the barriers to the ordination of women was then lost in the House of Clergy—there being also a tie in the House of Bishops. The Synod was in a position of stalemate. Though finding no fundamental objections to the ordination of women, it had nevertheless rejected the advice to do nothing further and equally the call to do something immediately. As a way out of the impasse I moved that the Synod invite 'the House of Bishops, when, in the light of developments in the Anglican Communion generally as well as in this country, they judge the time for action to be right, to bring before the Synod a proposal to admit women to the priesthood.' The significance of the motion was in its concern not only with the timing of any future action but with the manner of it. While, it was argued, conviction on the rightness of an action should be followed by such promptness in implementation as is consistent with charity, prudence and legitimate means, manner should have the edge over timing. Much education and pastoral preparation would be needed before women were ordained. Developments in the Anglican Communion and with other churches had to be assessed. Responsibility for the next move, as the Archbishop of Canterbury maintained, rightly belonged, 'whether we bishops like it or not', in the House of Bishops. The Synod carried the motion on a show of hands.

The 1978 debate

The House of Bishops has decided that the November 1978 group of sessions is the time to test the ground for further action. The incidence of the Lambeth Conference three months earlier has undoubtedly influenced the timing. At the time of writing the conference is still in the future, and so its effect on the November debate is quite unpredictable.

The motion in 1975 had asked for episcopal initiative when the time was deemed right for action, the assumption being that the issue of principle was settled. In the eyes of some, however, the issue of principle is not settled. In correspondence in *The Times* the Bishop of Truro took the view that so momentous a step could not be regarded as settled after 'two or three hours' debate' in General Synod. This expression seemed to ignore two previous lengthy debates in Synod as well as diocesan and deanery consideration of the issues.

After consultation with the Bishops the Standing Committee of General Synod has agreed to a single motion in the following terms: 'That this Synod asks the Standing Committee to prepare and bring forward legislation to remove the barriers to the ordination of women to the priesthood and their consecration to the episcopate.' A simple majority will be sufficient in each House, if voting by Houses is agreed. But success for that motion will not do more than initiate a long process of legislation involving further reference to the dioceses, special majorities and parliamentary approval, as well as consideration of pastoral provisions and safeguard of consciences.

I confess to some disappointment that since 1975 greater attention has not been paid to responsible dialogue and education on all aspects of women's ordination. Initiatives have been left to the more strident, not to say fanatical, protagonists on both sides. Yet it was obvious in 1975 that further ventilation of theological issues was needed, not least on a Christian view of sexuality. With the approach of the Lambeth Conference, however, there were signs of weightier contributions to the debate.

The ecumenical scene

If there has been a lack of responsible debate in this country since 1975, developments outside the Church of England have forced their attention on us. In 1975 only the Diocese of Hong Kong within the Anglican Communion had women priests. At that time it could have seemed to any disturbed at the prospects of women priests that the problem might go away. Now it is clear it will not. Canada, the United States and New Zealand have all ordained women. Several other Churches or Provinces have approved in principle, while in others action is pending. Whatever happens in November, one may wonder how long the Church of England can go on affirming its unity

and communion with all the Anglican Communion while not accepting all validly ordained ministers, male and female, who may come to this country and be invited to officiate.

One development that cannot be ignored is the degree of division within, and now schism from, the Episcopal Church in the USA. There are grounds for believing, however, that impressions created by reports in the church press over here need some modification. Those who have seceded are generally regarded to have been isolating themselves over several issues in recent years. Ordination of women may have been the last straw, but it certainly was not the only factor in secession. While unease undoubtedly remains in the Episcopal Church, a spirit of positive tolerance and charity is beginning to emerge between the two sides in the ordination debate. 'The appeal to those who have separated themselves from our Church', approved unanimously by the House of Bishops, was written by the Bishop of Eau Claire and the Bishop of Massachusetts, who take opposite positions on women priests yet see the present situation as an opportunity for re-emphasizing and discovering more of their unity in Christ and his church. The Bishop of Olympia voted against ordination of women at Minneapolis. Yet, as he had prayed for the Holy Spirit's guidance at the General Convention he felt impelled to accept the decision of the Church and so gladly ordained the first two women priests in his diocese. The attitude of those who see an opportunity for positive gain in Christian love in the differences of convictions may be summed up in some words of the Bishop of Massachusetts in an ordination sermon, when the Reverend Nancy Sargent was made deacon in October 1977: 'We can hold fast to our conscientious convictions; we can place them and ourselves in his hands; and wait, without rancour, without bitterness, without anger (all of those are contrary to his spirit); and in hope, with our hope in him, we can be confident that his will will prevail.'

In Canada, the introduction of women priests has been much more peaceful than in the USA. There are grounds for believing that for many in the Canadian Church this issue was simply a step along the way of the more important reappraisal of the ministry, ordained and lay. The Canadian step was taken in the light of Anglican-Roman dialogue and prolonged negotiations with the United Church of Canada which has women ministers. Ordination of women is a live issue with the Roman Catholics in North America as it is not in this country, except for some theologians and small groups of laity.

At the conclusion of the 1975 debate the General Synod expressed its concern to inform the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches of the decisions previously taken and to invite those authorities to share in theological study on the matter of admitting women to the order of the priesthood. The official response from both churches has been unequivocal.

The Bishop of St Albans, as co-chairman of the Anglican-Orthodox Joint Doctrinal Discussion, reported to the General Synod in February 1978 on the Orthodox opposition to women priests. Pope Paul's correspondence with the Archbishop of Canterbury emphasized the Roman view that ordination of women to the priesthood is inadmissible 'for very fundamental reasons' and saw Anglican steps in that direction as a grave new obstacle and threat on the path of reconciliation between the two churches. Cardinal Hume in his address to General Synod in February 1978 was at pains to underline the official Roman view.

Undoubtedly for many Anglicans the ecumenical dimension in this debate is decisive. In the prevailing mood, amounting to euphoria with some, nothing must be allowed to hinder the movement towards reunion with the great churches of East and West. A comprehensive account of the ecumenical debate is provided by Christian Howard in the *Ecumenical Review* Vol. 29 No. 3 (July 1977). In this present article it is only possible to offer some considerations to balance the weight of official Roman and Orthodox opposition.

To expect any movement from the Orthodox side would seem unrealistic, as much as anything because of that church's apparent attitude towards women, illustrated by the ban on communicating during menstruation. Yet a considerable number of Orthodox theologians live within the American scene and may be influenced by the experience of the Episcopal Church with women priests.

Rome already has its theologians committed to the ordination of women, some in this country. John Wijngaards, Vicar General of the Mill Hill Fathers, is one who has gone into print in support.[1] Gerald O'Collins, an Australian Jesuit serving in Rome, was a contributor to the symposium *Women Priests? Yes Now!*.[2] And seven years ago Hans Küng in *Why Priests?* was arguing for full and equal participation of women in the leadership of the church, including ordination.[3] Groups of Roman laity in this and other lands are praying and working for admission of women to the priesthood. These factors may not even amount as yet to a cloud the size of a man's hand, but if non-Roman churches are anything to go by, the few could become the many.

Archbishop Scott, Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, may be taken as summing up both Anglican and even official Roman opinion when he says, 'There is general recognition that it (ordination of women) will constitute another obstacle in achieving closer relationships but it is also believed that it will not cause a severing of relationships.' A more forthright judgement by Gerald O'Collins appeared in *The Tablet:* 'If our ecumenical relations would be upset by recognizing the full dignity of women in church life (i.e. ordination) they are the wrong kind of relations. Ecumenical relations which would be harmed by the ordination of women are not worth

having.' Even some supporters of women's ordination might not go as far as that. The statement, however, points in its way to the crucial question within the ecumenical context—how much weight to put on the effects on other churches of the decision to ordain women. The Bishop of Oxford in introducing the 1975 debate answered that question as follows: 'Ecumenical progress is made only when churches participating in theological conversations bear witness to what they believe to be true. If we believe that there are no fundamental objections to the ordination of women to the priesthood, then we have a duty to say so to our friends in all the other churches.' Later in the debate, the Bishop of Chelmsford quoted one described as 'a distinguished Orthodox divine' as saying that 'the Church of England should not spend its time calculating its moves on what others will do; what matters is what is right, what is doctrine—in short, what is orthodox.'

In fact, some parts of the Anglican Communion have already acted on the principle that what they believe to be right must be done. And the rest of the Anglican Communion has agreed that no breach of communion results. When the Church of England considers the effect of women's ordination on other churches she—and the Romans and Orthodox—must not forget that Anglicanism already has women priests, as also has another great church of the Reformation, the Lutheran Church. The questions are no longer merely academic.

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We must now turn to a survey of the theological debate on the ordination of women. While personally against a reopening of the debate on the principle in the November Synod, I see nothing but good from the fullest exposure of the arguments for and against both before and after. For the peace and well-being of the church, if women's ordination is to come, a steadily increasing majority must be in favour. A fairly evenly divided church would be no good to either side. In presenting a case for women's ordination I will inevitably follow lines developed in my chapter 'The Argument from Authority', in the symposium *Women Priests? Yes Now!*[4]. I further admit my debt to a most valuable article by Michael Williams in this journal in January 1977[5].

Catholic objections

First, however, let us note the principal arguments against from the Catholic tradition. They centre round the issues of 'maleness' and 'representation in priesthood'. God is known in Old and New Testaments as Father. Jesus Christ his incarnate Son was male. If the priest is to represent Christ in sacrament and absolution (an assump-

tion that may be allowed to go unchallenged only for present purposes) then a priest must be male. The fact that Jesus chose only men to be his apostles confirms the validity of the argument, it is alleged. And nearly two thousand years of tradition support the conclusions.

1) Maleness and representation

The contrary argument must follow these lines, I believe. When all due weight has been placed on the significance of the revelation of God as Father, we may not attribute a distinctive maleness to God. A human father must be male and achieve his fatherhood in the context of a sexual relationship. So, there are aspects of human fatherhood—masculinity and sexuality—that cannot be attributed to God. Moreover, as it is man in the generic sense ('male' and 'female'—Genesis 1:27) who is made in the image of God, the distinctive nature of woman reflects something of the nature of God. And, indeed, in various places in Scripture motherly qualities are ascribed to him. It is significant in this connection that modern research into sexuality has shown all persons to be a compound of male and female characteristics. But Jesus was male, not female, it is emphasized. In the culture and Jewish tradition in which he entered human life, and for his mission, it could hardly have been otherwise. As the late Leonard Hodgson[6] argued, he came as a sacrifice for the sin of the whole world: the Lamb of God. By Jewish tradition, by Old Testament precedent, that meant being 'a male without blemish'. Furthermore, he came as Messiah, always foreseen as male. As suffering servant he was the fulfilment of the role of Israel. John Wijngaards[7] also reminds us that in the context of the covenant with Israel men and women were not equal. 'Inequality began at birth. Whenever a child was born, the mother was considered ritually unclean for some time. If the child happened to be a boy, she was unclean for forty days; if a girl, for eighty days.' Only males could receive the sign of the covenant, circumcision. Women participated in the covenant indirectly through their fathers and husbands. How could the Incarnation happening in that context be in any but a male person?

Yet, male though he was, Jesus was God taking to himself total human nature shared by all men and women. In his high priestly work he represents the redeemed before the Father and his ascended humanity is the humanity of men and women taken up into the Godhead—as the Athanasian Creed affirms. If it is essential to priesthood, as understood in the Catholic tradition, to represent the ascended Christ, it is difficult to see why only the male part of redeemed humanity is capable of doing so. But is it not essential to clarify the biblical understanding of priesthood at this point? Evangelicals move instinctively to the epistle to the Hebrews to demonstrate the uniqueness of Christ's priesthood as providing access to

the Father for sinners and intercession for them throughout their earthly pilgrimage. On the nature of priesthood as exercised by redeemed humanity, the epistle has less to say directly but John Taylor, Bishop of Winchester, offered the following illuminating comment in the 1975 General Synod debate:

> We have largely failed to reckon with the strange emphasis of the Epistle to the Hebrews that the priesthood of Christ is not a perpetuation of the priesthood of Aaron. Then what is it? It is a restoration of the priesthood of man. Man, the culmination of the creative process, stands awkwardly astride the frontier between the created universe and the Creator God. He is called to work with the Creator upon the creation, developing, civilizing, bringing all that perfection which is in the vision of God. And, on the other hand, he stands within creation as that part of it which is articulate enough to offer to God all its yearning and striving towards that same perfection. And the being who is put into this priestly role is created both male and female. Male alone, or female alone, can only be a defective priesthood. Through the Fall man forfeited his priesthood, but in Christ it was restored. Christ is true priest because he is true man. And in him the way is opened for mankind to take up again its original priesthood. Meanwhile the church is *pars pro toto*, that part of mankind which for the time being is enabled through the Holy Spirit to be, on behalf of the rest, 'a royal priesthood'. And within the church the ordained ministry is *pars pro toto*. Just as we observe Sunday so that all days may be lived as worship, so we receive from the ascended Christ gifts of ministry so that the whole people of God may better exercise its priesthood.

2) The apostle and the ministry

What of the apostles? The argument from the choice of men only for the original apostolate to an exclusively male ministry in all ages can hardly be sustained from the New Testament. Beyond the choice of the twelve, Jesus made little or no provision before his death for the structuring of the church. Everything else was left to the guidance of the Holy Spirit after Pentecost. Leonard Hodgson writes[8]: 'His vocation as Messiah was to re-form Israel, God's chosen people, to be the instrument of his redemptive activity. For this purpose he appointed the twelve apostles as the re-formed patriarchate to take charge of the messianic community whose members, when crucified, risen and ascended, he would bind to himself and to one another by the gift of the Holy Spirit.' And so, he goes on to suggest, we need not be surprised that Jesus did not go beyond the commissioning of the new patriarchate, as also he did not give instructions for Gentiles to be admitted to membership on equal terms with Jews.

What do we find after Pentecost? Undreamt of developments and great flexibility, multiplicity of ministries, prophets (some of them women), evangelists, pastors, teachers, deacons (some of them women), elders and bishops. And the title of apostle is no longer restricted to the original band. Gentiles are brought into 'the ministry'—if the choice of the twelve was intended strictly to establish a pattern of ordained ministry for all time the uncircumcised Gentile would be excluded.

3) Tradition

Should not nearly two thousand years of tradition, however, be regarded as decisive evidence of the Holy Spirit's ordering of the church's ministry? Of all the Reformed churches, the Anglican Church gives greatest weight to tradition. But when the church faces new situations, tradition itself may afford us no adequate guidance. Modern times have seen a development for women that earlier ages could never have imagined. The greatly-enlarged opportunity for them to contribute their gifts alongside men in the service of mankind is now taken for granted in most cultures. And familiarity can easily dull appreciation of the revolution that has happened. The significance of this development in the purposes of God will need to be considered presently. Suffice it for the moment to question whether in new situations appeal to tradition is adequate to our need in determining God's will. John Wijngaards as a Roman theologian would not be expected to underestimate the place of tradition. Yet he writes[9]: 'The church placed before new situations has usually been helped most by the creative insight of theologies sensitive to new demands.' If new theology is to be both sensitive to new demands and true to revealed truth, a re-examination of first principles in Scripture is essential to the process. It is significant that in recent times a rediscovery of the New Testament teaching on ministry is leading to a new understanding of the way ordained ministry is meant to enable and serve the ministry of the whole people of God. The enrichment of the ministry of Word and Sacrament and pastoral oversight by full admission of women could be one development the Holy Spirit is prompting. It would be consistent with the fundamental principle of oneness of male and female in Christ and the mission of the church.

Evangelical objections

From Catholic arguments against the ordination of women we turn to those which concern evangelicals. They focus on the principle of 'authority' or 'headship'. For many evangelicals opposed to women's ordination it is not so much a matter of who may administer the sacraments as of who may lead in the church.

1) The Pauline texts

We may begin with the Pauline injunctions that appear to deny all public ministry to women and the role of leadership in particular (1 Corinthians 14:34, 35 and 1 Timothy 2:8ff). The interpretation of these passages needs to be set in the context of the following factors: Scripture itself, the church today, and society at large.

a) In the New Testament, women were numbered among the prophets and deacons. Philip's four daughters prophesied—one may assume they did so in mixed companies (Acts 21:9). And this ministry was in fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel (2:28-32) concerning the

pouring out of God's Spirit on men and women. Only one word, the masculine form, is used for deacon, but Phoebe is described thus in Romans 16:1. Women like Phoebe, Priscilla and Lydia (first convert at Philippi and an obvious leader) clearly took part in evangelism and teaching, and have been acknowledged even by some opponents of women's ordination as leaders of house churches.[10] St Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:3-16 acknowledges the rights of women to pray and prophesy in the congregation (so the prima facie meaning of 1 Corinthians 14:34 cannot stand). His point in chapter 11, somewhat difficult to grasp because of the uses of the words 'head' and 'authority', is explained thus by F. F. Bruce: 'In the synagogue service a woman could play no significant part. In Christ she received equality of status with man: she might pray or prophesy at meetings of the church, and her veil was a sign of this new authority. Its ordinary social significance was thus transcended. As man in public worship manifests his authority by leaving his head unveiled, so woman manifests hers by wearing a veil.'[11]

b) *In the church in modern times*, God has evidently bestowed gifts of teaching, evangelism and leadership on many women. Without such gifts the expansion of the church overseas in the last 150 years would have been considerably slower. There are innumerable examples of women preaching the gospel, planting and pastoring the young church. It is no adequate explanation of this phenomenon to describe it as a kind of makeshift provision by God because there were apparently no men willing to go. The bestowal of these women's gifts is a sure indication that the gifts were to be used. Within the Anglican Church the public ministry of deaconesses, licensed workers and women readers has been an established fact for many years. Does the church really see herself to be in defiance of 1 Corinthians 14:34, 35 and 1 Timothy 2:8ff?

c) *In society* women now occupy posts of leadership over men and women. A strict interpretation of the Pauline passages would commit its supporters to working for a removal of all women from positions of leadership over mixed communities in education, politics, industry, civic affairs, and even the throne. To acquiesce in these developments within society on the grounds that there we are dealing with the world, whereas in the church we are able to order affairs more in accord with God's will, is no satisfactory solution. Quite apart from presenting a false dichotomy between the church and the world, that argument is inconsistent with the premises on which it stands. If the headship of man is an invariable principle of the creation order, it applies to society generally and not just to the church.

2) Headship and authority

A closer examination of the principle of 'headship' or 'authority' is called for. The majority of evangelical opponents seem prepared to

recognize a full sharing by women in the ministry of Word and Sacrament and pastoral oversight, as long as a woman is not the leader. They may be 'in the team' but not *primus inter pares*, the vicar, the bishop.

Does Scripture actually commit us to an invariable principle of male leadership, in the family, throughout society, in the church? Certainly if that view is taken there are some exceptions to the rule in Scripture itself. Deborah was raised up by God to rule Israel. A married woman, yet the one to whom all Israel came for judgement (Judges 4:5), she summoned Barak, gave him orders from God, the carrying out of which led to God's victory (4:23). Barak would not venture on his mission without the moral support of her presence (4:8, 9). She was the saviour of the nation (5:7), a great leader even in a male dominated culture. Huldah, the prophetess in 2 Kings 22, is consulted by the king, the high priest and court officials at a time of national crisis. She is God's mouthpiece and they accept her instructions. We have already noted women in leading positions in New Testament times. The picture, admittedly, is not precise, but a point may be made thus: if Lydia is leader of her household which is baptized when she responds to the gospel (Acts 16:14, 15) does she not naturally lead the church in her house? A house-church would be the first kind of 'church' after the gospel reached any place. When the believers increased and a common meeting-place (in the open-air or in a big house) was established at Philippi, would Lydia be 'silenced' in the way some Christians interpret 1 Corinthians 11:34 and 1 Timothy 2:11, 12?

3) The creation order

Is there an authority vested in man by the creation order to which women must submit? A study of the creation narratives in Genesis 1 and 2 does not suggest the idea of man's authority over woman. Indeed, the emphasis in Genesis 1:27 (repeated in 5:2) is on complementary parity—'God created man in his own image . . . male and female created he them.' The next verse points to a joint authority of man and woman over the rest of the created realm. In chapter 2: 18-25 companionship and partnership are the dominant notes, and specifically, be it noted, within the marriage bond, the creation of one flesh. Even if it is legitimate to deduce the headship of man from Genesis 2, it could not be extended to cover relationships outside marriage. In a highly complex society where women, married and single, work with men on equal terms, a man could not be regarded as head of all women—single or wives of other men—with whom he works. Michael Williams, whose treatment of this theme is more thorough than space here allows, asserts that to interpret Genesis 2 as teaching that woman is secondary to man, 'a second order being', is to miss the point, which is that 'woman and man dwell in complete

unity, indeed are created from unity.'[12] That the word 'helper' is applied to woman, he shows, can in itself imply no subordination, as the same word is often used of God himself in relation to man.

Does the naming by Adam of his wife indicate authority over her? He has previously named other creatures over which he has authority. The answer must be: not necessarily. Names in the Bible express the essential characteristic of the person. In giving the name 'woman', Adam is not so much expressing authority as responding to the illumination by which he perceives her origin and nature. The essential humanity of the woman, her relationship to the man and her role as his counterpart are what the naming is about.

St Paul's treatment of the Genesis 1 and 2 passages is hard to follow. In speaking of man over against woman as made in the image of God (1 Corinthians 11:7) he seems to run contrary to Genesis 1:27 and 5:2, to the Genesis 2 passage, and indeed to the general tenor of Scripture. It is man in the generic sense, male and female, who bears the divine image. We need, however, to remember Paul's chief concern in 1 Corinthians. It is not a thorough exegesis of the Genesis narratives. He is dealing with practical, contemporary problems. In chapter 11 it is the question of how a woman in that situation should be attired in public prayer and prophecy. In chaper 14, and possibly in the situation to which 1 Timothy 2:8ff refers, Paul may well be alarmed at excessive expressions of a newly-discovered liberation among Christian women. Some have suggested that women at Corinth and elsewhere, emancipated from a pagan culture in which they had been conditioned to regard themselves as inferior beings, were exploiting their new-found status in Christ. C. K. Barrett regards the order in 1 Corinthians 14:34 for women (or wives) to 'keep silence in the churches' as indicating not so much a habit of chattering as of argumentative debating within the worship, presumably at the exposition of Scripture or during prophecy.[13] Hence the order in v35 to wait till they got home to pursue matters with their husbands. Faced with a menace to decency and order (v40) Paul might well be applying aspects of the Genesis passages in a somewhat exaggerated or loose way to enforce his points. The apostles and evangelists do use Old Testament quotations in a free manner. As has already been indicated, 14:34 should not be interpreted in a way that is inconsistent with the provisions for women to pray and prophesy in the church in 11:3-16.

4) The meaning of headship

In relating Pauline teaching in 1 Corinthians to Genesis, the key issue revolves round the meaning of the word 'head'. What does Paul mean when he speaks of man as head of the woman? Two factors, one theological, one etymological, point to the meaning. Let us take the etymological first. According to commentators on 1 Corinthians such

as C. K. Barrett and F. F. Bruce, the word (*kephalē*) for head denotes source, origin: not leadership, rule, direction or management. The significance of what Michael Williams calls 'the drastic shift of meaning from the biblical language to our modern usage' for an understanding of the man-woman relationship can hardly be exaggerated. The section in his article headed 'Subordinationism'[14] presents very full and, to the present writer, convincing treatment of the headship principle. In summary, his points are as follows. In modern thought the head is regarded as the place of command, because of our view of the brain as directing the whole body. Hence, such words as 'headmaster', 'headquarters'. The Hebrew view was quite different. There is no Hebrew word for brain. The directing centre of the personality was not located in the head, but in the heart and guts. Had St Paul wished to speak of man as ruler or director of woman he would have had to use the word 'heart'—or 'lord'—to describe the relationship. This he avoids. Both Hebrew and Greek words for head are closely related to origin or source—as may be illustrated from a phrase like 'head of a river'. So St Paul speaks of man as being the origin of woman (as in Genesis 2), not her chief or ruler.

The theological factor to consider relates to the doctrines of the Trinity, creation and the church. In 1 Corinthians 11:3 St Paul deals with the headship of man in parallel with the relationship of Christ to God. When God is described as head of Christ it is not in the sense of ruling or having authority over, but as source: 'begotten of the Father before all worlds'. As Michael Williams argues, to take the passage as teaching a subordinationist view of woman commits one to a subordinationist view of Christ. From other New Testament passages it may be deduced that the headship of Christ to creation and the church again signifies source. If rule or authority over either is in view lordship is the term used, but *kurios* and *kephalē* must not be taken as equivalents.

5) Headship—the fall and the new creation

No mention has yet been made of a crucial passage in the Bible for the man-woman relationship: Genesis 3. In Genesis 3:16 there is explicit reference to man's rule over woman. The context is all-important. It is as a direct consequence of the Fall that subjection of woman to man, and that specifically within the marriage relationship, comes about. Subjection of woman is a dire result of sin rather than a fundamental principle of God's pattern for human life, a result all too evident in the history of man. We are not faced here with a divine provision of the creation order.

If, then—and this must be fundamental to any biblical view of sexuality in mankind—subordination of woman to man is a result of the broken relationship with God, we must expect the new creation, established through the cross, to provide the remedy. The cross has

made possible the reversal of the effects of sin. On the basis of a restored, indeed a new, relationship with God the redeeming of, and new developments within, interhuman relationships become possible. And that includes the possibility of a new relationship between man and woman—Genesis 1 and 2 instead of Genesis 3. Domination on the one hand, and subordination on the other, are inconsistent with the new creation inaugurated at the cross. This is what St Paul is getting at in Galatians 3:28, surely, when he speaks of there being in Christ neither male nor female, Jew nor Gentile, bond nor free. Of course there are still men and women with their complementary roles, still Jews and Gentiles with their characteristics and cultures, still (in his day and in ours) the bound and the free, but old barriers are done away with and distorted relationships are repaired. In respect of man and woman it will be commonly accepted that oppressive male domination is totally inconsistent with the new creation. The foregoing arguments—expounded at greater length by Michael Williams—would conclude that in Christ any kind of male rule over woman is to be left behind. Social custom, sub-conscious attitudes developed over centuries, availability of opportunity, personal qualifications and gifts, will all contribute to the retention of leadership mainly in male hands for the forseeable future. And psychological factors cannot be ignored. Many women are not suited to the emotional demands of leadership—but neither are many men, for that matter. The position here maintained, however, is that the gospel gives no support to an invariable principle of male leadership.

Why now—and not before?

The potentialities for human relationships created by the cross have been emphasized. But that is not the whole story. While the inner relationship between man and woman is transformed in Christ, even those who acknowledge it still live within the social order of the day, and do so in accordance with the divine will, for human institutions preserve order in society. The Christian vision, as expressed in Galatians 3:28, is as yet imperfectly fulfilled. We live as Christians in a 'now, but not yet' situation. Indeed, as St Paul emphasizes elsewhere, there is a sense in which those in the kingdom are in the process of being changed; they have not yet reached the goal. Yet in themselves and, in so far as they may bring about change, in society too they are to strive towards the fulfilment of the Christian vision.

In respect of another human institution of his day, slavery, St Paul teaches that the inner relationship between master and slave is changed by the cross, even though both still live within the social order of the day. As the kingdom becomes more clearly and widely established, the changed inner relationship may be matched by a changed social order, as the developments of history permit prin-

ciples inherent in the gospels to be applied. The formal abolition of the institution of slavery took a long time. It has also taken a long time for the change in the man-woman relationship made possible at the cross to begin to be reflected in the social order. What development in history now makes it possible? The hitherto unforeseen enlargement of opportunity for women to share with men in service in all walks of life. Equal educational opportunities, medical discoveries in family planning, technological inventions to ease greatly the burdens of housework, have all transformed the life of the vast majority of women in the developed countries. Fallen nature can and does prostitute all good things, but it must be in the providence of God that opportunities for wider service to humanity have opened up for women. This modern development provides the matrix in which a new stage in the realization of the vision of Galatians 3:28 may emerge.

That is why we face now, and not before now, the possibility and rightness of ordination of women. The time is ripe for a development in the man-woman relationship that has been 'on the cards' ever since the cross provided the remedy for man's sinfulness, the healing of his impaired relationships, and the potential for realizing wholeness in human personhood. The New Testament has had this 'time-bomb' waiting for the *kairos* one day to be created by the Lord of history.

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NOTES

1 John Wijngaards, *Did Christ Rule Out Women Priests?* (Mayhew-McCrimmon : 1977).
2 *Women Priests? Yes Now!*, ed. Harold Wilson (Denholm House Press : 1975).
3 Hans Küng, *Why Priests?* (Fontana : 1971) pp59, 60.
4 ibid. pp75-87.
5 'The Man/Woman Relationship in the New Testament', *Churchman* Vol. 91:1, 1977.
6 *Theological Objections to the Admission of Women to Holy Orders* considered by Leonard Hodgson, (Anglican Group for the Ordination of Women : 1967).
7 ibid. pp41-2.
8 ibid. p3.
9 ibid. p13.
10 G. G. Blum in 'The Office of Women in the New Testament', *The Churchman* Vol.85:3, 1971, pp177 and 187.
11 *1 and 2 Corinthians* (Oliphants : 1971) p106.
12 ibid. p34.
13 *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (A. & C. Black : 1968).
14 ibid, pp40-5.