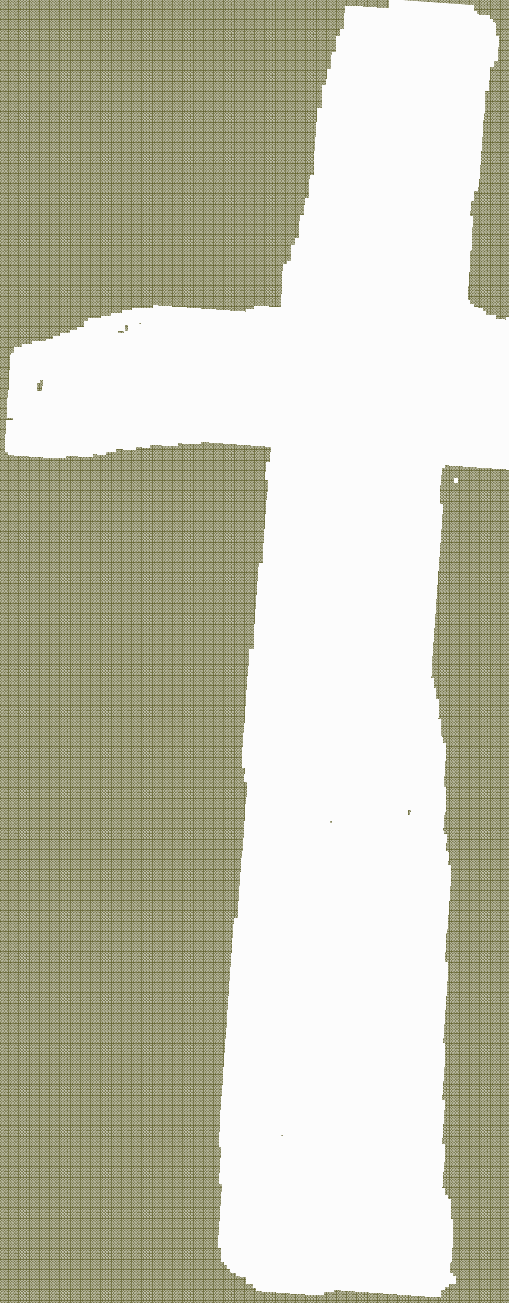


duty bound to lead

TOWARDS A RENEWED ORDAINED MINISTRY



This pamphlet sets out a vision of a Catholic Church of equals in which both men and women are called. It explores possible steps towards a renewed ordained ministry in which women and men share in ordination, leadership and decision-making.

It explains why OCW and others in the Church who are concerned that the sustaining gift of faith passes to future generations feel duty bound to lead in bringing about a change in emphasis in the existing clerical ministry. We want to recover the Church of the New Testament. A Church of community works together to discern and reflect the egalitarian nature of Jesus, remembering that the majority of the structures, titles and dress of the Catholic clerical hierarchy have been borrowed from the Roman empire and European aristocracy.

This pamphlet examines a foundational theology for such a shift, and discusses the way linguistic and symbolic representations of God operate to maintain entrenched behaviours that work against equality and spiritual development for the whole Church.

Ordination of Catholic Women is a group of women and men who advocate the ordination of women into a **renewed ordained ministry** in the Catholic Church. We are committed to encouraging discussion and understanding of this issue within the Church.

A renewed ordained ministry of both women and men who function in a relational rather than hierarchical manner will make the Church spiritually richer, more open to understanding the challenges that women, men and children face in life, and more able to bring God's love and wisdom to the complex problems of our world.

Our first pamphlet, *A GOSPEL TO BE PROCLAIMED*, was published in 1995. That pamphlet set out the Church's prohibitions to the ordination of Catholic women and questioned the extent to which these arguments should bind the Church to-day when anti-female prejudice has been exposed and when the leadership and decision-making skills of women are so widely recognized and valued.

Given that the scholarly evidence indicated there was no scriptural basis for the exclusion of women from ordination, and that women were not excluded in the original Church and early Christian communities, OCW's second pamphlet *THE HOUR HAS COME* (1997) challenged the Vatican's teaching on the ordination of Catholic women.

Why are women and men of faith now questioning church leadership ?

Many women and men now are increasingly frustrated with Church practice that is no longer meaningful and nurturing in an educated, technological and global society. The institutional Church seems to be dominated by a hierarchical episcopate that often absolves itself of responsibility, is dismissive of those who try to bring about some accountability and transparency, and that sometimes does not act to reflect the values that Christ preached.

The Church has failed to lead responsibly due to a lack of understanding of the challenges that impact on the daily lives of its members, both laity and priests. It has failed to read `the signs of the times` and to recognize that an educated laity will not accept a dictatorial argument. It has failed to understand the nature of its betrayal of children

and parents in paedophilia cases. It has not made adequate provision for the pastoral care of the faithful, even though psychologically suitable celibate male candidates for priesthood are almost non-existent and the current priesthood is ageing and dying.

These failures, coupled with the Vatican's refusal to dialogue and discuss women's ordination and equal leadership, are viewed as contradictory by people who believe in a God of love and liberation.

Our desire is to operate in a faith community that nurtures values of equality, inclusiveness, understanding and tolerance, one which encourages a transcendent spirituality that is imbued with a sense of compassion and the ability to reach beyond oneself to find spirituality in love and respect for each other and God's world.

We believe a renewed ordained ministry with women and men having an equal role in leading the Church is integral to sustaining the precious gift of the Catholic faith that has formed us. A renewed ordained ministry would revitalize pastoral care and sacramental ministry.

This ministry could contribute much to the complex and urgent challenges individuals, communities and the world face. Such challenges include the pervading sense of loneliness and alienation rife in the western world, the dominant materialism and consumerism, the lack of understanding and tolerance of issues around divorced and remarried peoples, same sex couples, the use of contraception and prevention of HIV/AIDS, particularly in developing countries where the disease so unjustly impacts on women and children.

These, as well as the global issues of the difficult interfaith dialogue between Muslims and Christians, the growing gap between the rich and the poor, the increasing deterioration of our environment, and the lack of peace in so many countries, impact on all of us.

Systemic sexism or anti-female prejudice

OCW's previous papers explain that the only barrier to the ordination of Catholic women within a renewed ordained ministry seems to be simply anti-female prejudice or systemic sexism. Many people who support this position, consciously or unconsciously, do so for their own purposes and

there is an element of denial and dishonesty in such a stance.

In the past our leaders and priests have been honoured and respected, but this is sometimes difficult now when such behaviour appears to lack integrity. Moreover, such a position does not reflect Paul's message of equality.

'In Christ there is no Jew or Greek, slave or citizen, male or female. All are one in Jesus Christ.' (Gal. 3.28)

Forty years ago, the Second Vatican Council called the Church community to eliminate discrimination against the 'other' as contrary to God's intent. Millions of Catholics were galvanized by the bold new vision of a Church 'reading the sign of the times' that called for 'the fundamental rights of the person'.

Now, in 2006, OCW and many other Catholic groups are committed to keeping this vision alive. The role and function of priesthood as we know it is being questioned by many thoughtful Catholics, both nationally and internationally. For instance, Australian Reforming Catholics, Catalyst for Renewal, the Association for the Rights of Catholics, We are Church, Call to Action and other groups are all working to influence reform in the Catholic Church.

In Australia in 2005, the National Council of Priests circulated a paper to promote discussion and reflection on *THE EUCHARIST: ITS MEANING AND CELEBRATION IN THIS COUNTRY AND AT THIS TIME*. This paper explored the central spiritual role, meaning and practical application of the Eucharist. Among the many questions the paper posed was

'why do all catholic priests have to be male – in a church where the majority of faithful people and people in so many areas of ministry are women.'

Earlier, in 1996, the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference commissioned a survey examining the participation of women in the Catholic Church in Australia. In 1999 the results of this research were published in the *REPORT WOMAN AND MAN: ONE IN CHRIST JESUS*. The executive summary of this report states:

'The overall findings of the written submissions, public hearings and targeted groups revealed a strong sense of pain and alienation resulting from the Church's stance on women. ... It was

perceived that little assistance and support were received from the institutional church to undertake anything other than ancillary and support roles. Significant barriers to the full participation of women were experienced. The fundamental barrier concerned traditions and attitudes which were seen to be inconsistent with the person and message of Jesus Christ and especially his relationship with women. The major suggestions to increase women's participation were the involvement of women in decision-making at all levels, a re-examination of the nature of ministry with exploration of the possibility of more inclusive roles for men and women, and reform of beliefs and associated practices that did not promote the equality of men and women. There was much agreement, even among those with different views on the question, that there should be open discussion of the issue of women's ordination.' (p.viii)

One of the key recommendations of this report established the National Commission for Australian Catholic Women. While the Commission has done some very useful work, one can't help but think that this seems like lip service in light of the Vatican continuing to forbid discussion of the issue of women's ordination on church premises. Such an initiative functions to mask the Church's continued exclusion of women's equal participation in Church leadership.

So it seems timely to turn our imagination to the form a renewed ordained ministry and women's role within it might take.

Duty bound to lead

If we are once again faced with a Church whose understanding is limited, even erroneous, as it was in the case of slavery when it lagged behind secular understandings of justice by almost a hundred years, **we are duty bound to follow our conscience and lead**. The Church's response to slavery indicates that it can change. Leading in these circumstances means questioning the adherence to the Christian virtue of obedience.

Dr Marie Louise Uhr, Founder of Australian OCW, in her paper *OBEDIENCE A QUESTIONABLE VIRTUE* (available at www.ocw.webcentral.com.au) suggests that

'a Christian theology which preaches an obedient Christ and upholds obedience to authority as a major virtue has led to authoritarian church structures, which have

*encouraged church members to uphold obedience, rather than **conscientious discernment**, as the primary response to orders from both church and civil authorities. And this has had disastrous consequences for large segments of society.’ (p.1)*

In this paper she urges us to

‘consider the theology, and in particular the Christology of obedience; some of the social and theological problems that come from this Christology; scriptural foundations for dissent and disobedience and the possibilities of a more Spirit-led, democratic church.’ (p.1)

Uhr argues convincingly that

‘church authorities not only need to hear criticisms of their rulings such as that on women’s ordination, they also need to question the basic assumptions about the virtue of obedience. Challenging the assumption that obedience is fundamental to a Christian identity is equally necessary for the health of our church. Furthermore it is clearly consonant with our scriptural tradition.’ (p.8)

The question then for OCW is: How do we as women and men of faith proceed to ensure that a renewed ordained ministry in which women and men are ordained and in which women have an equal role in leading the Church becomes a reality?

We believe that it is through the sacraments that we remain in contact with Christ. For this reason, OCW believes that we must continue to try to work from within the institutional Church.

We support Pope Benedict VI and his all male episcopate as our brothers in Christ, but we are Church too, and we draw on the tradition of the Church in matters of conscience. This is enshrined in the Documents of Vatican II, notably in **THE CHURCH TODAY**.

‘Let it be recognized that all the faithful, clerical or lay, possess a lawful freedom of inquiry and of thought, and the freedom to express their minds humbly and courageously about those matters in which they enjoy competence.’ (p.270)

Our common purpose with our brothers then, is to ensure that the faith espoused by Jesus Christ is maintained and passed on to future generations through a renewed ordained ministry in which women and men - celibate and married - minister equally.

Renewed ordained ministry

Two recently presented papers scope some of the possibilities for a renewed ordained ministry.

ROSEMARY RADFORD RUETHER

Rosemary Radford Ruether PhD. in her paper, **THE CHURCH AS LIBERATION COMMUNITY FROM PATRIARCHY: THE PRAXIS OF MINISTRY AS DISCIPLESHIP OF EQUALS**, presented at the Women’s Ordination Worldwide Conference in Ottawa in 2005 (available at www.ocw.webcentral.com.au) notes that:

‘the church from its beginning was understood as a community of liberation from slavery and oppression..... this vision of the church as a community of liberation in which all members share ministry equally has been continually recovered in Christian history’ (p.1)

She goes on to explain that most recently

‘the development of Base Christian Communities as the ecclesial expression of Latin American liberation theology have rediscovered this understanding of church’ (p.1)

She notes that the reclamations of small communitarian understandings of Church often implicitly reject patriarchy and states that:

‘rejection of patriarchy as the order of creation for society also obviously means rejection of it as the appropriate order for the church. If the church in its essential nature is a community of liberation from patriarchy then it should most particularly witness to an alternative pattern of relationship between its members based on a discipleship of equals and mutual empowerment.’ (p.2)

She argues that clericalism can operate in ways that can replicate patriarchy, defining ‘patriarchy’ as:

‘a historically constructed system by which ruling class males have established themselves in a position of domination over women and over dependent classes in society Ruling class males have built social structures and ideologies of cultural justification of these structures to monopolize cultural, economic and political power in society...’ (p.2)

Ruether explains further that

‘a church that claims to be the sacrament of liberation for society while itself embodying the worst patterns of oppression compounds sinful

distortion with hypocrisy and is simply unbelievable.....constructing a church of liberation requires dismantling clericalism. This means we have to understand the utter incompatibility of clericalism with a liberative understanding of church and ministry.’ (p.3)

She suggests that

‘a ministry of function rather than clerical caste can allow a true plurality of ministerial needs of the community to be defined and responded to’. (p.7)

Ruether notes that dismantling clericalism and Church organization does not mean that leadership, skills and credentialing would be dispensed with. Such a ministry would operate on a discipleship of equals, credentialed for particular ministries, for example: celebrants of the Eucharist, preachers, liturgists, pastoral carers of the sick, bereavement ministers.

SISTER JOSEPHINE ARMOUR

Sister Josephine Armour, OP PhD in her recent paper, *LIVING TRINITARIAN FAITH: A RESTRUCTURED THEOLOGY OF THE ORDAINED MINISTRY* presented at the OCW Conference Melbourne, 2005 outlines a very comprehensive theological view of renewed ordained ministry. (www.ocw.webcentral.com.au)

Armour says that rather than spending time refuting the arguments around the exclusion of women from ordained ministry:

I believe that in order to reach resolution in this debate we must review the very theology which underpins our understanding of ministry’ (p.1)

She urges us to briefly reflect on the result of our traditional theology of ordained ministry:

1. *We have an ordained ministry which is set apart from the Christian community. There is a clear division between clergy and laity.*
2. *We have an ordained ministry which has an hierarchical ordering (and elevated status).*
3. *There is little or no involvement of lay people in selecting ministers in the church.*
4. *There is a notion of ontological character and sacred power attached to the ordained minister.*
5. *Over the centuries the mystification of the Eucharist has consolidated clericalism.*
6. *Women and married people are excluded from the ministry and from decision-making procedures in the church.*

7. *Celibacy is a requirement for ministry.*
8. *Ordained ministry is a lifelong commitment. There is no possibility for being a minister for a shorter period. (p.1)*

These factors convey a picture of an exclusive ministry, one that does not reflect the egalitarian nature of God but rather can alienate the people of God.

Armour’s suggestions for a renewed ordained ministry challenge the current underlying theology and replace it with a theology that manifests the nature of God. She draws on the theology of Catherine LaCugna in *GOD FOR US: THE TRINITY AND CHRISTIAN LIFE*, based on the symbol of the Trinity

‘Because the doctrine of the Trinity is teaching about God’s life with us, it can provide a framework for understanding ordained ministry in the context of all ministry in the Christian community’ (p.2)

This theology encompasses concepts of community and relationship:

‘the doctrine of the Trinity reveals a God who is essentially relational, who is three persons united in radical communion, who is non-hierarchical, whose authority is grounded in ‘koinonia’ (in the essential relatedness or the bond of discipleship in the community) of the three persons whose mutual love between three persons overflows to all creation and who calls forth loving relationships in the Christian community.’ (p.2)

Armour notes that

‘the Trinity provides a critical principle against which we can evaluate present practices in ministry, such as exclusion of women from ordained ministry and it can be an agent of change, attuning us to the life of God. How would Christian ministry look if it were based upon the very life of God?’ (p.3)

Her paper suggests the way this theology might work in the Christian community, drawing on the work of Edward Schillebeeckx. She explains that

‘Edward Schillebeeckx has noted that discussions about the meaning and function of the ordained minister traditionally have been far too centred upon the ontological character of the ordained person and too little concerned with the relationship of that person with the Christian community. If we shift our attention from the question of the ontological character of the

minister to the relationship between the minister and the community, it is clear that ordination has no meaning outside of the Christian community. The situation which has arisen today where ordained men travel across the world to work in other communities which are supposedly without ministers ought to be viewed as an anomaly. Ordained ministers ought more properly serve the local community in which their ministry arose. However, the requirement of the current magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church that this ministry be confined to celibate males, has given rise to an apparent paucity of ministers. Local communities, open to the Spirit of God, do give birth to ministers. There is no shortage of ministers. The Spirit of God does inspire and raise up leaders and ministers if we are only open to that fact. Often those ministers will be married people and often they will be women.’ (p.3 & 4)

Armour’s vision of renewed ordained ministry requires a democratization of the Church

‘Since the triune God is three persons in mutual relationship and non-hierarchical in structure, there are good grounds for suggesting that the ministry of the church and the ordained ministry in particular, ought to be structured non-hierarchically and in a way that promotes collegiality and collaboration amongst the baptised people of God.’ (p.11)

Such democratization should not be viewed as threatening to the present Church but rather as an openness to God’s ways. Marie Louise Uhr’s paper on Obedience concurs with this trinitarian approach

‘The God of Jesus Christ, who challenges all power structures, gets lost in the presence of powerful authority structures demanding submission and obedience. A renewed emphasis on a Trinitarian theology with God recognized as equal and loving persons in relationship would not only allow us to acclaim God as love but would also allow the Trinity to model a ‘community free of domination’ in which all both give and receive.’ (p.9)

Each of these perspectives suggests possibilities for a renewed ordained ministry that is inclusive of women and men, that is reflective of the life and nature of God, that recognizes the pressures of daily life and that works to inspire and restore the Spirit.

How we speak and think about God: the impact of linguistic and symbolic images of God

An issue of crucial importance in moving to ideas of a renewed ordained ministry is the matter of ‘the way we speak about God’ and ‘the images we have of God’. Images of God and use of language have changed dramatically in modern secular society in which inclusive and non-sexist language is the accepted practice in all institutions.

In her 1993 publication *SHE WHO IS: THE MYSTERY OF GOD IN FEMINIST THEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE*, Elizabeth Johnston talks about the way Christian people even in the 4th century were fascinated by the right speech about God. The ‘question of speaking rightly about God’ is as important now as it was then. She explains

‘speech to and about the mystery that surrounds human lives and the universe itself is a key activity of a community of faith. In that speech the symbol of God functions as the primary symbol of the whole religious system, the ultimate point of reference for understanding experience, life and the world. Hence the way in which a faith community shapes language about God implicitly represents what it takes to be the highest good, the profoundest truth, the most appealing beauty. Such speaking powerfully moulds the corporate identity of the community and directs its praxis’ (p.3)

We all experience and can recognize the way language operates to ‘mould reality’ in relationships in our families, friendship, community and work groups. In this day and age technologies such as the internet and television also influence and mould the way we think and act. Importantly for women, in a renewed ordained ministry images of God as male together with an accompanying male-centred language are no longer appropriate. In fact many young men and women have already withdrawn from the Catholic Church due to the powerful and negative impact of such rhetoric. If language so influences meaning and relationships then using ‘the right language about God’ is crucial to experiencing God and developing a relationship of faith. The use of right language about God then, is not only important for women in the Church but it is also crucial for the younger generations for whom the Church no longer seems to be relevant.

The first step in altering this situation would be the introduction of inclusive language in Catholic Church liturgies and sermons. OCW has been arguing for such a change over a number of years and some parishes have adjusted their liturgies accordingly, but there is no official move or approval from the episcopate to do this. Such lack of leadership acts as a deterrent to universal adoption of inclusive language within the Catholic Church and entrenches male hierarchical views of God and the subordinate position of women.

The challenge for OCW in the future will be to maintain our agenda of ensuring women's equal role in a renewed ordained ministry while building partnerships with others who share the same purpose as well as the passing on the precious gift of faith that has sustained us to future generations.

In the words of Marie Louise Uhr

'Karl Rahner called for those who feel the presence of the Holy Spirit empowering them to challenge the official church to be of great courage and accept that the Spirit might be entrusting them with rights and responsibilities for the whole church. He called for them to cease hiding behind a comfortable obedience and speak out boldly, proclaiming what they believe to be true: "For this may be the truth of the Spirit of God" (p.9)

'The Spirit of God demands no less. This is not obedience to specific commands; it is faithfulness to the Spirit of God in our midst. It is this faithfulness that God calls us to, to be fully ourselves. To achieve this, we need to listen to a great deal more in life than magisterial authorities. We have to listen to the Spirit. We have to listen to life. We have to listen to one another.' (p.10)

OCW is 'duty bound to lead, towards a renewed ordained ministry'.

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