

THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN: THE EXPERIENCE  
OF FOUR EUROPEAN CHURCHES

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October 1987

## INTRODUCTION

The intention of this paper is to look at the experience of some European churches with the ordination of women. Four churches, representing three denominations, have been chosen for study.

The Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland portrays a church where the ordination of women has been "around" for decades already and where the interest has shifted from theological debates to evaluating the church's experience with its women clergy.

The Lutheran world communion, that has to a large extent opted for women in priesthood, is represented by two Nordic state churches: in the case of the Church of Sweden we will try to look at some of the causes contributing to the painful "Swedish problem", while in the Lutheran Church of Finland we will trace a recently made, more hopeful decision, to ordain but also to stay together as a church.

Finally, the Church of England will be looked at in the context of - even in comparison to - the Anglican world communion and will be seen as a church that is still right in the middle of making its decision for or against the ordination of women.

### I BAPTISTS - The Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland

Women in ordained ministry has been an established fact for almost 30 years in the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland. The interest within the church is now focusing on how the transition has taken place.

Has it been smooth? How have women adapted to their clerical roles and the churches to their clergywomen?

In this section, after looking briefly at how ordination came about among British Baptists, we will focus on the current discussion and self-evaluation of the church's experience with women in ministry.

The Baptist Union of Britain has a membership of two hundred thousand and is the main body of Baptists in Europe. In it a woman took charge of a pastorate for the first time in 1918. The first ordination took place in 1922 and names were placed on the full ministerial list in 1925. At this time an inquiry was set up into the whole question of women in Baptist ministry, as there was some hesitation concerning the wisdom of enrolling women in ministerial lists, as well as matters relating to grants and other practicalities.

In the same year, 1925, a formal declaration was made by a special commission considering the matter of admitting women into ministry, that "the Baptists saw no basic objection to woman ministers."<sup>1</sup> In 1927 a separate list for "woman pastors" was set up in the handbook and in 1956 the name was changed to "woman ministers".<sup>2</sup>

An order of deaconesses had existed in the Baptist Church since 1890. To begin with their tasks were mainly health related, but from 1947 they started to assume more pastoral responsibilities, with the result that in 1935 all deaconesses in active service were accorded Ministerial Recognition.<sup>3</sup>

In 1986, 30 out of the 2036 Baptists Ministers in Britain were women.<sup>4</sup> They exercised all types of ministry that men did, including administering sacrament, conducting worship and liturgy, preaching, youth work, counselling, social services and religious education. They were also

engaged in women's work. In principle there was no position that was not open to women and women held or had held a fair range of positions, including that of a senior or executive minister in a multiple staff parish and a national church official in a senior executive position.

Theologically the question of women in ministry is not classified as a "live" issue in the Baptist Church of Britain. This is natural, for besides having had women in this capacity for a number of years already, the church has clarified its theological position on the issue at least twice, in 1925 and in 1967. Theological objections to women in ministry arise only from time to time, on a very minor scale, and on personal rather than organized bases. The leadership of the church feels that the reluctance to accept women workers can be based on a "too literal and unthinking use of the biblical texts that refer to women,"<sup>5</sup> and usually deals with such problems by counselling and Bible study.

There is considerable amount of interest at present in the Baptist Church in how women have adjusted to ministry and how local churches have adjusted to their female pastors. In 1986 a whole issue of the Baptist Quarterly was dedicated to articles discussing the experience and implications of women in ministry. The issue attempted two main things: firstly, to lay down a record of contemporary attitudes to women's participations in the life of the Baptist Church as seen by a sociologist, and secondly, to hear the experience of woman participants, who have themselves entered ministry.<sup>6</sup>

The practice of studying church dynamics from a sociological perspective is traditionally more American than British. In the U.S.A. several studies have been conducted, especially among the Baptists, with regard to the entry of women into ministry. As results of those studies started

to trickle to Europe the Baptist Union of Britain decided to undertake a similar task. Thus in 1983-84 a survey was conducted by Edward Lehman, an American sociologist, and a Baptist himself, and already a "veteran researcher" in the area of attitudes to women's ministry.

The denominations that participated in the study, besides the Baptists, were the United Reformed Church, the Methodists and the Church of England. The U.R.C. have ordained women, like the Baptists, from the early part of the century, the Methodists since 1974, while the Church of England was at the time hotly debating whether women could be ordained as deacons - a half way post on the way to full priesthood.

The aim of Lehman's study was to make a "systematic evaluation of the ways in which lay members think and feel about the entry of women into the ranks of ordained clergy."<sup>7</sup> He points out that as women have moved into various professions - medicine, law, higher education - formerly dominated by men, they "typically encounter an identifiable set of stereotyped responses to them"<sup>8</sup> that portray them as unreliable workers, overly emotional, unable to handle interpersonal conflicts etc. By studying the lay members' responses to stereotypes of this kind, Lehman first attempted to establish the cognitive element of attitudes: what church members think clergy women are like.

What emerged from the study was that though clergy women definitely tended to be stereotyped by lay members, some members were much more prone to this than others, and some stereotypes were much more widely held than others. For instance, though a large proportion of members viewed women as subject to emotional problems because of the cross-pressures of demands from work and home, very few thought that women would change jobs more often than men or that they were less suitable by

temperament for the tasks of ministry than men.

Generally speaking, on most items only a minority viewed women in a stereotyped way while most church members tended to have a "more open and positive perception of women in the role of ordained clergy."<sup>9</sup> A factor analysis of the stereotype questions revealed that the most important criterion dividing members as stereotypers or non-stereotypers was their perception of how well women handled role conflict - the cross-pressures of work and home. Interestingly, this emerged as a criterion more important than even "reliability", which came second.<sup>10</sup>

The second element of Lehman's study concentrated on the affective element of attitudes: how members feel about clergy women. This was studied by focusing on the members' preference for men or women in various church positions. The dividing line in most members' minds was between preferring a man for various roles and the gender of the pastor making no difference to them. Very few women actually indicated that they preferred a woman over a man. The one major exception to this concerned the person to whom one might turn for personal problems. More people indicated a preference for a woman on that question than on any other.<sup>11</sup>

Maleness seemed to matter most in the role of the senior pastor and the person guiding on building project, least with items such as leading the pastoral prayer or reading the Scripture lesson. With most church functions and roles - preaching, giving the Lord's Supper, administration - maleness had only little significance. Looking at the total picture of preferences, for the majority of church members it made no difference whether the pastor was male or female in relation to most of the church's positions and activities.<sup>12</sup>



After having studied the cognitive and affective dimensions of attitudes, in yet another part of the survey Lehman explored the factors influencing the members' willingness to accept a woman pastor. The key factor was the deacons' recommendation: in an appropriate church for a pastor 74% of the members - to some extent regardless of their stereotyping or preferences for males in clergy roles - indicated that they would be willing to accept a qualified woman pastor if she were the one recommended by the deacons.<sup>13</sup>

The main sociological factor affecting the member receptivity to women in ministry was their concern for organizational viability. What this means in practice is that when confronted with the novelty of a woman pastor the lay members' openness to the idea depended largely on whether they saw her presence as enhancing their wellbeing as a church or whether she in their minds posed a threat to the organization. Thus in Lehman's European study "hard-up" churches with a declining membership were readier to consider "even a woman" as a solution to their problems, while bigger city churches with substantial budgets and a growing membership were more eager to preserve the status quo and turn away from what could be seen as a "potential threat."

The conviction of the Baptist Leadership is that "the ministry will grow in effectiveness and the church will better fulfill its mission if churches, laity, ministers and executives accept women and men equally as ministers."<sup>14</sup> Since "man and woman have been created for partnership and redeemed for partnership in service", it is "high time", wrote a prominent British Baptist in 1983, "to make that partnership truly effective in the service of God in His church and in His world."<sup>15</sup>

Helping the churchmembers to see that accepting female leadership

will benefit their church and that according to statistics the "horror stories" of congregational decline on the entry of a woman pastor simply do not materialize, is, according to Lehman, one of the key factors in helping lay members to accept women in pastoral roles.<sup>16</sup>

"Women in Ministry" studies among the Baptists in America have led the church leaders to take positive action to facilitate the entry of women into ministry and to enhance their contribution to the church's mission. Such "positive action" includes education of members on all levels - clergy, laity, administrators -, revision over college policies, and looking into the questions of financial aid, recruitment and women studying theology. The results of Lehman's British study are expected to precipitate similar, relevant practical steps in the Baptist Union of Britain.

While Lehman looks at "Women in Ministry" from a sociologist's perspective, Baptist women ministers themselves give a more personal account of what it means to be a clergy women. Women who have entered Baptist ministry give an overall picture of satisfaction and fulfillment in their work. This is generally true of ministerial women of all denominations and is not surprising as one needs to be highly motivated to enter such an "unusual area" as ministry is for women. Also ministry is more likely than any other profession to be seen as one's calling. Yet despite "job satisfaction" things could be easier, and ministerial women often stumble across problems that seem to relate to their sex alone.

The first such problem is the inequality a young woman aspiring for ministry typically encounters: the encouragement and support that a young man in a similar situation would experience "just isn't there" for her.



Also, the stereotype of "what a minister should be like" or "whom God can call" is deeply rooted and can influence the choice of ministerial recognition committees, thus making it hard or even impossible for a woman to enter ministry, even if she survives the initial lack of encouragement. On the other hand, some women studying for ministry experience problems with sorting out their self-image as ministers, for it seems that what they are supposed to become is a male figure.<sup>17</sup> When women do eventually enter the ministry they often find that they have to work harder for acceptance than their male colleagues. "Whereas men are acceptable unless they prove themselves unworthy, women are acceptable if they prove themselves worthy."<sup>18</sup> When working for acceptance a woman's personal qualities are usually scrutinized more carefully than those of a man, and she has the added strain of coping with the negative attitudes of those who may find women in ministry a novelty or not acceptable at all.

Even "acceptable" women ministers often find themselves as an exception to the rule. It is common for ministerial women to listen to statements such as: "if you can forget she's a woman, you'll find she's got something to say" or "she did a good job - but next time we'll get a man."<sup>19</sup> Women tend to be patronized in a way men never are, and often find themselves excluded by language that without thinking describes ministerial workers as "men" or "brethren".

One of the main problems women ministers experience when trying to expel prejudice related to their sex, is being off-handedly stamped as "feminist" or "women's lib" - when the fact is that in most churches the entry of women into ministry has had little, if anything, to do with the secular feminist movement.

The experience of Baptist women ministers has made them aware of the many difficulties and pressures of a minister's job. But the same experience has also made them aware of the contradictory nature of the arguments relating to women's ability to cope with pressure: one often loudly proclaimed argument of any ordination of women debate of almost every denomination is that women would just not be "strong enough" for the pressures of ministry or priesthood. Yet women's ability to bear the burdens of ministry has been amply demonstrated in many Free Churches that have, sometimes for decades, subscribed to female ordination. Would the pressures of ministry in different denominations be so different that one cannot serve as a demonstration for the other?

One Baptist minister also points out how in her experience many of those who do not consider women to be "strong enough" for ministry still regard their mothers - not their fathers - as the strongest person in their lives.<sup>20</sup>

## II LUTHERANS - The Church of Sweden and the Lutheran Church of Finland

The Lutheran Church is well suited for consideration on the issue of a church's experience with the ordination of women. First of all, about 89% of the world's Lutherans belong to churches that ordain women, while in Europe the figure is as high as 99%. Secondly, the problems of the Church of Sweden after its decision to ordain women are referred to probably more than those of any other church as an invitation for caution. Thirdly, the Lutheran Church of Finland made its decision for ordination as late as November 1986, and was at the time the largest Lutheran body still without ordination, yet also, one that had had an opportunity to follow the developments in Sweden from a close range.

In this section we will first look briefly at the situation of Lutheran churches worldwide, with regard to the ordination of women, as surveyed in 1984 by the Lutheran World Federation. Secondly we will consider some of the problems the Church of Sweden has been facing since its decision to ordain women. And lastly, we will look at the way the Lutheran Church of Finland reached its recent ordination decision and how the church is planning to live with it.

Lutherans number 74 million in the world and are divided into about 200 independant decision-making bodies. The first Lutheran church to make the decision to ordain women was that of the Netherlands in 1920. For the German "land churches" (Landeskirche) the time of decision was shortly after the Second World War. The African and Asian Churches tackled the question mainly in the 1960's, while the largest American bodies (ALC, LCA) did so in the 1970's.

When questioned by the LWF for factors leading to discussion on the ordination of women, most churches mentioned initiative taken by the church bodies themselves as the main factor.<sup>2</sup> Only two churches - both European - mentioned that the state was active in the decision making.<sup>3</sup> The presence of female theologians and education opportunities for women featured high for 30% of the churches.<sup>4</sup>

As causes for not ordaining women, the American "no-ordination" churches mention theological reservations as the main reason. In Africa 2/3 of the no-ordination churches list theological reservations as the main reason, but also indicate social and cultural causes, and many refer to lack of interest. In Asia social and cultural causes are the main reason why women are not ordained, lack of interest being the second.<sup>5</sup>

According to a recent report on the experience of women ordaining

churches, the ordination of women is now generally accepted and made a matter of discussion from time to time only by a few.<sup>6</sup> In 1974 6% of the world's 30000 Lutheran priests were women.<sup>7</sup>

In the church of Sweden the decision to ordain women was made in 1958. The decision was not reached as a climax to a lengthy debate, but rather, political pressure from the Swedish government and parliament was brought to bear on the Church on a national level and from political parties on a local level.<sup>8</sup> Thus a negative decision taken only in 1957 was reversed a year later. As it happened "a not insignificant number of Swedish church leaders and theologians changed their position virtually over night."<sup>9</sup>

To begin with a conscience clause was created to guarantee bishops the freedom of not ordaining women and male priests or not cooperating with them if that was against their consciences.<sup>10</sup> By the opponents of ordination of women, "the Loyal Opposition", this clause was seen as a "life-savers" and the cement holding the Church of Sweden together".<sup>11</sup> However, gradually the validity of the clause was eroded: political pressure and pressure from the mass media was exercised on bishops to "put their houses in order" and eventually "consciencs" could only be taken into consideration when there were no other interests at stake.<sup>12</sup> Also, there were pressures on the government to pledge that all further nominations to the episcopate would be women until the representation of the sexes reached 50:50.<sup>13</sup>

In 1975 the Church of Sweden Assembly reaffirmed the conscience clause. However, in 1981 parliament abolished it.<sup>14</sup> Under the changed circumstances it became technically possible to remove non-cooperating bishops and priests from their offices by secular law.<sup>15</sup> The present



Swedish government has decided not to appoint bishops that oppose the ordination of women. What has also happened is that theology students unable to accept women priests have been encouraged by the Minister of Church Affairs to think about other professions.

Besides the above mentioned "battle over the conscience clause" there are other, theological, factors, either in the ordination decision itself or the developments with the Church of Sweden, that have caused concern to the opponents of ordination.

Firstly, the Church of Sweden maintains the historic episcopate in an unbroken succession. The church has a "traditional feel about it" and this traditionalism is still obvious in the role of the parish priest. Besides feeling that ordaining women as such has been a breach with apostolic succession, some have pointed out with concern that supporters of the ordination of women have come to disagree with the basic Church of Sweden theology of priesthood and question whether Christ instituted ministry in its present priestly form at all.

Secondly, the supporters emphasize the message, rather than the messenger, in ministry as well as the individuality of the ministerial call. They also challenge some of the traditional interpretations of Scripture. These views have been seen as unorthodox by the "loyal opposition" which subscribes to an interpretation of Scripture "in the tradition of the Catholic Church",<sup>16</sup> and prefer evaluating the ministerial call "objectively" in the light of Scripture on the Apostolic Tradition.

It is customary to look at the "Swedish problem" from the perspective of the "Loyal Opposition". However, there are also concerns that the supporters of ordination have. They point out that in the final analysis the opposition to ordination is only a very small minority of the



church's membership, though largest and most vocal among the church-workers and male priests.<sup>17</sup> It may easily look as if a fraction of the church was holding the opposition captive, by its demand for "rights" and by its threat to split the church by forming its own administrative bodies. This, despite the fact that the Church of Sweden has "appealed for peace" with the Loyal Opposition.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, what has been disconcerting to both parties involved in the sorting out of the ordination decision is the fact that name-calling and character assassination have become a part of what ultimately is an ecclesiastical question. Also, though the active membership of the Church of Sweden may be as little as 2%,<sup>19</sup> for those who do believe in the separate and peculiar function of the church it has been hard to see the church become in the minds of many just "another social institution" to which "all the anxious of equal rights" apply and are dealt with as in any social institution.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the controversial nature of the ordination decision and its prolonged aftermath there are many who also see a positive and progressive side to the development. In 1985 there were 550 women priests in the Church of Sweden, 18% of the total clergy, and many parishes felt greatly benefitted by the new dimensions and gifts in ministry their presence had added to the life of the church.<sup>21</sup> Though breaking the traditional image of the parish priest has been understandably criticized by those to whom this image is meaningful, women entering ministry without the "burden of tradition" have, on the other hand, been able to find new ways of communicating the Gospel that are relevant to others.<sup>22</sup>

The Lutheran Church of Finland reached its decision to ordain women to the priesthood in November 1986, after the matter had been under

discussion for 30 years. The final vote of the synod was 87 for and 21 against, where a 3/4 majority was needed.

The development of the ordination debate reflects aptly the nature of the Lutheran Church of Finland: 4.6 million Finns, around 95% of the population, belong to the Lutheran State Church. The active to "somewhat active" membership is estimated around 20% of the total, and most active members belong to one of the five movements within the church that have their historical roots in religious revivals, and may hold theological views widely differing from the "official" Lutheran position. Yet all have been regarded as equally Lutheran. The voice of the active membership and the clergy is reflected in the vote of the synod while the "passive" majority is heard through the media and national polls.

At the heart of the Lutheran theology of ordination the question is asked whether the order of priesthood exists by human tradition or divine ordination, whether priesthood is primarily functional, as the Lutheran confessional books define it, or constitutive, established by divine command.<sup>23</sup> In the former instance the sex of the priest would have no theological impact, in the latter the theological implications would need to be established.

On the popular local church and clergy level and in the Finnish media questions pertaining to the "essence" of the priestly office have hardly surfaced: the debate has been conducted largely in terms of the traditional, mainly Pauline, "proof texts" on women and the argument from the lack of Biblical precedence on one hand, and in an attempt to contextualize the individual texts and to reach a wider biblical and dogmatic understanding of the priestly office on the other.

One of the expressed fears of some of the opponents of women's ordi-

nation has been that a step out of the church's tradition would lead into liberalism on several issues. Some with ecumenical interests fear alienation from the church catholic or jeopardizing any attempt of unity on the matter of office - though it is only realistic to realize that those who would not recognize the female priests of a church may not do so for the male priests either.

On the other hand, those who do find a biblical and dogmatic basis for the acceptance of women into ministry see the exclusion of women as a step out of biblical order, equally offensive to their consciences and detrimental to the church's ministry, in their view, as the inclusion of women is in the opposition's. In the end neither side of the debate has seen the question of ordination of women as primarily a biblical one. Both parties also agree that what has been tackled is not an equality issue and that feminism or women's movements have not been the precipitators of the debate.

Some disagreement exists as to what the church's role should be in its secular context: there is more tendency among the supporters of the ordination of women than among the opposers to strive towards a more socially active church, and to criticize the existing structure for "out-of-touchness" with its majority members' acute concerns: unemployment, loneliness, divorce - even AIDS. While the supporters would like to see the church as more of an opinion directing force in society, the opposers tend to emphasize its traditional functions.

However, both groups are wary of the church's extensive involvement in politics, its secularization and its loss of sight of spiritual care and evangelism.<sup>24</sup>

The fact that the decision of the synod and the theological debates

on the ordination of women reflect mainly the mind of the active minority of the church members - a problem in itself - was demonstrated in a national poll taken in 1984 after the synod had defeated the motion for ordination of women: 73% of the Finns strongly disagreed or disagreed with the synods' decision, while any kind of agreement came only from 22%. 79% of the participants in the poll also felt that the decision did not increase their respect for the Church and 87% felt it would not increase their participation in the church.<sup>25</sup> In the year following the Synod's negative decision the number of people leaving their church membership rose with one third - a somewhat dramatic figure in a country not prone for demonstrations.

At the time the decision to ordain women was eventually made, John Vickström, the Archbishop of Finland, expressed what had been on many minds, namely that "to postpone the decision once more would harm the church more than a decision by vote and its ensuing consequences."<sup>26</sup> It had become obvious that though at another stage of the church's 2000 year history the ordination of women would have been an offence to the majority of the church, its absence in the Lutheran Church of Finland had become so.<sup>27</sup>

As the decision was reached there were no "hurrah's" and no winner-loser division. Everyone was aware of the sensitivity of convictions on both sides and the mood of the Synod was sober as it realized that it was not the decision but how the church would live with it that would decide the effects on the church's unity and the decision's usefulness. In the nine months following the decision there has been no exodus out of the church - on the contrary, the number of people leaving the church has declined under the national average.



Media coverage of the ordination debate in Finland has been generous. After the decision was reached the press was eager to admonish the church in its new circumstances and to point it, sometimes quite sharply, back to its real duties: to offer the word of God to needy people and to carry on the task of evangelism. For many the church's preoccupation on "minor matters" - the sex of the priest - was symptomatic of its navel gazing and its exhaustion of its energies on internal struggles over tradition and form while the people's real needs went unattended.

Some clergymen expressed in the media their welcome to women to bring their gifts and strengths to share the burden of the work. In a study amongst church employees it emerged that women were expected to "make a difference" as they entered their priestly office. For instance, they were expected to bring more "soft values" to sermons and the church life in general. They could expect to be called on to christen a child and counsel their members more often than their male colleagues, while men would retain their position as "marriers" and "buriers". Women in particular would in many instances find it more appropriate to turn to a female, rather than a male, priest.<sup>28</sup>

The Lutheran Church of Finland is not expected to split over the issue of ordination. They feel that the church should be big enough to accommodate people from both for and against persuasions - as it already has done on many other issues. The matter would only get out of proportion if a group needed to sever church unity over it. What really has been a threat to unity is not the "reactions of the masses", but as one observer points out, "the stubborn attitude of some leaders that have consistently refused to recognize the direction that their flock had taken towards the ordination of women."<sup>29</sup>



The debate has been controversial, ranging from tears to cartoons, and that is understandable considering the nature of the issue. The opinions have been expressed clearly and sometimes provocatively on both sides, but now that the decision has been made it is time to strive to make it work, together.

The church law will not include a conscience clause. However, the synod emphasized in its determination to protect the consciences of the opponents. The "drive-in" instructions for female priesthood point out that the move should be made in the "spirit of Norway" - a reference to the successful way Norway handled the issue years earlier - that is, what can be done together, will be done together, what cannot be done together, will be done separately, yet without ill feelings.<sup>30</sup>

### III THE ANGLICANS - the Church of England

In many of the Anglican churches around the world the ordination of women to priesthood is already a well established, and more often than not, well accepted, fact. In the Church of England the early part of 1987 saw a major culmination of the debate which ended in a decision to ordain women as deacons, while the issue of priesthood is being prepared for a vote in the near future. For the next few years, then, the Church of England retains its tension.

The aim of this final section of the paper is to evaluate the present "mood" of the Church of England, in context of - or even in contrast to - the wider Anglican community: how ordination of women came about in the Anglican communion and what issues the Church of England is wrestling with in relation to it.

The Anglican Church experienced its introduction to the practice of

the ordination of women in 1944 when Deaconess Florence Lee Tim Oi was set apart for the priesthood by R.O. Hall, the bishop of Hong Kong. Though documents on the issue had been prepared since 1920, her ordination did not come as a climax to the debate - rather it was a solution to a war time emergency: During the Japanese occupation Deaconess Lee was in charge of the Anglican Church in Macao. Communion was celebrated once a month when a priest came from Hong Kong for that purpose. When the occupying forces eventually denied entrance to visiting priests, Bishop Hall decided to priest Deaconess Lee, rather than see the church deprived of sacraments.

After the war deaconess Lee resigned and the bishop accepted her resignation - both for the sake of harmony in the church. However, on the basis of the experience, the South China Diocese requested "for such legal action" to be prepared in the Anglican communion that would permit the ordination of a deaconess to priesthood for an experimental 20 years. The request was turned down at the 1948 Lambeth Conference. The reason for the refusal was "the church's tradition and order".<sup>1</sup>

It took another 20 years until the principles for "the tradition and order" that concern priesthood in the Anglican Church came under careful scrutiny. In 1967 a Working Party was set up on Women's Ministry. In its report to the 1967 Lambeth conference the working party pointed out that they found "no conclusive theological reasons for withholding ordination to the priesthood from women as such."<sup>2</sup> Though the Lambeth Conference was not ready for a commitment as yet, but declared theological arguments both for and against the ordination inconclusive, it requested "every national and regional church or province to give careful study to the question of the ordination of women to the priesthood"<sup>3</sup> - and report back

to the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC). The matter was regarded as urgent.

As a response to such "careful study" the ACC then started to receive requests of advice on how to act as synods voted for the ordination of women. In 1971 the ACC declared that if a bishop acting on approval of his synod/province decided to ordain women to the priesthood, his action would be accepted by the ACC.<sup>4</sup>

The Bishop of Hong Kong was again to be the one to usher in the practice as within the same year, 1971, he ordained two women to priesthood. This was, he felt, "what was best for the churches needs."<sup>5</sup> He also declared that "if humanity is to be fully represented before God in the priesthood it is logical to suppose that the ministry which is not limited to people of one tribe or race should not be limited to one sex".<sup>6</sup> The bishop of Hong Kong hoped that his diocese could provide the church world wide with "the living experience", which others could see and which could help them as they made up their mind on the issue.

The 1971 ACC declaration on the acceptability of ordination of women when the bishops decision was backed up by his synod was interpreted in the Anglican Communion as a virtual "go-ahead" sign for the ordination. A steady flow of Anglican churches voting for women priests started. The next synod to accept the ordination of women as a principle was that of Burma in 1972 and to implement it, Canada in 1975 and the USA in 1976. In the mid and late 1970's several churches made decisions for ordaining women priests, including Kenya, Uganda and New Zealand. Brazil made its decision a few years later. Action is pending or has reached the stage of "ordination for deacons" in several more countries, including Ireland, Cuba and Australia.

In comparison with many of the "overseas" churches the progress in the Church of England has been relatively slow. In 1975 its General Synod accepted the declaration that "there are no fundamental objections to the ordination of women to the priesthood."<sup>7</sup> It also invited the House of Bishops to bring before the Synod a proposal to admit women to the priesthood when "in the light of developments in the Anglican Communion generally as well as in this country they judge the time of action to be right."<sup>2</sup>

Time was, to some extent, right in February 1987 when the Anglican synod of England voted 317 for, 145 against, to ordain women as deacons. At the same time it was voted that legislation should be prepared, such as was necessary in the nature of the church's relationship to the state, for the issue of the ordination of women into priesthood itself to be voted on. Though the preparation of legislation does not in itself guarantee that any motion will be passed, the move to "prepare legislation" is usually taken in the Church of England as some kind of an indicator of positive attitude on a question.

The earliest the ordination of women could come to the Synod for vote is July 1991. Then, if passed, the decision would need to be passed in the Parliament and to receive Royal Assent. Dr. Runcie, the Archbishop of Canterbury, estimates that the earliest possible date for ordination in the Church of England would be in 1992.<sup>8</sup>

The situation of the Church of England poses a curious dilemma in the world-wide Anglican Communion. Many, at least English Anglicans, still regard the Church of England as having some kind of a leadership role amongst the worlds' Anglicans: the seat of the Archbishop is Canterbury and Lambeth Conferences bring the world church together. Yet, women



coming from overseas to Britain find that their priestly office is not recognized in the "mother church" and that the "third world" has in fact overtaken the first, in what they consider to be progress.

Then what has been holding the Church of England back on the question of ordination when several other Anglican churches have gone ahead, it seems, with relative ease? One answer could certainly be the cumbersome of its state - related machinery that may take longer to move than that of a smaller, "independent" Anglican Church, and that provides plenty of opportunity for referral and postponement by those not eager to see a motion accepted. Also, tradition may be more treasured in England than in some younger churches, and may form more of an obstacle for change.

Yet on a deeper level theological and ecumenical implications and fear of schism play probably a more important role for the Church of England than for the younger Anglican Churches. In general the range of theological perspective, tradition and liturgy available under the "umbrella" of the Anglican Church is probably unprecedented by any other denomination. However, the situation is accentuated in the Church of England, where all that "width" is actually portrayed in one country and one administrative body. Arriving at a consensus between the different sections of the church has often - not only here - proved to be a difficult task.

The theological arguments presented - for and against - on the ordination of women issue have varied greatly depending on which "level" of the church the issue has been discussed and probably, in total, these arguments summarize adequately almost the whole of the Protestant debate on the subject. The areas of debate more peculiar to the Anglican Church



have been the nature of God and the nature of priesthood. Yet the issues most vital in relation to a decision on the ordination question could be named as the church's tradition and its relationship to the ecumenical community, Rome in particular - as these are capitalized by the "high" trend of the Church, from which the most objections and the threats of division have come.

Anglican theologians are pointing out that the church's tradition, coming to us via the early Fathers and the medieval church "reflects ontological assumptions about the nature of women and her relation to man" that "in the light of modern knowledge and Biblical study"<sup>16</sup> are considered unacceptable. However, a breach with that tradition could create a sense of isolation and restlessness that for some seem worse than the relative contradiction with modern thinking.

Neither are ecumenical anxieties groundless. After the 1975 General Synod's "no theological objection" - conclusion the Archbishop of Canterbury wrote to Pope Paul expressing the "slow but steady growth of a consensus of opinion"<sup>11</sup> on the question of the ordination of women. The answer of the Pope expressed regret concerning the fact that this "new course taken by the Anglican Communion . . . cannot fail to introduce a grave difficulty" <sup>12</sup> into the Anglo-Catholic dialogue.

An area that will most certainly be under careful scrutiny before any decision of ordaining women to priesthood is made is how female deacons have been accepted by the Church. As this paper is being written the decision to ordain women as Deacons is only half a year old. Thus a conclusive statement would be premature. Yet, despite the shortness of time, at least three things have already emerged: Firstly, there has been no exodus out of the church because of the decision. Secondly, a typical

church member's response to his or her "Lady Deacon" is that she is fully accepted - because of the "kind of person she is" and because in most cases she was already working for the church, and her work was valued, even before the decision. And lastly, local churches that have a female deacon seem positive about the fact that her work will enhance their church's ministry. Though no official statistics have been compiled as yet, the churches that have ordained women as deacons seem to come from the "lower" end of the church, with often a strong community and evangelism orientation.

## CONCLUSION

The four European churches studied above have had very different experiences with the ordination of women. At the end it is therefore hard to come up with any features that would automatically apply to all of them or that would form a useful "prognosis" for a church contemplating a decision on the issue.

Yet there is one generalization that does emerge from this study and that is the fact that the factors contributing to a church's experience with the ordination of women, both in the decision making process and in the church's reception of its clergy women, are immensely complex, with the most crucial ones often being the hardest to identify. The sociological elements of this complexity have been illustrated above by the studies done in the Baptist Union, while the Church of Sweden illustrates the difficulties of a church-state relationship, especially when the state decides to exert political pressure on the Church. The Church of England, on the other hand, illustrates the difficulties of arriving at a consensus in a church with a wide spectrum of theological persuasions,

especially as some of them are highly ecumenically motivated. What also emerges from the experience of the churches that were studied is that the decision to ordain women does not automatically either divide the church - as is often feared - or solve all its other problems with its internal spiritual state or mission to the world - as is some times hoped. It depends on the church's maturity, self-understanding and its commitment to unity as well as to its mission as how the issue will affect it in the long run.

Admitting women to ordained ministry has the potentiality of enriching a church's experience and enhancing its ministry to the world. Enabling a church to perceive that potentiality and to acknowledge it is the key factor in helping it to make a decision that will not divide, but complete.

## FOOTNOTES

### BAPTISTS

<sup>1</sup>"Women in the Service of the Denomination" (the Baptist Union Great Britain and Ireland, 1967), p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>"The Order of Baptist Deaconess 1890-1975," A Pamphlet for Thanksgiving Service, 1975.

<sup>4</sup>"Women in Ministry, Facts and Figures," Britain, September 1986.

<sup>5</sup>"Women in the Service of the Denomination," pp. 12-13.

<sup>6</sup>"Editorial," Baptist Quarterly 31 (July 1986);301.

<sup>7</sup>Edward Lehman, "Reactions to Women in Ministry: A Survey of English Baptist Church Members," Baptist Quarterly 31 (July 1986):302.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 304.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 307

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 307-308.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 311.

<sup>14</sup>"Study of Women in Ministry Recommendations," Adopted by Commission on Ministry, 13 September, 1979.

<sup>15</sup>G.R. Beasley - Murray, "Man and Woman in the Church," Ministry Department, Baptists Union 1980, in Margaret Jarman, "Attitudes to Women in Baptist Churches in the Mid 1980's," Baptist Quarterly 31 (July 1986):326.

<sup>16</sup>Lehman, "Reaction to Women," p. 315.

<sup>17</sup>Jarman, "Attitudes to Women," p. 328

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Carol McCarthy, "Ordained and Female, " Baptist Quarterly 31 (July 1986):335.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid, p. 336.

## LUTHERANS

<sup>1</sup>cf. Francis Mahr, ed., The Ordination of Women in Lutheran Churches: Analysis of an LWF Survey (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation Department of Communication, Publications Office, 1984).

These statistics have been updated by the writer for this paper to include the changed status of the Lutheran Church of Finland. The 100% figure of the LWF statistics represents the 92% that answered the questionnaire. Taking into account the "no-answer" churches, the figures would be:

Membership figures of "Yes" and "No" churches in millions:		
	Europe	World
Yes	53.0 (92.3%)	60.7 (81.6%)
No	0.5 ( 0.9%)	7.7 (10.4%)
No answer	<u>3.9 ( 6.8%)</u>	<u>6.0 ( 8.0%)</u>
Total	57.4 million	74.4 million

<sup>2</sup>LWF Survey, p. 6

<sup>3</sup>Eeva Kinnunen, Luterilaisten Valtaenemmistö Toteuttaa Naispappeutta, " Kotimaa, 27 April 1984.

<sup>4</sup>LWF Survey, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid, p. 17

<sup>6</sup>Kinnunen, "Valtaenemmistö."

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Bertil E. Gärtner and Carl Strandberg, "The Experience of the Church of Sweden," in Man, Woman and Priesthood, ed. Peter Moore (London: SPCK, 1978), p.123.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>"Naispappeus Kirkkojen Keskustelunaiheena," Suomen Kirkon Tiedotuskeskus, 3 December 1955.

<sup>11</sup>Gärtner, "Church of Sweden," p. 126.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid, p. 124.



- 14 LWF Survey, p. 32.
- 15 "Naispappeus Kirkkojen Keskustelunaiheena."
- 16 Gärtner, "Church of Sweden", p. 131.
- 17 Ibid, pp. 124-25.
- 18 LWF Survey, p. 33.
- 19 Gärtner, "Church of Sweden," p. 124.
- 20 Ibid, p. 128
- 21 Sirpa Löytöluoma and Katariina Sjögren, "Naisen Asema ja Kirkon Virka" (Pro-gradu tutkielma, Turun Yliopisto, 1986), p. 226
- 22 cf. Ulla Carin Holm, Hennes Verk Skall Prisa Henne (Vänersborg: Vänersborg's Boktryckeri AB, 1982).
- 23 Eero Huovinen, Nainen ja Pappisvirka (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Teologisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 1979), pp. 95-96.
- 24 Löytöluoma, "Naisen Asema," p. 113.
- 25 "Yleisön Mielipiteet Kirkolliskokouksen Naispappeuspäätöksestä (Suomen Gallup OY, 1984).
- 26 "Nainen Papiksi," Ilkka, 7 November 1986.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 cf. Löytöluoma, "Naisen Asema."
- 29 Hannu Kuosmanen, "Naispappeuden Haavat Umpeutuvat Hitaasti," Uusi-Suomi, 9 November 1986.
- 30 "Ajo-ohjeet Pappisviran Uudelleenjärjestelyn Jälkeen," Kotimaa, 2 April 1987.

#### ANGLICAN

- 1 GC 104 "The Ordination of Women to the Priesthood." A Consultative Document presented by the Advisory Council for the Church's Ministry (London: Church Information Office, 1972), p. 55.
- 2 Ibid, p. 2.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid, p. 52

<sup>6</sup>Ibid, p. 56

<sup>7</sup>G.S. Misc 88 "The Ordination of Women," A Supplement to the Consultative Document GS 104 (London: Church Information Office, 1978), pp. 4-5.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid, p. 5

<sup>9</sup>Jonathan Petre, "Schism Threat after Synod votes for Women," Daily Telegraph, 27 February 1987.

<sup>10</sup>GS Misc 88, p. 47

<sup>11</sup>Ibid, p. 32

<sup>12</sup>Ibid, p. 33

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