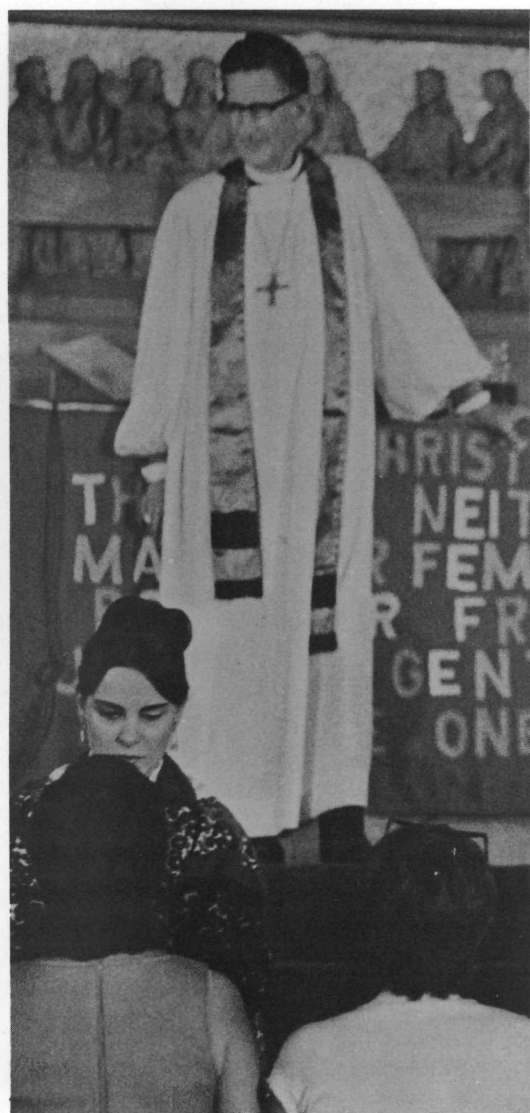


THE WITNESS

Special Issue, 60 cents
August 25, 1974

Eleven Women Ordained Priests In Philadelphia



Christian Conscience?

The recent ordination of a number of women to the priesthood was done in only partial compliance with the established procedures for ordinations. The irregular character of that action draws attention to those internal laws of the church, the canons. Challenges to received institutions make lawyers of us all.

The canons concerning the ministry have all been written in terms of "he," "him," and "his." It could be argued that the language of the canons was open to the construction that "he" might mean "human being" or baptized person." But over the generations this understanding of the intent of the canons was never tested. Seminaries were all-male enclaves; the diaconate, presbyterate, and episcopate were filled exclusively by men; and few people seem to have thought these things should be different than they were.

After some years of consciousness-raising on the part of individuals and the community, women were, by express action of General Convention, admitted to the diaconate. Their call by God and their competence in ministry was and is undeniable.

Then, in the fall of 1973, a motion to admit women to the priesthood was presented to the General Convention. It received a majority in the House of Bishops and was approved by a majority of the deputies. However, since divided delegations are counted as negative, the negative votes plus the divided votes outnumbered the affirmative votes, and the action failed in the House of Deputies.

It would be unrealistic, however, to suppose that the conviction represented by half the bishops and deputies of the Convention of 1973 could be contained. Persons who are equally committed to priesthood for women might disagree on strategy. But people who think of the issue as fundamentally not one of interpreting canons but as one of obedience to a call of God will feel a need to do something.

One course of action would be to wait until another Convention, try again then, and meantime publicize the case while abiding by the decision of the church's national synod. But such a course would be slow and uncertain. The

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Who We Are

The Reverend William Spofford, father of the present Episcopal Bishop of Eastern Oregon, was for some decades the prime mover of **The Witness** magazine. Starting in 1920, he produced a weekly which was, for many, the social conscience of the Episcopal Church. He believed deeply that Christian obedience required a posture of sharp criticism of the structures of this world. Some differed with him. All respected his integrity.

Early on, the effort was incorporated under The Episcopal Church Publishing Company. By dint of paying himself a subsistence salary, stinting on costs, receiving many contributions in addition to subscription prices, a small capital fund grew and with wise investment appreciated in value over the decades. At the time of his death over two years ago there were sufficient financial resources to resume publication, with funds enabling a guaranteed first year publication budget of \$150,000.

Bishop Spofford and his sister and niece wish the magazine to continue. They were instrumental in re-establishing a Board of Directors for The Episcopal Church Publishing Company, which consists of Bishops Arnold, DeWitt, Gressle, Hines, Krumm and Mosley, and Dr. Joseph Fletcher.

Over the past few months there have been consultations with scores of people concerning editorial policy. A real need has been discerned, a response has been assured, and **The** (new) **Witness** hopes, in its own high tradition, to bear testimony to God's continuing concern for the affairs of people.

Special Issue

The sequence of events pertaining to the recent ordination of eleven women to the priesthood has been reported extensively through the various public media. This special, pre-publication issue of **The Witness** is offered as commentary on those events. We seek to identify and illuminate the issues in the life of the church and in the lives of people implicit in those events.

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To Whom It May Concern

The Witness is an independent report on the issues behind the issues in Church and State and World.

Witnesses are those who know because they are present, and who tell what they know. You are present. What do you know?

You know that for the majority of the human family misery is increasing, all the myths of progress notwithstanding. You know that the small and weak nations of the world are being dominated and decimated by the larger and more powerful nations and by multi-national corporations. You know that in the United States enormous wealth coexists with extreme poverty. You know that Blacks, women, Latinos and native Americans continue to be victimized by persistent patterns of discrimination. You know that throughout the world our environmental inheritance is despoiled in the name of "productivity." You know that self-serving corporate and political bureaucracies are corrupting our sensibilities by the prostitution of words and the manipulation of images. You know that the churches are too conformed to the status quo to transform it. You know that vast numbers of persons are responding to the present state of the world by withdrawing into the cocoon of private life. You know how tempting it is to flee from the responsibilities of hope and languish in the inertia of despair.

Join Our Search

Nevertheless, we suspect that you (like the members of the staff at **The Witness**) are unwilling to succumb to weariness and lapse into the idolatrous worship of personal powerlessness. As a result, we invite you to join us in the contemporary search for clear vision, honest speech and appropriate action. We hope to provide a forum for writers who have broken through the perceptual handicaps of national, cultural, economic, sexual and racial vested interests, and are trying to articulate the needs of all people in our times.

We hope to win the attention of readers whose minds already have been numbed by the assault of too many words, but who **still** are willing to listen to those whose words may point the way to responsible deeds.

Finally, we intend to encourage the formation of a network of writers and readers drawn together by a disciplined desire to be faithful witnesses to the One who daily renews the promise to preach good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind and liberty to the oppressed.

An Open Letter to The Church

On Monday, July 29, 1974, the Feast of Sts. Mary and Martha, God willing, we intend to ordain to the Sacred Priesthood some several women deacons. We want to make known as clearly and as widely as we can the reflections on Christian obedience which have led us to this action. We are painfully conscious of the diversity of thinking in our church on this issue, and have been deeply sobered by that fact. We are acutely aware that this issue involves theological considerations, that it involves biblical considerations, that it involves considerations of Church tradition, and that it raises the vexing question of amicable consensus in our household of faith.

We are convinced that all these factors have been given due consideration by the Church at large, and by us. We note that the House of Bishops is on record as being in favor of the ordination of women. We note that a majority of the clergy and laity in the House of Deputies is also on record as being in favor, even though an inequitable rule

of procedure in that House has frustrated the will of the majority. All of the foregoing factors, by themselves, would not necessarily dictate the action we intend. Nor, even, would this intended action necessarily be required by the painful fact that we know pastorally the injustice, the hurt, the offense to women which is occasioned by the present position of our Church on this issue. However, there is a ruling factor which does require this action on our part. It is our obedience to the Lordship of Christ, our response to the sovereignty of His Spirit for the Church.

One of the chief marks of the Church is its being the community of the Resurrection. Ours is a risen Lord. He was raised in the power of the Spirit so that we might participate, however inadequately, in His triumph against sin and separation, proclaim the good news of His victory, and occasionally ourselves walk in newness of life. His Spirit is the Lord of the Church. Hearing His command, we can heed no other. We gladly join ourselves with those who in other times and places, as well as here and now, have sought obedience to that same Spirit.

This action is therefore intended as an act of obedience to the Spirit. By the same token it is intended as an act of solidarity with those in whatever institution, in whatever part of the world, of whatever stratum of society, who in their search for freedom, for liberation, for dignity, are moved by that same Spirit to struggle against sin, to proclaim that victory, to attempt to walk in newness of life. We pray this action may be, as we intend it, a proclamation of the Gospel — that God has acted for us, and expects us, in obedience, to respond with appropriate action.

The Rt. Rev. Daniel Corrigan
The Rt. Rev. Robert L. DeWitt
The Rt. Rev. Edward R. Welles

“The responsibility now falls directly upon those who feel aggrieved ‘to make no peace with oppression’ and to redeem the General Convention from a foolish mistake. As blacks refused to participate in their own oppression by going to the back of the bus in 1955 in Montgomery, women are refusing to cooperate in their own oppression by remaining on the periphery of full participation in the Church in 1974 in Philadelphia.” — from Dr. Charles V. Willie’s sermon at the Philadelphia ordination.

Tender, loving defiance

Yes to Women Priests

by Betty Medsger

One night in 1906 an 11-year-old girl was sitting on her bed reading by gaslight when her mother entered her room, sat on the bed and delicately asked, "Darling, what do you want to do when you grow up?"

The mother had carefully planned how to approach her daughter Jeannette with the difficult explanation of the doings of the birds and bees. "I later realized I was supposed to say, 'I want to be a mother and have eleven children just as you did,' " Jeannette Piccard now says, but that thought never occurred to her in 1906. Instead young Jeannette replied:

"I want to be a priest."

Her mother burst into tears and fled the room. "It was the only time I ever saw my Victorian mother run," recalls Mrs. Piccard, now 79.

Undaunted by the high drama her first announcement caused, Jeannette matured in her intent and in 1918 when the president of Bryn Mawr College asked the same question Jeannette gave the same answer. "Very well," the president said, "you should major in philosophy and psychology and by the time you graduate it may be possible for you to be a priest."

Merrill Bittner was born in 1945, 52 years after Jeannette. She grew up in an Episcopal parish in California, loved the Church and felt close to her priests.

Merrill taught biology for awhile, but felt a pull toward seminary and enrolled at Bexley Hall, Rochester, N.Y. As she became more certain of her vocation she returned to her home parish, eager to share her decision with the priests who had nurtured her in her faith. One said she should leave the Church. The other has not spoken to her since.

Both of these women have repeatedly been told by "wise men" to "go do something else."

Nevertheless on July 29 the Rev. Jeannette Piccard of Minnesota and the Rev. Merrill Bittner of Rochester, N.Y. — two women separated in age by more than half a century, bruised by prejudice based on their sex and joined by their common commitment to the Church — gathered with other women of similar experiences and similar commitments and were ordained as the Episcopal Church's first women priests. The other nine deacons ordained priests were: the Rev. Sister Alla Bozarth-Campbell, E.O., 27, Minnesota; the Rev. Alison Cheek, 47, Virginia; the Rev. Emily Hewitt, 30, New York; the Rev. Carter Heyward, 28, New York; the Rev. Suzanne Hiatt, 37, Pennsylvania; the Rev. Marie Moorefield, 30, New York; the Rev. Betty Bone Schiess, 51, Central New York; the Rev. Katrina Swanson, 39, West Missouri; the Rev. Nancy Hatch Wittig, 28, Newark.

Their historic ordination took place in a black neighborhood in North Philadelphia before some 1,500 witnesses at the altar of Church of the Advocate, an old church that has opened its doors many times to people who could find no other place to be heard.

The Rev. Paul Washington, rector of the host church, opened the service to warm applause: "What is a mother to do when the doctor says a baby is due on August 10, when on July 29 she has reached the last stages of labor pains?"

"We realize that a misjudgement of this sort can cause great inconveniences as well as problems. It would not, however, be an occasion for suing the doctor, for getting a divorce or for punishing the child for arriving too soon . . .

"May we praise God for those this day who act in obedience to God while we love and respect those whom this day we cannot obey."

Those ordained were among some 120 women deacons in the Episcopal Church, about 50 of them ordained as deacons since 1970. The four bishops who ordained the women risked censure or deposition for their action. The bishops were Robert L. DeWitt, resigned of Pennsylvania and president, Church and Society, a new organization devoted to keeping social issues before the Church; Edward Randolph Welles II, retired of West Missouri and an honorary vice-president of the American Church Union which opposes women's ordination; Daniel Corrigan, former head of the Church's Home Department. Also present, but not as an ordaining bishop, was Antonio Ramos, Bishop of Costa Rica.

The canon law of the Church neither specifically pro-

hibits nor approves the ordination of women, but bishops of the Church have condemned this ordination, in part, on the grounds that the national legislative bodies of the Church have not given a clear directive.

Even on that point participants in the Philadelphia ordination felt the Church's endorsement of women priests has been strong. In recent years each part of the Church — bishops, clergy and laity — has by majority vote approved the ordination of women priests. The Episcopal Churchwomen have also endorsed the principle twice.

Many Episcopal women deacons had properly prepared themselves for priesthood and were disappointed when last fall's convention — by a system of bloc voting — prevented their access to priesthood. Following that convention the bishops and the women held many conversations. Eventually, as conviction engendered courage, they decided that to delay was to postpone justice, and thus, the will of God for them and the Church.

Their ordination was also historic in that it was probably the first time that men within the Church placed themselves in jeopardy for the equal rights of women.

For ten days prior to the ordination, the Church at the highest levels tried to stop it. Presiding Bishop John M. Allin wired each woman and each bishop and asked them not to do it.

Alison Cheek, who before her ordination as a priest was an assisting deacon at St. Alban's, Annandale, Va., explained her refusal to drop out in a letter to Bishop Allin:

"When I became a deacon, the bishop charged me: 'You are to interpret to the Church the need, the concerns, the hopes of the world.' In the world there is a revolution going on — a women's revolution. Women are striving to define themselves, name themselves as whole persons. This, it seems to me, goes to the heart of the Gospel. The attitudes and actions of the Church have damaged women In order to live out my ordination charge, and to be who I am, I cannot comply with the request of either my bishop or General Convention . . . I have a lot of turmoil and grief around my decision. I'm not very brave, and don't look forward to the hatred I'll evoke. At the same time I go with joy at having come of age"

Most of the diocesan bishops of the women ordained in Philadelphia have indicated they doubt the canon law of the Church specifically prohibits ordination of women.

But they believe the traditional prohibition should be reversed by General Convention.

Many of the bishops in the eight diocese where the women are canonically resident have strongly criticized or defied civil law in order to stand for the human rights of blacks and other minorities or for the end of the Vietnam war. In those instances they felt the moral imperative more important than the legal technicalities.

The ordaining bishops decided, along with the women to force the Church to take a stand on this issue. Bishop Corrigan explained their position during the service: "There is nothing new in being compelled to choose the truth revealed in Scripture and expressed in doctrine when this truth is in conflict with our rules and ways . . . This is such a time."

That stand will be contested when the House of Bishops meets in Chicago in mid-August. Members of that House can either censure or bring their brother bishops to trial. The diocesan bishops may suspend their sister priests or at least inhibit them from functioning as priests.

All of the women knowingly risked their future careers as priests. Emily Hewitt, a professor at Andover-Newton, Theological School in Newton, Centre, Mass., expressed the feelings of herself and the other women:

"You cannot continue putting up with the Church's complicity with being untrue to the Gospel. To put up with it is to put up with a lie . . . If I finally can't exercise the office I'm called to, it seems better to do that than to make a mockery of the Gospel. It's better to be faithful, even for a short period of time, then not to do it at all."

—Betty Medsgar: former religion writer, Philadelphia Evening Bulletin and Washington Post; now freelance writer-photographer.

Woman in a Man's Church

by Rosemary Reuther

The ordination of 11 deacons to the Episcopala priesthood on July 29 was an event of great historical importance. Like other acts of civil disobedience which involved persons in risking much rather than acquiescing to unjust laws, it represented a decision to obey God rather than men, to obey the true mind of the Church rather than the letter of the law.

This is an appropriate time to reflect on some of the elements of the Church's history that have made it so difficult to treat its female half as full-fledged human beings and Christians. Both the Greco-Roman and the Jewish heritages, which form the background of the Church, were rigidly patriarchal in their legal subordination of women. Both carried forward a tradition of hatred toward women that identified women with the dangerous, negative side of the human self. Judaism excluded women, not only from the temple priesthood and the rabbinate, but even from first-class membership in the synagogue. Women were shut out of the inner sanctuary and kept even from its outer precincts during their "uncleanness". The rabbis pictured the woman solely as the wife, who sent her sons to the synagogue, but was not herself called to the study of Torah.

The ministry of Jesus was a breakthrough that liberated women from their traditional subordination. Jesus spoke with women who were not his relatives and allowed himself to be touched by the woman with a flow of blood, rejecting the taboos typical of Jewish law. The first witnesses of the Resurrection were women, countering the prevailing view that women were not competent witnesses. Jesus had women followers and disciples, something that must have looked highly irregular at that time. Jesus' concept of the ministry was

based on a criticism of the traditional roles of leadership. The Christian minister was not to be a hierarchical authority figure. Rather, the model of ministry was to be the servant role of slaves and women. By contrast, the one person he rebuked for being too occupied with serving was a woman, Martha. The synagogue excluded women from studying as disciples of the Teacher. But Jesus called women to be his disciples, and declared that Mary, not Martha, had chosen the "better part". Thus the ministry was meant to be woman-like in being oriented to service, rather than to power and rule.

This iconoclasm toward the traditional view of women was continued in the early Church. Women normally were fullfledged catechumens and members of the congregation. Christian baptism, unlike circumcision, was a rite that made no distinction between men and women. Moreover, in the early Christian community, women were teachers and leaders. Even Paul, who is often seen as the woman-hater of the early Church, continued this practice of female leadership, both in the local Church and among the traveling evangelists (apostles). Paul's statement in Gal. 3:27 that "in Christ there is neither male nor female" expressed the theological conviction that the redemption won by Christ abolished the traditional inferiority of women, just as it abolished the traditional inferiority of slaves and gentiles. Paul applied this conviction when he took for granted the right of women to lead the congregation in prayer and prophecy. Yet he was reluctant to allow a similar breakthrough to take place in secular society. Here his social conservatism was in contrast with his theological radicalism. This was true in his treatment of both women and of slaves. He believed that the final transformation, which would change the status of worldly things, would come only at the "End" (which Paul expected to happen very soon). In the here and now, he believed, women should continue to obey their husbands, slaves their masters. Women should cover their heads when they lead the congregation in prayer or prophecy because of their social subjugation and their historical fault in causing the fall of the angels (I Cor. 11; Gen. 6, 4).

Women Keep Silent

However, the statement in I Cor. 14:34 that "women should keep silence in the Church", long used as the chief text against women's ordination, contradicted Paul's practices elsewhere. It probably was an interpolation that came from the second generation Pastoral epistles. In these later epistles, which were the product of the deutero-Pauline generation, we have a more

institutional concept of ministry and a concept of the Church modeled on the patriarchal family. In contrast, Paul saw ministry as a plurality of particular charisms. The later epistles said that the women should be silent and submissive and should regard their salvation in the bearing of children, rather than in a new spiritual life represented by the Church. The Bishops and Presbyters were regarded as male heads of families, although the practice of ordaining women to the diaconate continued.

In the first four centuries of the Church's life, we see a continuation of this exclusion of women from their earlier participation in the Church's leadership. Gradually the ministry came to be seen as modeled after a new temple priesthood. The Roman priesthood acquired the privileges of a social caste. The idea that women were unclean and so should be excluded from the sanctuary, an idea rejected by Jesus, was reasserted, eliminating the role of deaconesses. Uncleaness also was seen as excluding women from full lay participation as well. As asceticism increased in the Church and shaped its ideal of ministry, women came to be more and more regarded as a sexual threat, safe only when veiled and hidden from public gaze.

Nevertheless, the Church Fathers never evoked the maleness of Jesus or the apostles as an argument for regarding women as second-class members of the community of redemption. This argument was developed in scholastic philosophy in the Middle Ages. Thomas Aquinas and others adopted Aristotle's views on biology, which defined women as misbegotten males. Women were seen as biologically, morally and intellectually inferior to men, by nature. Their role in the Fall made them the special exemplars of 'carnal lust'. In the "Malleus Maleficarum", the official handbook used in the Dominican witch-hunts, the maleness of Jesus was seen as redeeming males from the demonic temptations, but not women. Thomas Aquinas believed that the natural inferiority of women made it impossible for women to be ordained, because only males could represent headship, while women were, by nature, "servile people". This same argument was also applied to serfs. Thus the Church lost the original insights which said that the redemption won by Christ affirmed the equality of women as disciples, and which rejected the model of ministry drawn from male and kingly power.

False Biological Views

In addition, the Church adopted a sexist model of symbolization, which made it very hard for women to be speakers rather than hearers in the Church. In Christian theology there is a pervasive tendency to symbolize all the basic relationships: the relation of God to Creation, the relation of Christ to the Church, the relation of the soul to God, the relation of the mind to the body, and, finally, the relation of the ministry to the people in a pattern reflecting a hierarchy of male "active principle" over female passive principle. The basic assumption of all these symbolic hierarchies is that the higher, acting and initiative force is male and the bodily-dominated principle is female.

This concept of the male as the formative principle, and the female simply as a passive receptacle, actually reflects Aristotle's false views of biology. It ignores the fact that sperm and ovum contribute equally to the formative seed of the child. The concept is still more ludicrous when applied on the psycho-spiritual level, where men and women clearly have

mind, ears and senses which make them equally actors, as well as receivers, of messages.

The secular symbolism of the male as the transcendent, initiating principle, and the female as a passive body, dominated by male power, also invaded the symbolism of the Church. Christ was taken to be like a head in relation to a body, a husband in relation to a wife. The model is hierarchical, with the female as the passive, receptive "underside" of an action which comes completely "from above". This symbolism becomes especially questionable when it splits the relation of the clergy and the people of the Church into a similar hierarchical dualism. The clergy become like transcendent fathers who hold all spiritual initiation in their hands. The laity become passive receptacles, women-children, in the hands of spiritual power, which comes to them from above and beyond their own powers of initiation. Both a clericalist ministry and a passive laity derive from the same sexist symbolization of the clergy-laity relationship. This symbolism makes it very difficult for women to act as leaders or to be legitimated as clergy, because they are always taken to be symbols of that which is to be dominated and acted upon.

We must reflect upon whether these sexual hierarchies, and the consequent exclusion of women from ministry, do not fundamentally contradict the message of Jesus. We have to rediscover the original perception of the Gospel in the early Church as a breakthrough to a redemption that annuls the historical sinfulness of societies which made women, slaves and alien races inferior and even quasi-demonic.

"In Christ there is neither male nor female." This means that the barriers of sexism, class hierarchy and racism have been overthrown by the redemption that has been won by Jesus. This means that the incarnation of Jesus should not be seen as sanctifying male power. It means that spiritual power is not anymore something which is "up there", above and over against ourselves. Spiritual leadership should no longer be exercise after the model of kingly power and patriarchal domination of males over women and servants. Rather, God has now become the "ground of our being". Grace is no longer something that is acting from the top of power structures, and which is filtered down to the people by oppressive hierarchies. Rather, it has now become the 'matrix', the ambience in which we live and move and have our being. The Holy Spirit, as God-present-with-us, allows redemption to flow up from the foundation of our existence. The people, not hierarchical power structures, are the initiators and foundation of the life of the Church. The Church is a new Creation where people teach and forgive each other. Ministers are servants of the people, not dominating rulers. Men are instructed to be ministers by being servants and helpers, while women are called out of their traditional subordination to become equal disciples.

This full message of the Gospel has yet to be learned by the Christian Church. The message has gone out ahead of us, inviting us to transcend our inherited traditions and enter into the full liberation of the People of God, won by the death and resurrection of Jesus. Now, it is time for us to catch up by being faithful to the Spirit's call.

—Rosemary Reuther: professor of Historical Theology, Howard University; author, *Liberation Theology*

Conscience and The Canons

(continued from front cover)

advice to be patient with the church is often wise. But this issue is being posed for the church through specific people. Women have become convinced of a call of God to serve in the ordained ministries. That call has been tested, and the competences appropriate to it have been acquired. A large community recognizes that call comes from God and seeks its authorization in the communal, pastoral, and sacramental life of the church. The initiative in this matter seems, at least to a substantial portion of the church, to come from the Holy Spirit. God — constant in his very unpredictableness — is asking this Church to do something it has not done before. He is asking it through the persons of women who recognize deep within themselves an undeniable call to priesthood. It will not do to say, "But my doctrine tells me that you do not have a call". The reply is unanswerable: "But I do." Doctrine and discipline must come to terms with this concrete, personal fact. The conviction, determination, pain, hopes, and disappointments of a large and growing group of women in the church (and of others, men and women, who have identified with them) are prophetic signs. They require appropriate, compassionate, understanding response. The graceful thing would be for the relatively slow-moving institution to accept the pace of the personal.

Inevitably, a course of action other than that of waiting until 1976 commended itself to at least some persons. If the ordination of women to the priesthood is not authorized officially by the church, and yet it seems to be something that, by the best tests available, is the will of God for the church in our time, one responsible course of action would be an act of evangelical disobedience. To go ahead with an ordination with as much compliance with the doctrine and discipline of the church as possible, but without the full authorization of canon law, is certain to be an act with many anomalies. But it may be a way of helping the church to recognize and deal with the greater anomaly of a community of persons who are one in Christ but half of whose members are banned from the ordained priesthood. Persons who are convinced of the rightness of women's ordination are also convinced that without it the church is unfulfilled. An ordination of women presbyters may be an act of painful disloyalty to the church as it is, but at the same time, a joyful claiming now of the greater thing the church is called to become.

At any rate, moved by these or similar considerations, the decision was made. A group of women has been ordained by the bishops the church authorizes to ordain, supported by a body of clergy and lay persons using the liturgy appointed for such ordination and intending to do what the church does when it ordains. The point is not just to ordain women, but to ordain them in a church in which catholic substance and order are cherished under the informing judgment of the gospel. Things are never as tidy as might be wished, and irregularities are apparent. Diocesan bishops were not ordaining their own candidates; Standing Committees had not given official approval; the most probable meaning of the national canons was by-passed by the ordinands. The church will give close investigation to this act and ask some hard questions — partly of the initiators of the act, and partly, one may hope, of itself.

Life Over Laws

By this action, the consideration of ordination of women to priesthood is altered. It is no longer an abstract discussion of what ought to be in law. The church will now consider the matter, having in its midst a group of women priests. These women will be serving in congregations and under bishops; their ministry will be widely received within the church. The interpretation of existing canons and the writing and adopting of new ones will be done with this new factor present in the concrete experience of the church.

What is the relation between life in the faith community and the church's code of laws? Canons are the church's effort to shape the life of a community which is called into being by that which transcends law. They regulate a life which they do not create. Thus, canons often have a secondary or following role in the church. The church is not constituted by law; it is constituted by the gift an act of God; it exists for worship, witness, and service. The church's primary account of itself is not juridical, but theological; and theology is an explication of the Gospel; and the Gospel is a loving, freeing, dignifying act of God for all people. The church always has direct access to that Gospel by which its life is led and corrected. The Gospel can lead into new forms of obedience and ministry, and when that happens, canons must scramble to keep pace. Canons tend to be regulative and conservative, rather than innovative. New things in the life of the church seldom happen because those who write canons decide that the body of law requires enlargement or tidying. There is a technical side to good canon writing, and the church needs to value it. But when constructive change takes place in the life of the church, it usually begins deep in the soul of a person (or within a small group), not always in the official structures of the church, but not always outside them. These persons (or this person), acting as they believe according to what the Gospel requires in their situation, do something which may stretch the existing rules to the breaking point. They are sometimes, but not always, vindicated as the official system responds to include the enlarged reality which was originally represented by a prophetic minority. They are sometimes rejected, and the thing they stood for dies or is forced to be represented in schism. Neither the representatives of the new departure nor the church which must respond is invariably wise or right. But that is the risk involved in seeking to express the freedom and diversity of faith within an ordered, lawmaking and law abiding community.

If we had to wait for discussion of the merits of new features of the life of the church to be carried on abstractly before

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THE WITNESS

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Eleven Women
Ordained Priests
In Philadelphia



Christian Conscience?

The recent ordination of a number of women to the priesthood was done in the only partial compliance with the established procedures for ordinations. The irregular character of that action draws attention to those internal laws of the church, the canons. Challenges to received institutions make lawyers of us all. The canons concerning the ministry have all been written in terms of "he," "him," and "his." It could be argued that the language of the canons was open to the construction that "he" might mean "human being" or baptized person. But over the generations this understanding of the intent of the canons was never tested. Seminarians were all-male enclaves; the diaconate, presbyterate, and episcopate were filled exclusively by men; and few people seem to have thought these things should be different than they were. After some years of consciousness-raising on the part of individuals and the community, women were, by express action of General Convention, admitted to the diaconate. Their call by God and their competence in ministry was and is undeniable. Then, in the fall of 1973, a motion to admit women to the priesthood was presented to the General Convention. It received a majority in the House of Bishops and was approved by a majority of the deputies. However, since the divided delegations are counted as negative, the negative votes plus the divided votes outnumbered the affirmative votes, and the action failed in the House of Deputies. It would be unrealistic, however, to suppose that the conviction represented by half the bishops and deputies of the Convention of 1973 could be tainted. Persons who are equally committed to priesthood for women might disagree on strategy. But people who think of the issue as fundamentally not one of interpreting canons but as one of obedience to a call of God will feel a need to do something. One course of action would be to wait until another Convention, try again then, and meantime publicize the case while abiding by the decision of the church's national synod. But such a course would be slow and uncertain. The

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article is "Love And Marriage Revisited". Elliot Wright will discuss the current intellectual conflict at New York's Union Theological Seminary. Mohammed Kenyatta will write about the plight of the liberals (they are in disarray). Scheduled also are articles by Jesse Christman (social criteria on investments), Antonio Ramos, David Gracie, and James Morton. And there will be commentary by Robert L. DeWitt. That's just a sampling of what you'll find exclusively in *The Witness*. Don't miss a single issue!

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anything moved, the waits would often be too long for the dynamics of the new situation. The discussion might be educative; the final action might be somewhat more united. But argument can be met by counter-argument for a very long time. In times of rapid change, new things will be upon us. Recognition and incorporation of them (if that is the response they get) comes later. Whether incorporated or rejected, weighty theoretical reasons are found for what is done.

Sample Instances

This order of things could be instanced at length. A few samples: Monastic communities arose in Anglicanism out of a deep religious impulse (and midst furious controversy); the canons according them recognition followed. New marriage canons have been written after new patterns and problems of marriage have developed in the society and have been met responsibly by pastors. Canons are being drafted now to cover the position of bishops who assist in dioceses but who have not been elected as suffragans or coadjutors; but bishops have been doing such work for many years apart from any authorizing or regulating canons. The practice of ecumenical intercommunion is now widespread in the Roman Catholic Church and has been consented to by many members of the hierarchy, even though, by a strict construction, it is illegal. The law-makers can say that such an instinct was misguided; they can seek to stop the practice and discipline those guilty of it. Or they can include the practice in new and more generous regulations.

Probably the classic instance of the priority of the concrete life of the church over official regulation is the Book of Acts. At point after point, as the narrative moves, the church which was originally all Jewish found itself, contrary to anyone's expectations or design, admitting Gentiles as members because the Holy Spirit had claimed them. The Jerusalem Council narrative in Acts 15 is largely an account of events that had happened in the extension of the Gospel under the Spirit's leading. The conclusions of the council ratified what had already proved itself in the missionary work of the church.

This line of argument is dangerous, of course. It could seem to urge everyone to act on his pet idea and then ask the Church what it will make of it. But a challenge to the laws of the church is not undertaken lightly. Our obedience to God and our loyalty to the church are, most of the time, not in conflict. The canons, on the whole, do a pretty good job of guiding the working of a Christian community. Legal consistency is a way of assuring the continuity and self-identity of the church from generation to generation. Obedience to established law — its empowerments and its restraints — is our way of participating in that strange catholic and evangelical community which is Anglicanism. The canons make us responsible and humane when we might not be on our own. We run a risk in working outside them. But faith is a risky thing. Even though venture is part of faith, we do not venture without controls. The appeal of any action which violates the laws of the church must be to that theology which the church imperfectly embodies in its laws. The question for the ecclesiastical law-breaker is not the simplistic, "Have you broken the law?" The question rather is: "Has your conduct been faithful to that account of Christian faith, community, and life to which both you and the institutional church owe obedience, and by which you and the community are willing to be corrected? Has your action brought

the implications of the gospel into fuller engagement with the life of our time?"

Church's Response

On July 29, an action, conscientiously undertaken, has challenged the church. The response is partly a matter of canons, but more largely, it is one of statesmanship, imagination, discretion, understanding, and charity.

Punitive action could be taken against the clergy who have participated — by the House of Bishops in the case of the bishops, and by individual dioceses in the case of presbyters. The case would be on the grounds of having violated the oath to obey the discipline of the church. The penalties could go as far as deposition. This is one of the possible consequences of their action that the women, the presbyters and the bishops had to weigh. It is one of the possible responses of the church.

But it is by no means the only one. There is no requirement that ecclesiastical disobedience be punished. There is every desirability that it be investigated. The disciplinary provisions are in the canons, but there is great room for discretion in the way in which they are applied.

An action has been taken intending the good of women, men, the ministry, the church, and the gospel. What is on trial is not only the initiators of such a challenge, but also the church which must respond.

If women are actually serving competently and faithfully as priests, if behind this first group there are more women who believe themselves called to this same ministry, if theological judgment can find nothing inappropriate in a woman proclaiming the word of God and voicing the thanksgiving at the Eucharist, if the Gospel of the oneness of all in the life in Christ has been made more believable, the canons need to incorporate unambiguously this inclusion of women in the priesthood. Beyond the anger, division, pain and misunderstanding of the present, this is a constructive task for the shapers of the ecclesiastical system as they look towards the next Convention.

—Daniel Stevick: professor of Liturgics and Homiletics, EDS, Cambridge; author, **Canon Law**

Who's in Charge Here?

by Paul van Buren

At their recent ordination to the priesthood, eleven women deacons were asked the same question that is asked of every other candidate: "Do you think in your heart that you are truly called . . . ?" They gave the same answer others have given: "I think it." They or their examiners could, of course, have been mistaken. That risk attends every ordination, as it does every action in the life of the Church. Indeed, there is no Christian faith without that risk, for we are servants of a living Lord and are in constant danger of not hearing His orders, not understanding His will, or not detecting His signs. In this case, as in that of any other ordination, the candidates and their examiners thought in all honesty that the Lord was calling them now to this job. If He is, then an obedient Church can only accept His will. It is His Church after all, not ours: Easter has settled for us the question of who's in charge here!

The issue is not one of equal rights for women. Since the church is on earth and not in heaven, it would be most surprising if those involved in this action had not been influenced by the consciousness of the times, when women are entering so many areas and activities from which they have long been excluded in Western civilization. In such a time, it is not surprising that Christian women should also consider the ordained ministry. As a small sign of the freedom for which Christ has set us free, why should not the Church be open to such a development? It would be a serious misunderstanding of the matter, however, to support this action solely on the grounds of egalitarianism or simple justice. In the matter of ordination, equality and justice are hardly the issue. No one has a right to be ordained. Ordination is a response of the Church to the calling of its Commander. It is an action of obedience or it is a farce.

We say that the Church is apostolic. If it is, then the apostles

will be given a leading place in our deliberations. On the specific question of women priests in 1974, of course, they have left no instructions. The Book of Acts tells us that the apostles, in good form and order, chose Matthias to replace Judas. But Acts and the rest of the apostolic witness make it unambiguously clear that the Lord of the Church had other plans: "irregularly," He chose Paul to make up the complement of the apostles. The warning of the apostles, therefore, is that whatever structures, procedures, or "established channels" we may devise for ecclesial administration, we will never escape the risk of faith. If Christ is risen, we have a living Lord whom we must be prepared to hear today. Not the tradition, not General Convention, but the risen Christ is in charge of his Church.

This action, then, may be read as a sign that the Church has a Lord who is alive and active, who can still do a new thing among us. It is also a sign that the Church is alive, set free to respond to her liberating Lord. Once we become aware that we have a living Lord who still runs things, we may be awakened to the risks to which we have been called by our baptism. As a small sign of that liberation of all persons and the whole creation in which Easter lets us hope and for which Easter makes us long and frees us to work, we can give thanks for this act. It reminds us of who is in charge here, and it calls us again to the risk of faith in the one Liberator.

—Paul M. van Buren: Chairman of the Department of Religion, Temple University, Philadelphia.

On the Other Hand

Ever since I served as a member of the special committee of the House of Bishop which dealt with the ordination of women I have been convinced that this is a move the Episcopal Church must undertake, indeed should long since have undertaken . . . I was increasingly convinced that an exclusively male priesthood in the Church is a misrepresentation of the High Priesthood of Christ . . . I am saddened that brother bishops with whom I share this basic conviction should embark on a course which I feel will do more harm than good to this important cause . . . I am convinced that these brother bishops have acted only after a great deal of thought and prayer and under the urgent mandate of their consciences. Nevertheless, their action seems to me to be an abandonment of the kind of process and procedure which our life together in the Church requires."

—John M. Krumm: Bishop of Southern Ohio; vice-president, Episcopal Church Publishing Company.

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