

## Women priests

### I. Perspective

'The only better gift, which can and must be desired, is love. The greatest in the kingdom of heaven are not the ministers but the saints.' (CDF Inter Insigniores, 15th October 1976 n.115; quoted J-P II 22nd May 1994)

'The whole concern of doctrine and its teaching must be directed to the love that never ends. Whether something is proposed for belief, for hope or for action, the love of our Lord must always be made accessible, so that anyone can see that all the works of perfect Christian virtue spring from love and have no other objective than to arrive at love' (Catechism n. 25).

1

'In the Church this communion of people with God, in the "love that never ends" is the purpose which governs everything in her that is a sacramental means, tied to this passing world. "The Church's structure is totally ordered to the holiness of Christ's members. And holiness is measured according to the great mystery in which the Bride responds with the gift of love to the gift of the Bridegroom" [JPII Mulieris dignitatem §27]. Mary goes before us all in the holiness that is the Church's mystery as "the bride without spot or wrinkle" [Ephesians 5:27]. This is why the "Marian" dimension of the Church precedes the "Petrine" [JPII, Mulieris dignitatem §27]. (Catechism n. 773).

2

Fact 1. The twelve were all male

Fact 2. Discipleship transcends the male-female difference

'There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.' (Galatians 3:28)

Fact 3. Men and women exercise ministry in the Christian community

- Simon's mother-in-law (Luke 4:39) - first use of the verb diakonein 'to minister'.
- Group of women (Luke 8:1-3) - use of diakonein 'to minister'.
- Martha (Luke 10:40) - Luke's only use of the noun diakonia 'ministry'.

3

### 2. Arguments

a: Sociological and cultural considerations alone account for all-male priesthood of the past and point to a change today.

b: theological - based on traditional understanding of revelation

In favour of ordination of women

(presented by Archbishop of Canterbury 18th December 1985)

- The word became human to unite all humanity to God

4

- Those commissioned as priests fulfil a twofold representative function
  - i) They represent the priesthood of all the baptised
  - ii) They represent the risen Christ as source of life for all the faithful
- Male only priesthood is a defective symbol - a fact that sociological and cultural changes have now made obvious.

Against the ordination of women (CDF 1976 ; Cardinal Willebrands, June 1986; J-P II, May 1994)

- The symbolic and iconic role of the male priest, representing the male Jesus, the bridegroom of the whole of the Christian community, the Bride of Christ (Willebrands).

