

Women and the Priesthood.

By the late

CANON H. R. L. SHEPPARD, C.H., D.D.

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"WHY does the Church refuse to ordain women?"

My correspondent probably means: "Why are women not ordained to the Priesthood?" Women are ordained, but they are not yet permitted to be Priests. I really do not know, apart from prejudice, the reason for this restriction. There cannot be many to-day who would affirm, as was done when I was young, that women are incapable of the grace of Holy Orders. Even if such people exist, they should realize that women have been ordained in recent years, and have, of course, proved themselves entirely capable of receiving the grace which the Church believes is given in ordination.

The Archbishop's Commission on the Ministry of Women, although, with one exception, the members were opposed to the ordination of women to the priesthood, declared that it should be recognized

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“that a deaconess is in Holy Orders;” and the Archbishop of Canterbury speaking in May, 1937, of the ministry of women, said: “Their status is definitely secure; they are ordained women in precisely the same sense in which I am an ordained man.” If those two statements are fully considered, it would certainly seem as if the continued refusal to ordain women to the priesthood was a matter of expediency rather than principle.

Apart from prejudice, it is very difficult to find valid reasons why women should not be fully ordained, as men are. In His teaching, our Lord made no distinction between women and men. His attitude to women was revolutionary. He was ministered to by a little company of women, and He gave to Mary Magdalene the privilege of being the first messenger of His Resurrection. No doubt St. Paul was critical about the ministry of women, but “There can be no male and female for ye are all one in Christ Jesus,” was spoken by him.

It is said that so great an innovation as the ordination of women to the priesthood ought to have the approval of the whole Church, but in a divided Church it is not possible to call a General Council. It is also said that this innovation would make an insuperable bar to reunion with the Church of Rome. Does this mean that in our Church we must never do anything, not even if we think it right, that might offend the Church of Rome?

Women have spiritual and intellectual gifts which would be of immense value in the priesthood, but if they are to be fully used they need larger opportunities than the diaconate can give them. Those who believe that women should be admitted to the priesthood desire it not merely that justice should be done, but because they know that many women have a special vocation for the ministry, and they covet for the Church its fullest use and service.

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