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A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

Does the Concept of Priesthood exclude Womanhood?

W. D. ROUND

I. The Apparent Motives for the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood

Why is it only now, after nearly two thousand years of Christianity, that the notion of ordaining women to the priesthood has arisen? Why never before? What can be the difference, the real difference, between our day and age and that of all the previous generations of Christians who have belonged to the Church since Jesus died on the Cross?

Why do we claim to know better, to be wiser, nowadays, than our forefathers, about the needs of the Church?

What has happened?

Let us review some of the reasons which are given, and evaluate them in the light of the above questions.

Equality—legitimate and logical

For women, equality seems to be the key issue. We now have laws of the land which are designed to ensure the equality of women with men. The argument therefore runs: if women may and do achieve equality with men, this decree must and should extend to all areas of male endeavour. If both sexes are equal in the eyes of the law, how can they possibly remain unequal in the eyes of the Church? If men are priests, women should be priests too. Q.E.D.

But do women want this equality in each and every aspect? Doesn't it often begin and end with the having and the holding on to—the position, the authority, the reward, the winning? She wants what a man has, she wants to be in his place—but remain a woman?

If so, equality can mean: what is yours is mine, and what is mine is mine too! The tenth commandment forbids our wanting what somebody else has.

Nevertheless, the priesthood is seen as just another of man's domains from which women have been excluded. What valid reason is there to debar them? They will act differently, they will be different.

Man's work has patently been enhanced by the female touch and presence. Women will transform the priesthood. They will bring back, nay introduce, femininity into the concept of God.

Does the Concept of Priesthood exclude Womanhood?

The catch is that although women think they will remain the same, they are mistaken. They emulate men at their peril. They will become more and more male-like, except in one baleful aspect. In the past people sensed this danger, but not any more.

It is not so much the femininity of God we women need to assert, as our own femininity. Is equality a prerequisite for this?

Justice

How do men feel about women's ordination? The surprising thing is that nowadays men support it. They are the ones who are opening the doors and ushering women out into the world. Does this mean that men have at last seen reason, or have they yielded to pressure? Or is it from a sense of justice? Justice is what they have fought and died for since civilisation began.

So who dare oppose? You will gain more from magnanimous surrender than from outdated rearguard action. You will think better of yourself for being more tolerant than your predecessors. And after all, how could a man be so unchivalrous, so ungentlemanly, so unchristian, as to say 'no' to a woman sharing his ecclesiastical prerogatives?

Theological Issues

I should prefer to steer clear of this thorny field. However, as long as feminists insist that the Bible does not say anything explicitly against the ordination of women, it must in fairness be pointed out that the Bible does not say anything explicitly for it either.

As far as relations between men and women are concerned, the Bible tells us that woman was a gift to man, to be his helper. Being a helpmate does not mean being at the other's beck and call. It is rather that, in a situation of reciprocity—which you cannot have so well with two identical beings—she can supply what he lacks, and he can do the same for her.

Expediency

Nobody can deny that without women, time and again, in the Church today, wheels would grind to a halt. Without our deacon(esse)s, many parishes would have very short shrift. Somebody must step in if the Church is to continue, particularly when male estimation of ordination has greatly diminished. It does not appeal as a vocation as it used to. It cannot compete with the attractions of other careers and callings. Some women may still see it enshrined in an aura of distinction and reverence, but few people, besides pew people, share that deferential view.

II. The Hidden Motives of Women Crisis in Identity

We need once again to put the question with which this discussion began.

Why is it only now, and never before, that the idea of ordaining women to the priesthood has arisen?

Is it part of that 20th century phenomenon—the so-called emancipation of women? Or is it due to something else about women which was not true before?

Or have women always aspired secretly to men's rôles? Is it merely an old story in a new guise?

Why do women feel drawn to the male world? Why do women want to be men? Why do they not want to be women?

If there is dissatisfaction with the accepted rôle women play, what causes it? Which is the rôle that is being rejected?

Is it a false one, one imposed by culture or custom, society or circumstance, but out of harmony with women's true nature? Or is it the one which is part and parcel of their natural physical and psychic being?

Whichever way, is not modern woman experiencing an identity crisis about what sort of person she wants or ought to be?

Unisex

There is an argument these days that there is no such thing as sex or gender identity. Anything a man feels, or thinks as well as achieves, a woman can too, and vice versa. After all, it is only one chromosome, one half of a pair of chromosomes, that distinguishes us.

This curious belief is a serious distortion of the truth, a distortion characteristic of our times. This blurring of the sexes is bunkum. It takes only our biological description, our pre-human ancestry into account. But past generations, back to the dawn of history, knew there was more in gender than anatomy.

Loss of Femininity

Feminine qualities which were once regarded as worthy, attractive, desirable, are now seen in a very negative light. To stay at home and be totally involved in child-rearing and the care of the home and family, the honourable estate of women for hundreds of years, is now held in scant esteem. As the psychiatrist Karl Stern puts it:

There is an over-valuation of masculine achievement and a debasement of values commonly associated with the womanly.¹

It is in the outside world where woman's interest lies, particularly in the exciting world operated by men, that male territory on which she has now staked her claim. Is it the home as such which has become

untenable, unfulfilling, or the home as we have made it? Are women encamped in men's world now because they have nowhere else to go? Is that where they belong? If so, are women geared-calibrated as well as furnished—for its pace and purpose?

Ever since Eve took the initiative in the Garden of Eden, there has been something inside our Eve that makes us think we are. Something about our own fecundity can beguile us into feeling that we are the begetters and providers of all that our children will ever need; that men are only our adjuncts and theirs. This may well be true, in certain places and times—in any long period of stability there is less need for man's inventiveness or drive to ensure provisions and protection. Have not women always shared men's work, done men's work—when it is a matter of producing necessities for survival—and still do, in many parts of the world? It is only because modern technology, in the last couple of centuries, has given man a head start in the use of new methods of production that women have been superseded in this activity. But now that they are mastering these new techniques, obviously they are able to participate, even take over, once more.

But the mechanization of industry soon led beyond the supply of essential wants. Women, therefore, find themselves caught up in moneymaking, competition, display, acquisitiveness, novelty and change, which can thwart their cherishing instincts. The newer, the better, is a maxim more appealing to a man's heart than a woman's.

Changing versus cherishing

In the main, throughout the ages, there has been a balance between changing and cherishing. Change has often been catastrophic, but humanity has recovered, as cherishing has come into its own again. Consolidation follows conquest, where possible. It is easy to see which part falls most naturally to the male, and which to the female; which corresponds most naturally to their inner potential and inclination. The choice is inherent in their make-up: only half a chromosome's dissimilarity, but it makes a world of difference.

The male is the instrument of change right from his own beginning. In the fertilised ovum, development would be into a female foetus, if the male factor was absent. All life was 'female' until the male arrived.² Men are specially endowed with resources of energy and vigour (sometimes short-lived) to overcome inertia and start movement along new channels.

Cherishing belongs to the female, that patient, persistent activity which watches defences, maintains things as nature meant them to be. Without this secure foundation none of her offspring would develop the resources to make the great leap forward into the vast and varied outside world.

But because woman is designed to nourish and cherish, her aims, if

unmodified and unterminated, could lead to anti-social behaviour. Her children can become all in all to her, and she to them, and any threat to that sanctity will arouse her primitive instincts of defence and retaliation.

The present day world has lost sight of this; but there have been warnings, as we shall elucidate later.

From motherhood to the hooded mother

Motherhood can be distorted in another way. It is a tremendous, mysterious rôle—mothering. To bear and rear children, to supply what will prepare their bodies for life, and mediate what will prepare their souls for eternity, is an awesome responsibility. It requires not so much scientific know-how as a totally giving nature, the same qualities, no less, as there are in God, who creates and sustains life. So was it that it could only be a woman as open and receptive to God's indwelling as the Virgin Mary who could mother God's son.

What preparation does the growing girl receive today for this rôle? Is not her education directed more to make her a competent actress on the social stage? Her mentors are magazines, advertisements, special offers. The emphasis is on the material rather than the spiritual sustenance she administers. In taking on all this paraphernalia, the curtain falls on her natural assets. If mothers don't mother, a wound is inflicted never to heal. The hand that rocks the baby buggy can wreck the world.

The implication for those advocating the ordination of women is that this new ambition does not come out of women's conserving nature, but from the compulsion to deny it. Woman leaves her homeground, her spiritual bastion, where she is free par excellence to be herself, to take up her station on a site that has all the regimentation of a military encampment, the insecurity of the barricade. The Church may not quite be a battleground, but it is not yet a realm of peace and concord.

III. The Hidden Motives of Men

Why don't men want *to be men*? There is little space to do justice to this subject here. It would require a full analysis of what it means to be a man—that instrument of change described in our last section. Why restlessness is an intrinsic part of his nature, why he needs to prove himself, why he fails so often in his desperate search for satisfaction, and why he cannot come to terms with this failure. Why this representative of the most highly developed species, who strives to improve everything around him, does not apply this expertise to himself. And how in his conquest and mechanization of nature, he is himself becoming more and more a machine. Suffice it to make a few points in relation to the Church's ministry which women are so eager to share.

Does the Concept of Priesthood exclude Womanhood?

Jesus had the answer. His disciples today, however, have an impossible task putting it into practice. They have to have a degree, pass selection boards, join organisations, keep to time-tables. Studying the Scriptures does not matter, so long as you can pick and choose texts which support theological arguments, or bear out a self-fulfilling, trouble-free, or power-seeking life-style. Those which challenge Christians to implicit obedience, to self-denial, to the extra mile or the final sacrifice, have to be accommodated to conventional morality. The training of a Buddhist monk seems to have more in common with Christ's preparation for His ministry than the syllabus at his modern counterpart's theological college.

His career in the Church soon lands him in a treadmill as stereotyped as his brothers' in other walks of life. Whatever he does has to be programmed, not as the Spirit wills, but within schedules convenient for society. Within that framework, he is free, no doubt, to do his own thing, with whatever remains of his devotion to his Saviour. If administration does not bog him down, he is overwhelmed instead by the incurable bodily ills, the tortuous psychological traumas, or the insoluble social problems of those who come to see him. Thus he can rarely address their spiritual sickness—that 'sickness unto death' which Kierkegaard so revealingly analysed. Clouds of incomprehensibility hide what faith in God really means. How can a man be a man when he has to conform so much to the world? Yet women want to rush in where men so fearfully flounder!

IV. Mankind as God Intended True Womanhood

Deep down is not our blinded, bewildered, contemporary woman still hoping to find a man she can look up to and admire? To whom she can be totally receptive, to whom she can give herself with unconditional trust and devotion? In the last analysis, is not all a man wants a woman who can enfold him in love; who can be a haven of peace from the world's storm-troubled sphere? Who senses his inexpressible needs, and to whom he would give without qualification, all he has, his possessions, his capabilities, his powers? We all dream impossible dreams, but is this the most outrageous of them all?

A woman who is warm and tender, thoughtful and caring, kind and gentle, patient, joyous, serene, gracious, is she out of this world? There is no reason why she cannot be tough too, with the toughness not of aggression, resistance or obstinacy, but of endurance, perseverance, trustworthiness. A toughness which enables her to emerge from life's buffetings unruffled and unscathed.

This is her spouse's point of view. What about her children? What do they look for?

All these qualities, and more. She is always there. Constantly available: whenever they have need of her, whenever they need a

feeling of home.

Is the Church doing anything to foster this womanhood ideal? What sort of education does it see appropriate to a female person? She needs full access to modern knowledge to know what man is up to. Instead of being sheltered from scientific ideas, she should be enabled to discover their limitations, how the models with which science works, apparently so categorical about truth, are only working models, and could one day be discarded. She should be encouraged to show the scientists how to act on, and validate another theory, another hypothesis, the working model of faith and love, which in the end can move mountains. Mothering—not smothering!—can go on all a woman’s days, that’s the joy of it, for the unmarried woman as well as the married, for the world is full of lost souls who have missed out on this blessing, and evermore feel their loss. How often do our women deacons reflect on these ideas of womanhood?

True Manhood

What about the particular attributes of the ideal man? Not for a mere woman to say, perhaps. But it is not necessary; as already indicated, the model is clear for all to see, in the Gospels. Jesus gives our man plenty to be getting on with.

For those who are striving to put the feminine back into the divine, Jesus can remind us that it has always been there. Not effeminacy, but the desirable sympathetic and caring qualities that a woman can have automatically. Why else do we sing, if not to attest this truth:

Warm, sweet, tender, even yet
a present help is he?

Our hymns, however, also assure us of Jesus’ masculinity. Real masculinity: do we comprehend how masculine God is? As C. S. Lewis put it:

What is above and beyond all things is so masculine that
we are all feminine in relation to it.³

The most earth-shaking bulldozer of a man is putty compared with the One who set the stars in their courses.

I am no theologian but I understand that there are some professors of theology who would question whether the Divinity has sexual characteristics at all. I will not attempt to argue with them. But as I come to know Christ and glimpse the fullness of the Godhead in Him, I feel I am shown how the male and female side of human nature can be harmoniously integrated. He showed more than that, of course: a perfection of being that our human categories of masculine and feminine are inadequate to describe.

Masculinity, in absolute terms, what is it? We are really very confused as to what it involves. We see God often in man’s image,

Does the Concept of Priesthood exclude Womanhood?

instead of the other way round. But what have we but human terms to describe the attributes of God? Because the imperfect male can be an imperious, condemning, punishing, terrifying figure, we assume that God must be the same. But that is not what masculinity is about at all.

O son of Man, our hero strong and tender . . .
O lips divine that taught the words of truth . . .
Lover of children, boyhood's inspiration,
Of all mankind the servant and the king . . .

If this is a picture of the Son, it must portray the Father too; Jesus came to show what God is like. Christ's masculinity, and God's, is manliness supreme. 'The highest, holiest manhood thou.

What is all-important for a priest is how he carries out this godfatherly rôle. A woman cannot do that for him. When you consider this, it is hard to understand how any woman could imagine herself addressed as 'padre'!

Immanence and Transcendence

Let us think what motherhood and fatherhood mean, what is unique about each. If, as we have shown, only a mother can help a child feel at home in his own soul, only a father can help him feel at home with other souls, in the family, in society, in his cultural environment, and even the whole universe.

Here are the beginnings of apprehension of the divine, of immanence and transcendence, the two poles of God's relationship with us.

A woman is so endowed that she is more suited to mediate the immanence, the 'within' of God.⁴ But only a man can mediate God's transcendence, the God of 'beyond'. We are more accustomed to saying, 'God be with you', than 'Be with God' (the latter a familiar greeting in the Middle East). Yet there is a time, in the Eucharist, when we are with God more than at any other moment—the focus is on Him, not on ourselves.

If Christ's birth represented God's immanence—Emmanuel, God with us—then His death showed above all God's transcendence. His transcendent glory, taking the sin and suffering of humanity into Himself, to transmute them to work our redemption. We must not lose sight of this transcendence, otherwise Christ on the Cross, sharing in cruel reality our suffering, our weakness, our sin and its retribution, loses all meaning. The Lord's Supper celebrates a death, not a birth. God's omnipotence most supremely demonstrated in powerlessness, in giving His power away.

In our remembrance and re-enactment of God's self-giving in Christ, we see His masculinity at the full, in all its mystery and majesty. The perfect Man gives Himself to the uttermost. Woman's

self-giving is to God, to bring God's life into His creation. However womanly she tries to be, she cannot speak for His sacrificial dying. Sacrificial living, yes, please, but she cannot put herself on the Cross.

V. The Consequences—We Have Been Warned

The science versus faith dilemma

Science will take nothing for granted, it must have proof, empirical, demonstrable proof, before it will accept anything to be true. Faith has to work without that sort of proof; it goes in fear and trembling, grappling with uncertainties, or it would not be faith.

The doubtings of science have led to such an increase in knowledge and expertise, to such power to create and control so many wonders of man's devising, that it seems that a question mark is needed when dealing with all forms of knowledge. The same scrutiny must be applied to the knowledge called intuition, 'knowledge from within', 'gestalt' knowledge (of things as a whole) or whatever we can call knowing something without having to dissect or analyse or measure it first—in fact, knowledge which is destroyed if scientific methods of testing are used. No wonder faith has melted away under this kind of microscopic investigation. Instead of 'believing where we cannot prove', we have come to the position of proving that we cannot believe.

The sort of faith popular science would have us hold is the belief that man, by fulfilling his potentialities, will bring in the millenium of peace, joy and prosperity for which the world longs. Faith in man at the wheel, but with God not even in the back seat. And yet, with all the glory of mechanization, the sky-scaling achievements of technology, there is still an emptiness, a sense of something missing, inside the human heart. All this scientific success has a hollow sound. It has brought such a trail of destruction, such a toll of helpless victims in its wake.

Certainly there never could have been a time when the forces against the spread of Christian ideals were as rampant as they are today. Men hurtle downward, women scramble after them. What is the Church doing to stop the rot? Priesting women. As if that could bring the Kingdom of God one whit nearer! Nero's fiddling was hardly less effective in halting the burning of Rome. Like people living on a volcano, we fondly believe we shall escape disaster where others perish. We shrug our shoulders at the desolation about us, because we have been indoctrinated into thinking it is the norm. Brave new science will come up with a solution some day. We are made to think that change is of the essence, whether we like it or not. So the ordination of women is seen as just another undesirable trend we shall come to accept.

Fallacies about our own invulnerability lead us to discard those long-tested safeguards, inbred security measures which fortified

Does the Concept of Priesthood exclude Womanhood?

society in the past. We let our inbuilt immunity system be invaded and eroded.

The latest discoveries in biochemistry show us that one of the functions of sexual reproduction is to protect us from viral infection, to save complex organisms from being broken down, taken over by pathogenic forms of life.⁵ In other words, the existence of two sexes ensures the biological integrity of the species. Could an analogy be drawn here, for the spiritual sphere? Our disregard for sexual distinctions, could it not expose us to some of the most elementary pitfalls, as well as sinister perils, and undermine the whole of our psychic stability?

Oriental Sagacity—Yang and Yin

Yang—
male principle



Yin—female principle

The West has no monopoly on supplying answers to problems between the sexes. The Chinese concept of 'yang' and 'yin'—the constituents of the universal harmony which humanity should be displaying along with the rest of creation—is rich with significances which our culture has hardly explored. Unfamiliar it may be to westerners, but it is nonetheless such a masterly, pregnant symbol that it is worth studying, in order to deepen our understanding of the duality of gender, of the separate attributes of maleness and femaleness.

How do you express in words this idea of a perfect interaction between two complementary beings, each matching each other in form and quantity, yet differing in substance and quality? It is more than the difference between dark and light, between the revealed and the hidden, although these are vital aspects. Jung, Plato, many have tried to determine this essential reciprocity, but have left a lot unexplained.

It is, alas, easier to demonstrate what happens in disharmony. So often the two components, far from fitting together smoothly, are very ragged at the edges. Or the bulge on the one does not correspond to the concave gap of the other. Or they might both shrink until there is no point of contact between them anywhere.

The contrasting 'eye', the dark spot within the light part, and the light one within the dark, must not disappear, neither must it loom too large, nor get displaced—the contrasting sexual element within has to keep its place. And, however much you try, you cannot transform the one into the other. Each can certainly encroach on the other's territory, but it will be to the detriment of both. Rubbing along together, a hit-and-miss relationship, give-and-take in the wrong

proportions and places—is not this the sort of situation which all too frequently obtains these days?

Lack of proportion. What is it in the female that can swell up and be displaced? We have indicated what happens as woman tries to conform to man's calling and character—especially in the way the world has distorted and misdirected these—and how her femininity can thereby be impaired and contaminated.

Examples from secular literature

Let us have a look at three stories, three famous plays for the answer.

For the first example we have to go back more than two thousand years, indicating that this unsavoury, disproportionate element is something eternally inherent in womanness. The *Oresteia* of Aeschylus is the story of two murders, and whether the first condones the second, or is by it condoned. Orestes kills his mother Clytemnestra, but she has already murdered Agamemnon, his father and her husband. When the shade of Clytemnestra incites the Furies to wreak vengeance on Orestes, he takes his cause to Pallas Athene. In his trial before the Athenian High Court she makes the casting vote which vindicates him. Judgment is made on the Furies too. They are obliged to swallow their curses and accept that their domain, sovereign within the family, must not go beyond. They cannot become arbiters of the laws of society. This is not before it has been made plain that their natural impulse is to repay any suspected injury with the direst punishment that they can devise. Any offence which outrages them is seen as an offence against themselves, to be dealt with by themselves, with no accountability to anyone else. They reckon not if they disturb the harmony, destroy the values, of the community in the process.

They had to be over-ruled; their capitulation was the only righteous solution. Euphemistically called the 'gracious-minded'—'Eumenides': the title of the last play in the trilogy—graciousness was the face they were supposed to show. If the Greeks could appreciate so long ago the venom lurking in a woman's breast, why do we need reminding all over again?

Shakespeare was no misogynist, nor did he underestimate the influence of women. He could portray not only virtue and nobility, but also evil incarnate in womankind. He could allow good to ensue when a woman enters a man's domain. According to the convention of his time, this had to be in disguise, but we see Portia, Viola, Rosalind, all displaying more than masculine wit and discernment in doing so. But with others, Tamora in 'Titus Andronicus' for example, with Goneril and Regan in 'King Lear', with Lady Macbeth, there is no disguise. It is as women that they perpetrate their wicked deeds; with malice aforethought, all finer feelings banished. And in doing so, they do not merely persecute men, as did the Furies, but pervert and paralyse them also. Gertrude's son, Hamlet, is a very unmanly

Does the Concept of Priesthood exclude Womanhood?

man. He is the epitomy of inaction. Throughout the play he cogitates on what he should do, but never does it.

Why? What has put him in this vice? Shakespeare is in no doubt as to the cause: his mother's failings, the alienation that he feels from her has infected him to the bone, and incapacitated him. Gertrude has done it all so easily. Not aggressively, like the Furies, but by her non-resistance to, her conniving with, evil. It is as if all that matters to her is to continue to reign in her little world. She acquiesces, agreeably it seems; as Hamlet says:

'That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain!'

The discovery of his mother's shortcomings is something he just cannot come to terms with. Her hasty second marriage to the one who proves to be her first husband's killer has soured everything for Hamlet with a cloud of cynicism and mistrust. His contempt, and cruelty is extended towards Ophelia, the girl he loved, because all women now are tainted with his mother's perfidy. He thinks and thinks, but his superior mental powers are of no help to him. The native hue of his resolution is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought, and becomes unproductive. The inward-looking Furies overwhelm Hamlet in a different way from Orestes. Hamlet's moral stamina has gone. We know all about men desecrating, raping women. It is perhaps not quite so apparent what harm a woman can do to a man.

The playwright Ibsen seems to have had an uncanny insight into women's unconscious drives, particularly in *Hedda Gabler*. Hedda has married a man, not out of love, affection or respect, but for the place he gives her in society. This is threatened when another man appears whose scholarship and erudition is superior to her husband's. He has been working on a paper which promises to make him famous in academic circles. Hedda contrives to destroy, first his writings, and then the man himself, experiencing great satisfaction in doing both. He had been of use to her once, but now that he can no longer serve her purpose, she rids herself of him.

Such women as Clytemnestra, Gertrude and Hedda are not imaginary. They are all around us, women who can thrust themselves into the centre of what is going on, full of their own opinions and importance, convinced they know what needs doing and determined to see it done. 'Phallic' women they have been called, as if they take over the most fundamental of men's functions. But any similarity is superficial, they fertilize nothing, their female psyche has become twisted and bloated and gone to seed, a triffid stifling other growth.

If it is objected that men are the ones who have composed these tales and therefore projected into them misconceptions and prejudices of femininity, then I challenge my fellow women, those who have exerted any authority, or been in any position of superiority, to

say they have never felt this wild, imperious, often vindictive drive within them.

They must have, because I have felt it myself. If they have successfully suppressed it, then we can only say that others can see it clearly in them. The woman in authority needs to be very careful for that reason, often she is not conscious of drawing on these sinister forces.

The Choice for Man and Woman

Must man capitulate entirely, keep no special function for himself? Not the setting of standards and ideals, no more attempting life's most difficult task of distinguishing good from evil? Is not this a job which has been specifically given to men, for them to do?

Women have their specific rôle. If a woman does not want to follow it, that is her affair, but that refusal gives her no right to usurp man's instead. Woman can be so many things to man—his mother, his muse, his 'mysterium tremendum'. Must she be his father, his fellow trooper too? What sort of presumption, *hubris*, is this?

Man and woman are complementary. All ages have recognized this till now. They have great similarities, as the eastern model of Yin and Yang makes clear, but they are not identical. They come closest together in their differences. Unless there is a balance between these, nothing good can ensue. We must not shift everything to one side of the fulcrum. The irony of the present situation is that woman thinks she can equalize the restless urges of man by competing with him instead of the surer way, by being true to her womanly nature. Her capacity for wisdom and inner understanding should be able to match any of man's new discoveries. Women can make their mark in society without running the show.

The Choice for the Church of England

Is this the time to make radical changes in the Church? To let women take on the most exacting rôle a man has ever had to fulfil, just when he hardly knows how it should be done? There are women in secular employment who complain that top jobs are still closed to them. Is it only chauvinism that makes man hang on to being boss, or a subconscious awareness of dire consequences otherwise? It would be ironic if it was the Church, the guardian of virtue, which should capitulate first, and bring about the abolition of man!

Women who want to be ordained, beware. There is a sense in which a priest has freedom of action unmatched in any other profession. He has powers to bind or loose both on earth and in heaven, to remit or retain another person's sins—an awful responsibility not lightly to be assumed. But imprecation was the Furies' stock-in-trade. What rites and practices will women priests choose to abrogate?

Does the Concept of Priesthood exclude Womanhood?

Could I plead with the bishops: do not be like Little Red Riding Hood, staring with such unblinking trust, into grandma's great big eyes and great big mouth. Watch out! Shout for help! Your father may be passing by and come to your rescue in the nick of time. Your mother cannot help you; she had no sense, sending you out alone into the forest in the first place.

And of the House of Laity, could I ask: whom do you represent, the communion of saints, both militant and triumphant? Or the psychologically disoriented, materialistically dominated mass of modern society? Are you really expressing the wishes of the many quiet but sincere Christian souls who do not make a fuss about what they want, but who will be relieved, not troubled, that attention is being drawn to all these dangers?

And to the House of Clergy could I say: Yes, I think many of you appreciate what I have been trying to express. But you are in a cleft stick. Any move could jeopardize your position. You do not wish to tarnish any further the image you would like to have of wide-embracing love. Though you see no reason to exclude women from Christian ministry you are apprehensive about the priesthood being open to them. You understand that to keep the Ark of God afloat, you need to man it, *not woman it*.

I have tried in this article to draw attention to the intrinsic differences of human gender, and their relevance to women's rôle in the Church. These differences must surely affect our spiritual life, as long as our souls and bodies are one entity. The Church, no less than society, when it makes changes, may not always know at the time what is best for itself. Rectification will then have to be made. The edifices which we build nowadays take a lot of pulling down. It will be less costly if the errors are perceived before those shafts of steel are too deeply immersed in the quick-setting concrete.

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NOTES

- 1 Karl Stern: *Flight from Woman*—Introduction.
- 2 Jeremy Cherfas & John Gribbin: *The Redundant Male*—Chapter I.
- 3 C. S. Lewis: *That Hideous Strength*.
- 4 'Every mother is a natural mediatrix of faith.' Karl Stern. *loc. cit.*, Chapter 12.
- 5 'The rapid generation time of pathogens gives them such a huge advantage that it is only thanks to sex and recombination that multicellular organisms can fight back quickly enough to maintain the status quo!' Cherfas and Gribbin. *loc. cit.*, final chapter.