



A. James McAdams

Ordaining the Zeitgeist

*"Our times demand" the ordination of women priests.
Not our faith, but our times.*

There are now women priests in the Episcopal Church of America. To non-Episcopalians, this fact may seem insignificant. But to those in the church, the admission of women to an office once reserved exclusively for males is extraordinary indeed. Some Episcopalians have expressed whole-hearted approval for the change; others have condemned it as heretical. Both sides agree, however, that the new priesthood represents nothing short of a radical break with traditional church practice, a break, furthermore which is likely to have consequences reaching far beyond the religious domain.

When church authorities met this past September at the Minneapolis meeting of the Episcopal General Convention, they were hardly in agreement on the idea of women priests. The ordination of women had been voted down at the Conventions of 1970 and 1973, and church authorities had censured the three retired Bishops who ordained eleven women in Philadelphia in 1974, but the ordination of these women (as well as that of four others in Washington) had set in motion an intensive lobbying effort for an official change. Thus, when the ordination issue was brought to the floor in September, the vote was close. Of the two houses of the Episcopal Church's governing body, the House of Bishops approved the ordination of women with the support of only 60 percent of the prelates. The vote in the House of Deputies (which represents both laity and clergy) was even closer. The laity voted 64 to 49 and the clergy only 60 to 54 to grant final approval to the changed composition of the priesthood. The Convention also took steps to adopt a substantially revised version of the church's Book of Common Prayer, an initiative which, for many Episcopalians, signaled a drastic departure from the communion's doctrinal and liturgical heritage. Keeping close step with its reformist orientation, the Convention also passed a resolution recognizing homosexuals as full members of the church and tacitly acknowledging homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle. In fact, the ordination of homosexuals will be the chief topic of the next Episcopal conference in 1979, and there is, in view of the church's current disposition, relatively little doubt that it too will be approved.*

But the ordination of women is by far the most controversial issue confronting Episcopalians, and its acceptance represents nothing short of a revolutionary change in the church's self-conception. The ordination of women is in fact so controversial a measure that it may eventually rip the church apart. On the ecumenical level, the consequences have already proven profound.

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Both the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches have condemned the new ordination policy, and the Polish National Catholic Church has severed its ties of intercommunion with the Episcopal Church.

The reasons for this controversy are to a great extent historical. Traditionally, the Episcopal Church has occupied an unusual position among Christian churches in the sense that it has acted as a sort of bridge between "old world" catholic conceptions of faith and dogma, on the one hand, and "new world" Protestant conceptions, on the other. Generally speaking, there are three major types of Episcopalians, "high," "broad," and "low," the first being catholic-minded, and the latter two leaning toward Protestantism. "Low," or evangelical, Episcopalians are split on the ordination issue, and because they are numerically the smallest of the three types, they have exercised the least clout in the debate. Thus, the battle has principally been waged between "broad" and "high" Episcopalians, each of which has a different view of the church.

The "broad" Protestant perspective is primarily organizational and functional; church offices are seen as administrative, pastoral, and oriented to teaching and preaching. In contrast, while the catholic perspective includes all of these functions, it is primarily based on the notion of a ministry of sacrifice, that is, on the representation of Christ's sacrifice for mankind. In the action of the Mass, the catholic priest is the representative of Christ. Because the Christian God chose to become incarnate in male form and because Christ selected only men to number among His Apostles, catholic Episcopalians argue that the priest can only be male. When he is ordained, the priest is recognized as a "Priest in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of God." Only men can take part in the "apostolic succession" which emanates *directly* from Christ, and to put women in the position of acting as Christ's vicars would be to set everything askew.

This catholic view is bolstered through the appeal to sacred Scriptures. Generally, catholics favor literal interpretations of Scriptures, and when they read that "the man is the head of the woman, just as Christ also is the head of the Church" (Ephesians 5:23) and find, furthermore, that "it is a shocking thing that a woman should address the congregation" (I Corinthians 14:35), they are bound to take such teachings seriously. Historically, both this emphasis on Scriptural revelation and the appeal to Christ's

* In fact, an affirmative vote would seem guaranteed, since one avowed lesbian, Ellen Marie Barrett, who believes that "homosexuality is an alternative life-style that can be a good and creative thing," has *already* been ordained. Significantly, her ordination comes also at a time when one Washington, D.C. priest has announced that he will soon "marry" a homosexual couple.

precedent have combined to serve as the bases of the Episcopal conception of priesthood and, in this light, the decision to ordain women may be seen quite logically—by “broad” and “high” churchmen alike—as ridding the church of much of its catholic temper.

The ordination of women would thus seem an outright victory for Protestant Episcopalians, and on the surface at least, this example of church reform would seem to be just another of the many products of the “winds of change” of the present age. But the issue is not solely religious. For one thing, Protestants do not claim to have “priests.” They have “ministers,” and catholics see nothing wrong with women ministers. To ordain women priests, however, is to violate catholic sacraments. It is to preserve a superficial catholicism but to drain it of content. There is something incongruous here, and theology alone will not help us expose the driving issues at hand.

Rage Stage

From the ordination debate, in fact, more can be learned about the pursuit of the Spirit of the Times, the *Zeitgeist*, than about the workings of the Holy Spirit. One is astonished at the readiness of the proponents of women’s ordination unabashedly to admit this influence. One pro-ordination priest, Robert Wright, has put the matter in a convenient nutshell. “*Our times demand*,” he has proclaimed, that “both sexes be given the opportunity of serving as ordained ministerial priests” (emphasis added). Not our faith, but our times. Indeed, we find that the issue is permeated with a spirit of revolution and upheaval, a passion and a fervor pregnant with the hopes for a “new world” to come. This is the spirit which has moved one Roman Catholic woman to intone: “I’m in the rage stage, which comes just before revolution!” And, it is the very same spirit which has compelled one leader of the National Coalition for Women’s Ordination to admit: “It [ordination] was 20 months of hard work, carefully programmed, and feeling sure that the Spirit was calling the Church into a new age”—a remark which prompted one magazine to ask: “Are we to believe that the Holy Spirit directed the political campaign?” A similar passion brought post-Convention sighs of relief and exhilaration to one of the Philadelphia 11: “I feel very much like I did when I heard that the war in Vietnam was over.”

This quasi-revolutionary fervor is central to the new direction that the church is taking. In large measure, the debate centers on the priority of authority and the challenging of its validity—a spirit which the ‘60s certainly did a great deal to foster. And, clearly, the decision of 15 women to participate in irregular ordinations was representative of such a challenge (and denial) of authority. Thus, one of the women, Jeannette Piccard, could proclaim triumphantly: “I am a priest. The bishops can recognize me or not—but they can’t do anything to invalidate the sacrament.”

But there is more to the issue than this particular denial of authority. In fact, what lies at the heart of the matter seems to be a total antipathy for any authority whatsoever. Authority inhibits; it limits one’s pursuit of freedom, one’s right to choose to act as one pleases. Thus, one of the ordained women, Alla Bozarth-Campbell, could use one of her homilies to urge “everyone to actively seek out his or her own freedom.” Similarly, Malcolm Boyd, priest, novelist, and social critic (who used the floor of the Convention freely to announce his “gayness” to the world) has explained that “we are persons with acceptably different parts of our natures—and we are free even as God is free.” In the same vein, the most outspoken of the “Philadelphia deacons,” Carter Heyward, has expressed the conviction that she has “a right to choose and shape my own life; a responsibility in fact to claim my own authority and live accordingly. No one can deny me this right; or bear the burden of responsibility for me.” Ms. Heyward’s is, by the way, no mean statement since the priesthood has heretofore been considered a calling, not a right.

Of course, it comes as no surprise that the rhetoric of the pro-ordination movement bears close similarities to that of the cause of women’s liberation. Again, Ms. Heyward’s words are instructive. She informs us in her book, *A Priest Forever*, that “as in all

matters of justice, one is faced with the choice essentially between the worship of God and the worship of an idol—in this case the phallus of male anatomy, every bit as much an idol as the breasts of fertility goddesses might be considered.” Who has perpetuated this unfortunate myth? The very same forces, we are informed, that have oppressed American minorities for centuries. Since the church has taken a strong stand against racism, it can only court hypocrisy if it fails to take a similarly strong stance on sexism. One high-ranking laymember of the church, Charles Willie, has summed up the contention. “There are,” he argues, “parallels between the Civil Rights Movement and the Women’s Movement and this is what we are witnessing today. In reality both are freedom movements for men as well as women, and for blacks and browns as well as whites.” Evidently, some Episcopal leaders have come to see the light. Speaking after the Convention vote, one bishop, John Spong of Newark, remarked: “The issue is simple justice. From time to time in history we have oppressed Blacks, American Indians. We have treated women as property.” But, Spong continues, the ordination of women is a breath of fresh air. “We Christians have known some great moments; when we have challenged injustice, our actions have led to great revelations...I have no fear of the future or of change.”

Naturally, the great *bête noire* of the movement is the issue of sex, that is, specifically the difference between the sexes, and the controversy over this topic has produced some unusual and innovative interpretations of Christian theology. Christ can’t have been only male, so He must also have been female, or possibly neuter. It is anathema, too, to speak of God as “He”; why not also as “She”? (Tired of being barraged by depictions of God that suggest His maleness, Fr. Boyd wonders why we don’t have pictures that suggest “Lillian Hellman or Helen Keller, Eleanor Roosevelt or Marian Anderson.”) The issue is clearly a matter of equal opportunity for women.

Sex Will Never Be the Same

Nevertheless, there is one major stumbling block which the advocates of the female priesthood have had to overcome. The problem has been that their opponents do not maintain that women are inferior, only that they are different. Clearly, the dilemma lies in this alleged “difference” between the sexes. As Emily Hewitt and Suzanne Hiatt address the subject in their *Women Priests: Yes or No?*, “the insistence that women are not inferior but simply different from men in profound and irreducible ways has a disquietingly familiar ring. It reminds us of the ‘separate but equal’ doctrine in education which this country devoutly cherished for so many years.” Yet, argue the ordination advocates, men and women are not only equal in the mundane terms of democratic politics; they are, moreover, equal in all the essentials. In line with Jungian psychology, each man has his female side; each woman, her male counterpart. What differences exist between the two sexes are trivial, insignificant. Ms. Heyward knows this. It was in “my childhood,” she confesses, “that I first became aware of what I now would name *androgyny*, the interesting blending of so-called ‘male’ and ‘female’ characteristics in all people.” From this admission onward, the road to the priesthood is an easy one. Since no man, hence no priest, is wholly male, and since every woman is partially male, it follows more-or-less logically that women can be ordained. Whichever side of this debate one wishes to take, one thing is perfectly clear—sex will never be quite the same.

But there is also an obstacle that cannot be resolved through the recourse to psychology, and that is the power of precedent, of tradition. As the opponents of the “new church” argue, priests cannot be female since Christ chose only males for His disciples. But here the advocates turn to sociology to bolster their claims. Christ’s actions, they contend, must not be taken too seriously. Either He was blinded by the “environmental conditioning” of His milieu and failed to appreciate the potential role of women, or He was merely inhibited by the hostility of His society to such a heightened female role. These are curious arguments since it is, first of all, odd to attribute myopia to the incarnation of a deity that

is supposed to be omniscient and timeless. Furthermore, it is equally strange to imagine Christ environmentally inhibited since He destroyed practically every other social convention of His time ("You have heard what is said....But I say unto you," Matthew 5:43). In fact, the sociological argument seems to falter on its own logic. "What is truly amazing," writes Orthodox priest Alexander Schmemmann, "is that while absolutely convinced that they understand past 'cultures,' the advocates of women's ordination seem to be totally unaware of their own cultural conditioning, of their own surrender to 'culture.'"

Of course, the psychological and sociological arguments are part of a larger picture, and they tell us quite a great deal about the state of the American mind, its likes, its dislikes, and its changing sympathies. As social scientists have argued in recent years, we are presently undergoing a dramatic shift in our attitudes toward change and in the criteria we employ in assessing the relevance and validity of cherished institutions. This shift can be seen as one aspect of an emergent "post-industrial" era, an age in which a premium is put upon science, rationality, and efficiency and in which old myths, traditions, and sentiments are exposed for their ostensive lack of practicality and cast aside. In large measure, it is this trend clothed in the progressive raiments of the *Zeitgeist* which—for better or worse—feeds the fires of church revision.

As the *National Catholic Reporter* has editorialized in support of the ordination of women in its own church: "Holding women back from full ordination in the Roman Catholic Church is a denial of common sense." And, if one thinks about it, there is certainly more than just a grain of truth to this assertion. A woman can do almost anything a man can do, so why not ordain women? But the appeal to "common sense" is a tricky exercise, for all human beings, whether they live in huts or condominiums, tend to act on the basis of what makes common sense to them. Otherwise, we should be inclined to characterize their behavior as abnormal, or deviant. What the *NCR* has in mind is something specifically modern, "scientific" common sense, and this orientation is manifestly incompatible with traditional approaches to questions of faith and practice. Take, for example, C.S. Lewis' traditionalist case against women's ordination. When we talk about the sexes, he writes, "we are dealing with male and female not merely as facts of nature but as the live and awful shadows of realities utterly beyond our control and largely beyond our direct knowledge." Modern common sense revolts against such a claim. How could such a statement be verified? How could anything of importance or consequence lie beyond our direct control and knowledge?

The Transformation of Faith

This question of "control" is of course inextricably bound up with the ascendancy of scientific rationalism in modern times. For this reason, it should not surprise us to find that the greatest opposition to women's ordination comes from Anglican churches in the "unenlightened" African continent. American post-industrial man, however, is prone to rebel against his past, increasingly demanding reasons, *concrete* reasons, for his actions and beliefs. He likes to know what he is doing, and he likes to have control over it. This makes the going quite rough for those aspects of human experience—sexuality, the family, marriage—which have never pretended to be wholly justifiable according to the standards of positive science. The climate is particularly unpropitious for faith itself. Faith is of course central to catholic doctrine, but it is also no small matter for Protestants since, it will be remembered, faith is precisely what they chose to defend in their Reformation. This is one reason why religious Americans were at least slightly shocked when they recently heard Barbara Walters interview Jacqueline Means, the first woman to be ordained under

new Episcopal law. (I paraphrase the discussion.) Ms. Walters posed a question that one would think to be rather daring: "Rev. Means, do you consider yourself to be a woman of strong religious faith?" The response: "No, Barbara, I do not. But I do believe in caring, and that's what religion's all about, isn't it?" Yes, religion *is* about caring. But there is (or was) certainly more to it than just that.

This re-working, whether systematic or casual, of religious conviction would appear to fit quite nicely with the demands we have encountered for the fabrication of the "new age." The literature on women's ordination bears this suspicion out, for the altered priesthood is only the beginning of a larger protest which extends far beyond matters of religion. As far as the sexual dimensions of this movement are concerned, we are reasonably well-informed. As Boyd writes, "when a priest is a woman, even God is no longer male. Then we must *really* see that our sex roles are to be discarded." Ms. Hewitt and Ms. Hiatt are more explicit. "The problem we now face," they explain, "is that the old patterns are changing and we can no longer be as clear as we once were about which sex should do what. In fact, sex is proving diminishingly effective as a way to organize society." "We are," Ms. Heyward elaborates, "agents of transformation." Once the church is reformed, one might assume, the way will be opened for the reorganization of American life. But it is still too early to predict the course of this imminent social reformation.

The victory, however, of women's ordination is, at best, only a partial one, because the battle in the Episcopal Church is by no means finished. Some Episcopalians have left the Church for other churches. Others have simply split from the church body, while retaining the "Episcopal" designation. This is the case with the recent withdrawal of the Colorado parish of St. Mary's Episcopal Church. As its rector, James Mote, explained the action, "we are not leaving the church. The Episcopal Church has left us by creating a new Protestant sect." Schism is no minor problem at the moment. And, various catholic-leaning groups are presently in the initial stages of organizing a separate Episcopal communion on a national scale.

Yet, it would be incorrect to suppose that other churches do not share the pressures of the Episcopal Church. The Roman Catholic Church, in particular, seems to be increasingly swayed by the breezes of the *Zeitgeist*. At the recent Catholic "Call to Action" conference in Detroit, priests and laymen levelled a series of demands, many of which would have been considered "unthinkable" a few years back. Numbering among these were women's ordination, the elimination of sexist language from church documents, support for affirmative action, social justice in the third world, revision of church laws concerning divorce, the right to birth control, and the condemnation of nuclear arms proliferation. Of course, the conference was immediately condemned by several U.S. bishops and, doubtless, was not favorably received by the Holy See. But one should be careful not to underestimate the forces of change in Roman Catholicism, for it too is subject to the very same currents which have polarized the Episcopal Church.

Evidently, 1976 was a tumultuous year for at least one major American church, and that experience could indeed prove a harbinger of future changes in other churches. The study of religion is important because it is one of the few indicators that we have of the sources and motivations of human action. In the past, it has been conceivable to point to this or that aspect of church dogma to explain why people acted (or failed to act) in the way they did. The church could be seen as acting—for better or worse—as a strategic factor influencing society's course. To be sure, the relation between church and society is a reciprocal one, and society has always exercised some influence on religious belief and practice. But it is evidently society which now has the upper hand, indeed, so much so that religion's freedom of movement might be



called into question. This is why it is not surprising to find that one of the Philadelphia 11, Betty Bone Schiess, was so determined to be licensed as a priest that she filed civil suit against her bishop, charging him with illegal sex discrimination. As if the courts could decide what people must believe. In light of this trend, we might find ourselves wondering whether religion will continue to be truly religious if it comes to reflect the play of societal forces alone.

George Gallup has recently pointed to a resurgence of religious conviction in America and, as everyone knows, the U.S. has been blessed with a President twice-born. Does this mean that religion is on the upswing? Perhaps. Yet it is important to note that many

of our churches are of a radically different stance and color than their predecessors of just a generation ago. As Tom Hayden, erstwhile revolutionary and U.S. Senate candidate, has solemnly observed, the radicalism of the '60s has become the common sense of the '70s. It is not up to this writer to predict whether the changes in American religion *and* in American lifestyles presage either the bliss of a bacchanalian revel or the gloom of an Orwellian nightmare. It is enough to admit, simply, that the proponents of women's ordination are right about one thing—we *are* entering a new age. □

Terry Quist

Psychotherapy, Soviet-style

How Soviet psychiatrists cure dissidents' delusions.

The horror of "psikhushki" [the mad house] gripped me from the start. In the ward there were more patients than beds. I was put as the third person on two bunks that had been pushed together. On the beds patients were writhing from haloperidol. One man's tongue was lolling out, another was rolling his eyes, a third walked around unnaturally bent over. Some lay and groaned with the pain—they had been given injections of sulphur. As they explained to me, they were being punished for bad behavior....

When I woke up the next morning, I saw two male nurses beating up a patient....

The patients immediately explained to political prisoners that they shouldn't complain here. If you did you were given a reinforced treatment of neuroleptics, injections of sulphur, they prevented you going to the toilet.

You had to admit to the doctors you were ill and renounce your views.

So speaks Leonid Plyushch of the horror of his first days in the Dnepropetrovsk special psychiatric hospital in the Soviet Union. (1) The history of his madness is not explained. Born in 1939, Plyushch began writing neo-Marxist dissident tracts in 1966. In 1968 he was sacked from his post as a mathematician; in 1969 he joined the Initiative Group for the Defense of Human Rights in the Soviet Union; in 1972 he was arrested and jailed for six months. Diagnosed later that year by state psychiatrists as afflicted with "sluggish schizophrenia from an early age," Plyushch began the internment at Dnepropetrovsk which ended only with his expulsion from the country in January 1976.

General Pyotr Grigorenko, born in 1907, was a Party member at age 20. He became a decorated war hero and wrote more than 60 scholarly works on military science. In 1961 he delivered an anti-Stalinist speech and commenced anti-Khrushchev and anti-government fulminations, all from a Marxist perspective. He was arrested in 1964; although declared non-accountable and committed to a psychiatric prison for 15 months, he was deprived of his pension. Grigorenko subsequently gained notoriety by protests on behalf of dissidents such as Andrei Sinyavsky, Yuri Daniel, Alexander Ginzburg, and Anatoly Marchenko. Fearing the

publicity of an arrest in Moscow, authorities detained Grigorenko in 1969 while he was testifying in Tashkent for the rights of Crimean Tatar leaders. Psychiatrists at Tashkent declared him sane and accountable, but perspicacious physicians at the Serbsky Institute of Forensic Psychiatry in Moscow rectified the error and bundled him off to Chernyakhovsk psychiatric prison. After vigorous Western protest, Grigorenko was released in June of 1974, physically broken by his imprisonment.

Gennady Shimanov ignored a summons for psychiatric examination for several months. In late April of 1969, he was finally taken from his work to a clinic, where he was frankly informed: "...inquiries are coming to us from the KGB.... It seems you have been behaving incorrectly." From the clinic he was sent to Kashchenko hospital for a couple of weeks for observation.

Shimanov had engaged in no dissident political activities; his "incorrect behavior" consisted entirely in his religious activity (churchgoing, religious witnessing to friends). One vaguely cynical psychiatrist admitted that the Soviet Constitution granted religious freedom; but witnessing to friends was forbidden, and the KGB didn't give a hang for the Constitution; he'd better leave off "religious propaganda" and save his skin.

Examiners tried vainly to bait Shimanov into saying that he had visions or hallucinations, that he believed himself a saint, that he had eccentric religious notions. "My answers did not please the doctor," said Shimanov. "I could see that from her face. 'How can we catch this schizophrenic?'" At the examination, Haslayeva, the hospital's deputy medical director, remarked to Shimanov:

If you had grown up in a religious family or had lived somewhere in the West, well, then we could have looked at your religiousness in another way.... But you were educated in a Soviet school, and were brought up in a family of non-believers.... You are an educated person, I am ready even to admit that you know more about philosophy and religion than I do.... And suddenly...wham!...you're religious!...It's very odd indeed...and makes one wonder if some abnormal processes were not already developing in your youth, which later on brought you to religion....

Your symptoms are a one-sided fascination with religion. You have cut yourself off from life. After all, how do healthy believers behave? An old dear crosses herself, goes out and carries on with her own affairs, having forgotten about God already.... But it is quite different with you. That is what worries us. (2)

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