

Tangaza College

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Working for Women's Development:
Elements of a Theology of Women's Ministry

by

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STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the material used herein has not been submitted for academic credit to any other Institute. All sources have been cited in full.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Machota', is written above a horizontal line.

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PREFACE

“There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither slave nor freeman, there can be neither male nor female for you are all one in Christ Jesus” - writes St. Paul to the Galatians. According to these words, the church is a community of equal believers united in their faith in Jesus Christ, the Eternal Word of the Father. That community is prompted by the Spirit to go and spread the Good News to the whole world. The same missionary mandate has been endorsed almost 2000 years later by the present Pope John Paul II in his Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*. It has been given to all the faithful both men and women. Everyone is called to ministry.

In two years time we will be celebrating the 2000 anniversary of Christianity. Such occasions make us reflect and evaluate the past, see the present and prepare the future. This essay is dedicated to all women who from the beginning of the church have been involving in its ministry. I am going to see whether the church has been faithful to God's intention regarding women. I also intend to give a vision of woman's ministry that would be adequate for the church entering the third millennium.

I would like to express my gratitude to all those who have enkindled in me the interest in promoting women's ministry. First of all, my thanks go to those women and men who inspired me by their life witness, collaborative apostolate and strong commitment to the work of evangelization. I sincerely thank Rev. Fr. Patrick Ryan for his guidance in this work. My words of thanks go to my formators and students in the SMA House in Nairobi, for all the help they showed in bringing this endeavour to completion.

I hope that my essay will make a small contribution to the development of women's dignity and to the proper understanding of their call to evangelize given to them by the Lord. Lastly, I hope that it will help me in the missionary work that I am about to begin.

CHAPTER I

PRESENT SITUATION

Introduction

In this chapter I will present the current situation of women's ministry. I will not be able to exhaust the topic. On the contrary this will be a rather selective picture dictated by the limitation of the work. Nevertheless, I hope that the key issues in the areas of women's ministry highlighted here will be able to make an overall general statement of the position and ministry of women in the church.

The presentation will consist of a very brief overview of history. Then I will have a look at the involvement of women in the church's activity in a few countries of Western Europe. I will also present the problem and state the position of "Altar girls", see women's theological education and, finally, present some women working in the Vatican.

A Quick Look at the History

Though the general attitude of the Fathers of the Church was quite discriminative towards women, their role in the Church's ministry of that time was quite significant. First of all there was an office of deaconess (Rom 16:1) which is also referred in a letter of Pliny the Younger. They were part of ecclesial hierarchy. Widows had a task to instruct female converts for baptism. Their role diminished with the cessation of the practice of adult baptism which almost disappeared at the end of the 5th century.

St. Thomas Aquinas's theories were not more favourable for women than the ones of the

Fathers. There were, however, some women who during this time of male domination played significant roles in the Church. These were usually nuns. "The abbesses who had power of jurisdiction wore the mitre and the staff exercised great power far beyond what is accorded to religious women today".¹ There were such great women rulers as Cotilde Blanche of Castille, Saints like Catherine of Siena and Joan of Arc. These were exceptions because the church and Law gave women low status. Canon Law allowed husbands to beat their wives and women were legally incompetent... "In general they were considered as man's property".²

In the period following the Middle Ages the atmosphere did not improve dramatically. The wind of change blew first in the lives of the religious women. Angela Merici (1474 - 1540), the foundress of the Ursulines not only broke the strict enclosure imposed upon all religious women by Boniface VIII, but rejected the habit and common life leaving only a vow of chastity. "They were to live the life of consecrated virginity while laboring as apostles in the world".³ This attempt was, however, suppressed by the ecclesiastical authorities after Angela's death. A similar fate awaited the "English Ladies" and their foundress Mary Ward (1585 - 1645). Mary's ideas of conducting schools for girls, teaching them secular subjects as well as Latin, being governed only by women and depending only on the pope, brought a strong opposition from the hierarchy. Although the congregation survived under the new name of the Institute of English Virgins it was only until the

¹Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1968, p.97.

²Ibid p.98

³Ibid p.103.

present century that Mary Ward was reinstated as the foundress.⁴

The XIX and XX centuries brought about some movement towards feminine emancipation. However, Pope Leo XIII in the Encyclical Letters *Quod Apostolici Muneris, Rerum Novarum, Arcanum Divinae* was expressing his fears and scepticism towards them. Although in 1919 Benedict XV pronounced in favor of votes for women his successor Pius XI again showed his scepticism towards feminist emancipation (*Casti Connubi*). “Pius XII seems to have been anxious to find a role for women in line with ‘spiritual motherhood’”.⁵ The real signs of change came with Pope John XXIII. This “wind” blew even more strongly during Vatican II. In 1964, the first women auditors (although silent listeners) took part in the third session of the Council. A significant change occurred in the awareness of the religious women in the Church which led to a massive leaving of many members. In 1965, missionary sisters got permission to distribute Holy Communion. In some parishes in Brasil sisters were performing all the pastoral functions except for the strictly sacerdotal ones (Mass, confessions, extreme unction).

Women in the “Western Church”

We hear statements that “the Western Church is in decline”. One of the reasons given is the Church attendance which has dropped enormously. In this context I will have a glance at the situation regarding the difference in female and male “religiosity”.

In France, (in 1986), fifteen percent of French Catholics practised regularly “of which the

⁴Ibid p. 106.

⁵Ibid p. 116.

majority were women.”⁶ The practising women are mostly over fifty years old and are from the middle class. In Belgium, there are about twenty percent practising Catholics (1985). The young population is more or less equally not interested but “among the adults and elder people women are the majority at both Sunday and weekday masses.”⁷ In Ireland, Mass attendance reached eighty-seven percent (1981). But there is no clear distinction made between male and female attendance. Surveys made in Italy show that forty-five percent of women and thirty one percent of men attend church once. “Among the young the greatest percentage of those who believe in God are women.”⁸ In Spain, (in 1987), ninety-one percent of women and eighty-one of men constitute the total of the eighty-six percent of Spanish Catholics. “In some parishes the attendance of some of the services is almost totally female.”⁹

These are just a few samples from some countries that give us a hint of who the practising Catholics are. In Western countries and generally in “Western Europe”, as well as in the USA, more women than men are regular Church-goers. To sum up I will cite Anne Brotherton : “In my own eye-count at scores of European Church services, women outnumbered men by an average of three to one.”¹⁰ According to the same author, the real labor force in the Western Church is women, starting with preparing food for the priest and decorating the altar and finishing in the classes of religious

⁶Anne Brotherton, *The Voice of the Turtledove. New Catholic Women in Europe*, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1992, p. 63

⁷Ibid p.15.

⁸Ibid p.128

⁹Ibid p.172.

¹⁰Ibid p.196.

education. It is mostly done on the basis of voluntary and thankless work. The reality is also that “few of them have the formal representation on governing boards, decision-making bodies.”¹¹

There is, however, a change in the role of women in the Catholic Church in the “West”. The situation varies from country to country, of course. In Belgium, for example, a woman was heading the National Justice and Peace Committee which normally is a “Bishop's territory”. Although in England the situation is not as good, women are more involved in the activities like counselling, religious education, non-ordained liturgical ministry. In France eighty-five percent of catechists are women. In Spain progressive bishops ordered a balance of fifty-fifty men and women on parish councils. More and more Dutch women go for theological and pastoral training.

Women's Ministerial Priesthood

The Roman Catholic juridical position is very direct and clear about this issue. Both Codes of the Canon Law from 1917 and 1983 stated clearly that “only a baptized man can validly receive ordination”(can 1024).

The issue was brought to light in the late sixties and early seventies. National Synods of countries like Holland, Austria, Switzerland, as well as some other organizations and individuals demanded reexamination of this issue. The Pontifical Biblical Commission had studied the role of women in the Bible. After long and meticulous examination in plenary session, the seventeen members of the commission agreed unanimously that the N.T. by itself did not seem able to settle the issue.¹²

¹¹Ibid p. 196.

¹² Jacqueline Field-Bibb, *Women Towards Priesthood, Ministerial politics and feminist praxis*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 182.

Pope Paul VI approved, on 15 October 1976, the Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood, prepared by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The message can be summarized in the statement from the document: "The Church in fidelity to the example of the Lord does not consider herself authorized to admit women to priestly ordination."¹³

The declaration was supported by a series of articles in "L'Osservatore Romano". Responding to the argument of inequality, many of them would emphasize especially "other roles that women are called to" (Raimondo Spiazzi - 10 February 1977) and that "pursuit of equality based on the elimination of sexual differences is a minus for the real liberation of women" (Louis Bauer in L.R. 20 January 1977). Church theologians like Hans Urs von Balthasar, Joseph L. Bernardin or Joseph Ratzinger also contributed in endorsing the position stated in the Declaration.

In the Encyclical Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* on the dignity and vocation of women on the occasion of the Marian year, Pope John Paul II reiterated the central argument of the Declaration. Points like: institution of the Eucharist being closely linked with priestly service of the Apostles, and sacramental minister of the Eucharist acting in *Persona Christi*, were again put forward as key arguments in favor of the position presented in the Declaration *Inter Insigniores*. Hence the ministerial priesthood can be exercised only by a man.

A few years later, in 1994, the pope dispersed any doubt about the official stand of the Catholic Church. "Wherefore, in order that any doubt may be removed regarding a matter of great importance I declare that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on

¹³ Ibid p. 182.

women and that this judgment is definitively held by all the Church's faithful.”¹⁴ By this letter the pope finished the debate and Cardinal Ratzinger in a letter reflecting on the document wrote that anybody who does not agree with Vatican teaching “obviously separated himself from the faith of the Church.”¹⁵

Altar girls

“This was the result of an interpretation of existing Church Law and not a major innovation by the Church”, said Joaquin Navarro Valls the official Spokesman for the Holy Father. However, it took quite a long time to get to this new interpretation.

The tradition concerning this issue was codified in canon 813,#1 of the 1917 Code: “A priest may not celebrate Mass without a minister who serves him and makes his responses.”

#2 “The minister serving Mass may not be a woman except that when no man is present for a just cause, a woman may make the responses from a distance but under no circumstances may she approach the altar.” Canon 230,#2 of the 1983 Code reads: “Lay persons can fulfill the function of lector during liturgical actions by temporary deputation; likewise all lay persons can fulfill the functions of commentator or cantor or other functions, in accord with the norm of law”. According to the Canon 6 of the new Code the 1917 Code was abrogated.

Apart from the Code, there are current liturgical norms: *General Introduction to the Roman Missal* (1969, revised 1975), *Liturgicae Instaurationes* (1970), *Inaestimabile Donum* (1980). All of them clearly prohibit women from service at the altar. In connection with that angry exchanges took

¹⁴ John Paul II, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, no 4.

¹⁵ “Revealing Reactions”, *The Catholic World Report*, July 1994, vol. 4, No.7, p 15.

place between the supporters of the reform and the opponents. In 1987 during a Synod of the Bishops on The Laity one of the propositions put to vote was, that women should be permitted to exercise all ministries that did not require ordination. It was rejected by the majority, although according to the 1983 Code it was already permitted.

This lingering problem about the altar girls was finally resolved on the 30 of June 1992 by an answer to a doubt presented to the Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts. The doubt was as follows: "Whether service at the altar is to be included among the liturgical functions which the laity, whether men or women, may exercise according to canon 230,#2."¹⁶ The Council answered: "Affirmatively and according to instructions to be given by the Apostolic See."¹⁷ On July 11, the Pope John Paul II ordered this decision to be promulgated.

It has been resolved formally but the discussions, polemics and opposition have continued. When Mother Teresa met with her sisters in New York, she told them: "I spoke with the Holy Father about altar girls. It was very clear. He said it would not happen."¹⁸ Theoretically it is resolved, but how many Christian communities have implemented it in practice, is another question.

Women's Religious Education

Many women, especially in the countries without adequate general education and cultural openness which would challenge the traditional thinking, are victims of ideologies whether cultural,

¹⁶ Joseph Fessio, S.J., "How did it happen: A Canonical Investigation", *The Catholic World Report*, June 1994, vol.4, No. 6, p.47.

¹⁷ Ibid, p.47.

¹⁸ Joseph Fessio, S.J., "How did it happen: A Canonical Investigation", *The Catholic World Report*, June 1994, vol.4, No 6, p. 48.

religious or political. Most of all they have to struggle with themselves to change the pattern of beliefs and convictions. One of them is that women are not supposed to study theology because it is a man's field. An example of the first Samoan woman who had an opportunity to study theology gives some light on the situations of women's struggle in the area of theological education.

Roina studied in the Pacific Theological College (PTC) in Fiji, where she was eventually accepted after series of attempts in other institutions. One of the convincing arguments was : "If you send me home there is no hope because there is no separation between theological education and ordained ministry".¹⁹ The traditional way of thinking that "the ministry in the church is a man's job" put the idea of doing theology out of the question. Those who overcome this block and decide to study theology have still a long way to go. They encounter opposition from the Church, other students, even some women. Roina said : "I don't blame them all, after all I had the same understanding : it's not a woman's world".²⁰

Another serious obstacle is the problem of sponsorship. The Case of Roina is a testimony of it. Her first year in PTC was entirely sponsored by her family. Raina is not a member of the Catholic Church. Nevertheless how many works of female theologians are being studied in the Catholic Theology? How many female theologians are studying especially in the young Church of the South?

Women in the Vatican

Though Vatican is dominated by males, there are a few women who hold important posts.

¹⁹ See: Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Roina Fa'atauva'a, "The struggle about women's theological education", Ursula King ed., *Feminist Theology from the Third World*, London, N.Y.: SPCK/Orbis Press, 1994, pp.170-175.

²⁰ See - Ibid, pp.170-175.

A Belgian theologian, Marie Hendricks, is the only female working at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the faith. She is an Assistant for studies and is to find out “how the truth works”. She is one of the 103 females working in the Roman Curia directly or, of 123 if we include related commissions (1990 statistics). However, they constitute roughly fifteen percent of the total Curial officials. Apart from these, there are 105 women working for Vatican Radio, the small clerical staff, or volunteer workers.

The highest post held by a woman is the work with the Secretary of State Cardinal Angelo Sodano as the person responsible for “relations” with European organizations. In the Vatican there are lay, religious women and consecrated laity. They are the continuation of the breakthrough precedent which happened in 1967, when the first woman, Rosemary Goldie, was appointed to the Curia. There are also women who though not in the Curia itself, work for Vatican and these are even more than inside the Holy See itself. They are in Vatican Information Service, Vatican Radio and the Vatican Museum.

CHAPTER II

ASSESSMENT OF WOMEN'S MINISTRY IN THE CONTEMPORARY CHURCH

Introduction

In this chapter I intend to give an analysis of woman's ministry in the church . It could be easily a topic for a doctorate thesis and still it would not be exhausted. Consequently, I will have to be selective in my approach. I will look at the ministry of women in the broader context of the ministry of lay people and the reason will be given at the very beginning.

The analysis will be divided into two parts: *A* - where I will see what is the call of the laity, and *B* - where I will concentrate on the women themselves. In both cases I will base my reflection on two documents: *Apostolicam Actuositatem* of the Second Vatican Council, and *Christifideles Laici* of Pope John Paul II . We will have a look at the models of the church and how they treat women. I will tackle the question of equality and their involvement in the leadership roles, after which I am going to proceed to the ministry itself. Although neither of the documents gives attention to language, I consider it important to talk about this issue, as well as to see the danger of extreme feminism.

Where do Women Belong to in the Catholic Church?

To answer this question is very difficult. In the *Concise Dictionary of Theology*, I found this definition of the laity : "The faithful who have been fully incorporated into the church through

baptism, confirmation and communion (1 Pet 2:9-10) but who have not received holy orders and become clerics.”²¹ However, in the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* we read : “The term laity is here understood to mean all the faithful except those in holy orders and those who belong to a religious state approved by the church.”²² There is a clear discrepancy between the two definitions. The problem is whether the religious sisters and brothers belong to the laity or not.

It seems to me that the church magisterium does not have a clear idea of who the lay faithful are. The pope refers to the Council’s definition and indeed that is the understanding he uses in the Exhortation because he does not give any attention to the religious sisters and brothers in the apostolate of the laity. If the bishops, canonists and doctors are confused about the definition of the lay state what about a student aiming at the basic of the theological degrees?

As much as it is difficult to give a definition of a lay person, yet it is absolutely crucial in order to do a theological analysis of the women’s role in the church. The fact whether they all belong to the laity or whether women living a consecrated life constitute yet another category will determine the whole reflection. Since the church’s magisterium and theologians give contradictory definitions I will try to overcome this difficulty by giving my own understanding of women’s state in the church and let this be the basis for theological reflection.

I tend to base belonging or not to the lay state on the sacrament of baptism and on not having received the sacrament of holy orders. Since no woman has been ordained all of them belong to the laity. The church’s most prominent documents on the lay ministry are : the Vatican II’ Decree on the

²¹ Gerald O’ Collins, S. J., and Edward G. Farrugia, S. J., *A Concise Dictionary of Theology*, New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1991, p.118.

²² *Lumen Gentium*, no.31.

Apostolate of Lay People - *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, from the 18th of November 1965, and more recent Apostolic Exhortation on Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful - *Christifideles Laici* by John Paul II. Since these documents do not include religious sisters in their consideration, I will not include the latter in the scope of this chapter. It is not because I do not appreciate their role and position. On the contrary, I see them as indispensable in the church. Let this contradiction be the best illustration how inadequate the present understanding of the church's teaching about lay and consequently women's ministry is. As we have seen in the first chapter, although there have been voices and discussions about changing this situation the recent papal statement did not leave any doubt that the world of a catholic woman is the world of a lay person and should remain like that.

It is hard to appreciate adequately enough, the tremendous contribution of Vatican II to the ecclesiology and consequently to the understanding of the laity's role in the church. It has taken a giant step in the development and promotion of this state in the previously almost totally clerical and religious ecclesial structures. The Council Fathers discovered that one does not have to be a cleric to fulfil God's mission and to be called to holiness. To see what is the role, position and mission of a lay person in the contemporary church I will look at the two documents mentioned above.

A. Lay Ministry in the Church

The Vocation of Lay People to the Apostolate

One of the key ideas of the Council Fathers as well as the pope's, is that all the faithful share in the life and activity of the Body of Christ or the whole vine, where both images represent the church. They immediately specify that there is diversity of ministry but unity of mission. Yet the task of teaching, preaching and governing belongs exclusively to the hierarchy. What it means in reality

is that the power, jurisdiction and decision making lies mainly in the hands of the clerics and the lay are only to “share in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ.”²³ So when the documents are specifying the mission and task of the laity, in fact they emphasize that the baptismal equality is somewhat theoretical and participation in the development of the church in practice is inferior.

The lay person is rightly called to holiness in the midst of the world affairs whether in family, parenthood, finances or work. She/he is to be the leaven in the world.²⁴ The question is how is it to be rightly exercised since, up to 1979, 81% of saints were clerical or religious?!²⁵ Where are the lay saint models who have integrated prayer, conjugal love, family life, politics, civic service? The Council says that there are helps which the laity should use. The reality is that these helps are by and large either inadequate or a luxury reserved for clerics and religious. The example is the clerical liturgy, where still even after the reform there is a huge gap between the priest and the “profane faithful”.

Laities are deprived of the theological roots in spirituality which often leads to devotionism, and even looking for some magic elements in the prayer, liturgy and sacraments. As we know the sacrament of penance, especially in the so called, “western church” is in great crisis. There is very little effort to tackle that situation looking for alternatives or more subtle forms of this wonderful sacrament. Spiritual direction is an even more evident example of clergy and religious’ luxury. Very few of the lay people have the opportunities and means to benefit from this spiritual help.

²³ *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no 1.

²⁴ *Ibid*, no 1.

²⁵ See: Pierre Deloor, “The Social Function of the canonization of saints”, *Concilium* 129, (1979),p.21.

The same we can say about the lay participation in the retreats, which would be adequate to their spiritual needs. It is still common that a cleric preaches an old spirituality to the faithful and they have to listen. A directed retreat or a sharing of experience by a fellow lay person is certainly rare. So why should we be surprised when even now we see many people saying the rosary during the Mass, or some old people repeating the sins learned from the catechism for the first communion? Till the Reformation, the Bible in the hands of a lay person was a dangerous element. I think that there are still many such elements which can only be "safe" in the hands of the clerics! Thus, I hear the voice of the Council and the pope - to live their lives in the spirit of beatitudes - not only as an exhortation, but more as a prayer which, in my opinion, will demand a miracle.

Ministry

"The ministry of the word and sacrament committed in a special way to the clergy, leaves room, however, for a highly important part for the laity... helping on the cause of truth (Jn 8)"²⁶ The Council calls for more active participation of the lay in the apostolate of evangelization and sanctification and rightly so. However, the above citation does not leave any doubt that they are only HELPERS. It is good that there should be a union between all the members of the Church. The question is why should there be a relationship of dependency?

It is the hierarchy's task to put proper system into this collaboration²⁷. I believe that it would be a mistake to deny the clergy the role of pastors, guides, spiritual assistants... It is their specific vocation, they are trained, both spiritually and intellectually, to fulfil such roles. What is more, their

²⁶ *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no 6.

²⁷ *Ibid*, no 24.

position, call and celibate state enables them to commit themselves fully to their work. Nevertheless, I think that these relations should be characterised by equality and not by those that we see in the world, namely the one between an employer and an employee. "The exclusive duty of hierarchy is teaching and authentic interpretation of the moral principles, to see that doctrine and order are safeguarded".²⁸

The truth is that not only bishops but clergy in general at times oppress laity. They have the juridical and legislating power. Now, when there are no more lay cardinals on the high level, practically the only policy makers are clerics. The laity do not have a say in electing a pastor and there is no adequate mechanism of evaluating his pastoral performance. It is true that Vatican II strongly endorses the idea of lay councils, where lay experts can analyze and give their opinions about issues concerning the church. However, the ones who decide are the bishops, canonists and pastors. Such examples could be multiplied. It is a great idea to form councils, to train the laity, that they take more active participation in the field of evangelization. However, if this clerical system is not going to be changed, *sensus fidelium* is not going to mean much, any non-infallible teaching of the church must be accepted and any dissent is to be treated as treason of the Catholic faith, so long the chasm between the clergy and laity will be perpetuated.

Again I would like to make it clear that I do not contest the church's teaching about the variety of gifts and vocations. I do agree that the laity will participate in the mission of Christ in a very different way from those in the ministerial orders. Lay contribution to the building up of the Body of Christ has the secular character. They are supposed to be entirely directed to the world, being in the world and engaging all the efforts to their satisfaction. The peculiarity of the lay mission is its secular

²⁸ Ibid, no 24.

character. Although the hierarchy, as well as religious, themselves do involve in the matters of this world, their prime mission is the sacred ministry, whereas the religious are called to transfigure the world by the witness of the beatitudes.

What I want to say is that I see as futile the call of the pope for the lay apostolic commitment in Diocesan Synods and local councils (25), intensification of missionary effort (28), proclaiming the gospel (33), and many other activity in which lay may fulfil their task as agents of the Kingdom of God which was given to them at the baptism and confirmation. I consider it futile because it is perpetuating the relationship of superiority and inferiority. As long as a lay person is a helper and an “employee” and not a full partner of the clergy, the world will not see the real sign of unity in the true collaboration of laity and clergy.

B. Women's Ministry in the Church

The Council and the Pope Speak about Women

It might seem quite obvious that the hierarchy speaks about the half of the church's population and even to think that they would not give them adequate attention would seem outrageous.

However, looking at the history of the church it becomes less obvious. The church's authority did talk about the “second sex” but not in terms of equality with men, dignity and full participation in church's life.

As the Vatican II was a real revolution in almost all church's domains, so also was it in her position towards women. John Paul II has followed the Council's “wind of change” and women's issues find strong emphasis in his teaching. How much relevant and adequate this position is for today, I will try to examine in this chapter.

***Apostolicam Actuositatem* and *Christifideles Laici* on Women**

The confusion about the definition who the lay people are comes back again and again. Since there is no special attention given to the religious women in both documents, I consider them as a separate category and I am not going to concentrate on their role. Thus the focus is on the laity living in the world and especially in married, family life.

The pope cites a few times his Encyclical Letter *Familiaris Consortio*. It seems to me that the Council's interest in women issues came as a discernment of the signs of the times. We read: "Since in our days women are taking an increasingly active share in the whole life of society, it is very important that they participate more widely also in the various fields of the church's apostolate."²⁹ On the one hand, it shows the great attentiveness of the church to the global situation, on the other, it demonstrates that the hierarchy had to learn from the secular world and could not progress by reflecting on the Gospel message and church's structures. Whatever the reasons, the fact is that indispensability of women in their contribution to the mission and building up of the church, their personal dignity, equality with men as well as their marginalization have now eventually been recognized and acknowledged.

The Pyramid Model Versus the People of God Model

We have seen that both documents are very strong in insisting on sharing in the three-fold mission of Jesus Christ : Priestly, Kingly and Prophetic by any baptized person and even more so by the virtue of confirmation. They are equally quick in clarifying that the office of teaching and governing belongs exclusively to the hierarchy. In this way they endorse the old pyramidal model with

²⁹ *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no 9.

the pope on the top and slowly going down towards the bottom. In this system the non- religious women are at the very bottom.

Undoubtedly there are some advantages in such a system. There is order and clarity, everyone knows where she or he belongs. However, this system gives power and privilege to the hierarchy. “Such a self portrait also envisaged a clear chain of command : upper echelons of the clergy directed local pastors who instructed the docile faithful”.³⁰ The author of these words was considering this situation as a past paradigm. However, only looking at the present standpoint of the church, one can see that it is still there. Regarding this issue I see a lot of confusion in the Council's approach. *Lumen Gentium* clearly presents the “people of God” model of the church, where the constitutive sacrament is baptism, not ordination. “The whole body of the faithful who have an anointing that comes from the holy one (cf. Jn 2:20) cannot err in matters of belief. This characteristic is shown in the supernatural appreciation of the faith (*sensus fidei*) of the whole people, when from the bishops to the last of the faithful they manifest a universal consent in matters of faith and morals”.³¹ I understand this statement as the coming together and putting common efforts in discerning the will of God in the context of the life experience of all the faithful.

However, the pyramid system, which is strongly endorsed by the same Council that issued the statement about *sensus fidei*, gives all the power into the hands of the hierarchy. The feminist theology criticizes such approach: “Contemporary experience challenges any simple division of the church community into teachers and learners. Such a division is particularly troublesome since the

³⁰James D. Whitehead, Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *The Emerging Laity*, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1986, p.155

³¹ *Lumen Gentium*, no 12.

authoritative teachers (bishops) are all celibate males.”³²

How can one find a clear vision of the woman’s role and ministry in the church, when the whole system is quite confused? On the one hand, they want to be collegial and form a community of equals before God, on the other hand, some strong authoritarian elements contradict that. It is very perspicuous in regard to the dissent. Lay Catholics, including women, have practically no right to refuse magisterial teaching. On the contrary, the hierarchy does not take into account what Vatican II teaches us about the people of God and that we should give heed to every member of the community of the faithful.

The reality is that in some areas, a tiny minority of the male hierarchy dissents from the overwhelming majority of the people of God. In that way those who are responsible for teaching, preaching and governing simply ignore the teaching of Vatican II. In this context the words of the pope: “acknowledgment in theory of the active and responsible presence of woman in the church must be realized in practice”³³ sounds like a pious wish.

Different but Equal

Ecclesiology and Canon Law are very keen on stressing the equality of all members while recognizing functional differences. The pope is very strong on this point especially regarding women. He particularly articulates the functional difference emphasizing that although they cannot receive the sacrament of orders, they do not lose anything on their dignity.

³² Catherine Mowry Lacugna ed., *Freeing theology. The essentials of theology in feminist perspective*, San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993, p.169.

³³ *Christifideles Laici*, no 51.

I do not enter into a polemic regarding the issue of women's ordination. However, I would like to mention that there are some trends in contemporary theology which challenge this concept of equality. One of the forcible examples of such criticism is the feminist theology. They consider this phraseology as fostering a system which, according to them, has exactly the opposite effect. Here is just an example. "No church is credible that limits women, calls them inferior and keeps them as a group from assuming certain roles by speaking of women's role as different but equal (...). Thus different has come to mean unequal to women when they as entire group are excluded from a role."³⁴

Exclusion from the Leadership Roles

I repeat that it is not my intention to challenge the pope's clear position about women priests. What I want to challenge though is the fact that there has not been developed a model of leadership that would be independent of ordination.

One can flood me with examples where women are in the leadership capacities, as we have seen already. The pope stresses very much that a "woman is called to put to work in this apostolate the 'gifts' which are properly hers, connected with her vocation as a woman."³⁵ I feel that in the present structure she is not able to actualize all the potentials she possesses because she is excluded from the leadership on the higher levels. Now the main criterion for taking the leadership role in the Catholic Church is ordination and not qualifications, although, at least theoretically, every candidate for diaconate, priesthood or episcopate has to acquire adequate skills during the times of formation.

³⁴ Pamela Dickey Young, *Feminist Theology/Christian Theology: in search of method*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990, p.106.

³⁵ *Christifideles Laici*, no 51.

If we can somehow justify the qualification level of the clerical ministers, certainly we can question their gifts. No man can acquire the gifts which are properly women's even if he spends fifty years in training. To acknowledge our different gifts is one thing, to put them into practice is another. That is why again I see the feminist theology challenging the structures. May these words be the expression of it: "Ministry is about sharing one's gifts with the whole community. You take the leadership role for which you have gifts and the community recognizes your role".³⁶

It is hard to envisage such a trend when there is so strong demarcation line between those in the holy orders and the laity, between clerical roles and tasks and those of the lay people. Instead of looking for some alternatives to give women a chance in assuming the role of leaders, the pope is worried about the clericalization of the laity.³⁷

Women's Ministry

"The Holy Spirit gives the faithful special gifts for the exercise of the apostolate" - is a key statement of the Council Fathers calling all the people of God to take an active part in the work of evangelization. John Paul II endorses this call with an even stronger appeal also directed to the women, as we have seen just above, where he mentions the unique gifts and vocation of women. He sees their apostolate in various sectors of the church's activity like educational environments, participation in preparation of pastoral and missionary documents, assuring the moral dimension of culture and of course, the great role they play in the family life.

³⁶ Pamela Dickey Young, *Feminist Theology/Christian Theology : in search of method*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990, p.110.

³⁷ *Christifideles Laici*, no 61.

Indeed "the majority of people in evangelization are women."³⁸ Even looking at the description in the first chapter we can see that it is the women who form the grass roots and take the responsibility in carrying out the task of evangelization. They do it to such an extent that John Paul II became worried that active laity will be totally feminine. The pope's concern about men's indifference in taking the responsibility in the church and especially in her most basic cell - the family, is very genuine and legitimate. As no man can take the responsibilities pertaining to the woman's specific vocation, so no woman can play a substitute role for a typical man's part.

Looking at this issue from another angle, it shows that the pope in a way admits that it is the women who take the real burden of the ministry at the grass roots level, but still they are not permitted to involve on the higher ones. The present picture of the church shows a sad reality where it is only a tiny minority of the people of God who play an active role. In trying to look for some reasons why so few men engage in the apostolate and indeed, why the vast majority of the lay people both men and women do not fulfil their baptismal obligation, I suggest a dominant one. I think that the whole theology of hierarchical ministry brought an atmosphere of passive expectations to lay Catholics. Certainly that is the case in my home church in Poland. However, looking at the description in the first chapter I can say that it is not an isolated case. What is more, when in Poland the majority of people wait for the guidance and leadership of the bishops and priests, in some countries they just simply do not care.

The church's tradition for centuries emphasized the image of *ecclesia* which consists primarily of bishops, clerics and religious. By and large the lay people do not feel a sense of full belonging. That

³⁸ *The Role of Women in Evangelization*, issued by the Pastoral Commission of the Vatican Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, Origins 5 (April 1976), p.702 -707.

of course creates the situation when the real church, all the baptized do not engage in the activity, do not take adequate responsibility. Should we be then surprised when we hear the voices criticizing the church for involving itself in politics, not sticking around the sacristy, calling her "the black mafia" etc.? Maybe we should not be, if they were not the voices of the baptized ones...

That is why I do not blame the laity, because they have been formed in such a spirit. However, as a missionary and a minister in the church I do not accept such a model. According to me it is one of the greatest weaknesses and unless we start a serious change we can not expect women and indeed the lay faithful to become true evangelizers, true missionaries. I do agree with the pope that women should play a more active role in the church's life especially in the sectors he has mentioned. To do that, however, they must feel that this ministry comes from their particular vocation and gifts as women. They must feel themselves that they are a source of ministry not just recipients.

Only when a woman feels an equal part and partner in the community and understands that she has a role to play in the ministry, which emerges from that community, that she has the true capacity to be an effective missionary in whatever life situation she finds herself. That is what we call the ministry from within: "The church appears not primarily as she who acts upon us, but rather she whom we all are in virtue of the fact that grace of God has moved and inspired us and bound us together into a unity."³⁹

We often read or hear that the family is the basic cell of the church. The pope calls for the family participation in the ministry of the church with its community pattern.⁴⁰ I think that we need

³⁹ Catherine Mowry Lacugna, ed., *Freeing theology. The essentials of theology in feminist perspective*, San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993, p.173.

⁴⁰ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, 50 : AAS 74 (1982), pp.141-142

not only the family's participation in the ministry but the ministry should have a family pattern. Each and every member of the family plays her or his role and share mutual love. It can not be otherwise because: "Rooted in a common baptism, ministry is portrayed as a shared imperative. As the common responsibility of a faith community, ministry becomes a more mutual enterprise."⁴¹

The Question of Language

In order to look for some kind of a solution model for the adequate understanding of woman's ministry in the church, it is crucial to realize that throughout the ages the whole Christian tradition has been imbued in the masculine, patriarchal culture as the feminist theologians would call it. It has its expressions in different fields. Take for example art, where famous painters, sculptors, have depicted God in different but usually masculine characters and features. However, nowhere it is more evident as in the realm of language.

Nowadays we talk about an inclusive language. In my opinion, the English language provides some special difficulties when words like 'mankind' or 'brothers' are supposed to include both sexes. Although in many languages (e.g. Polish) this difficulty is overcome by utilizing inclusive words, nevertheless, in general, we can say that in the Bible, liturgy and the whole "church language" is very masculine. Just look at the personal pronouns used when talking about God like: 'he', 'his', 'him'. They are used in breviaries, missals, spiritual books etc.

Language is only a way to express different concepts. It is not only the language, but the whole way of thinking and conceptualising anything connected with the divine, that is in the masculine

⁴¹ James D. Whitehead, Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *The Emerging Laity*, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1986, p.159.

gender. The feminist theology look for the root-causes in the patriarchy, which is “a complex socio-economic-legal system that found its classical expression and its systematic articulation in Aristotelian philosophy”.⁴² Throughout the centuries this way of thinking has been engraved not only in the minds of the theologians and clerics but also among the faithful. They simply see God as male.

I feel that the way Mary is portrayed makes this impression even stronger - God is masculine, Mary takes the feminine part. It would be interesting to check how many faithful consider the fact that, although Angels are depicted as men (Michael, Gabriel, Raphael), they are spirits so they are sexless.

I do not suggest that we should suddenly change “Our Father” into “Our Mother”. What I am pointing out, though, is the necessity of the awareness that God is more than mother and father. God is not a human being and the language in the Bible and consequently in the church's tradition, when talking about God is only analogical, metaphorical.

Secondly, if we want to give the real picture of the case, even if the Bible uses predominantly masculine attributes to God, it is also full of the feminine ones. The Book of Isiah compares Yahweh to a woman comforting her son (Is 66: 13) or to woman's love for her child (49: 15). The prophet talks about woman in labour. Deuteronomy uses this analogy to say that God engendered Israel and gave birth to him (Deut 32: 18). Prophet Baruch goes as far as using the phrase of “breast feeding” (4: 8).

It is also noteworthy that Hebrew word *Ruah* (Spirit) is a feminine one, as well as *Hohmah* (Wisdom), which is closely associated with God in work of creation. The Latin word *Spiritus* is in masculine gender, so the whole feminine understanding was changed together with the translation.

⁴² Elisabeth Schusler Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals*, London: SCM Press Ltd, 1993, pp.213-214.

Hebrew mind used both father and mother figure to express, as fully as they could, the attributes of God. The Father figure is connected with authority (Deut 32:6, Jer 31:9), discipline and protection (Prov 3:11, Ps 68:5). Mother is associated with life giving, nurturing, tender care, comfort (1 Sam 2:19, 1Kgs 3:27). What is important is that they did not express biological image but rather kind of relationship between Yahweh and Israel. If the people of God understand that God is really beyond any sexual confines, the relations in the Christian Community will also go beyond any gender limitations.

Criticism of the “Extreme Feminism”

Much has been written recently on the feminist issues. We can find all range of different schools of theology taking up this problem; from the most liberal to the most conservative, from a macho point of view to the ultra-feminist standpoint. I think that neither of the extreme ideas genuinely seek the truth or do they represent the majority of the faithful. Likewise the extreme feminists are a relatively small group, mostly from the United States and “Western Europe”, claiming to speak for the majority of the women in the church: “Indeed the weight of the evidence should long ago have demonstrated that feminists do not really speak for Catholic women, nor is their ideology really compatible with authentic Catholicism.”⁴³

Although the author uses a general term “feminists”, I apply it to this small group of “extremists” who, more than the real equality and proper form of women's ministry in the church, seek conflict and foster alien ideas to the Christian spirit. They shout aloud that abortion is a basic

⁴³K. D. Whitehead, “To Appease the Unappeasable. Women, Church, Society and the US Bishops”, *The Catholic World Report*, March 1995, vol.5, No.3, p 55.

right of every woman. They contest almost everything that exists in the church, often falling in the trap of contradiction. One of the good examples would be their claim for the ordination of women. There is nothing extraordinary in that because as we have seen in the first chapter, this claim is held by quite a big number of theologians and faithful. What is odd about it is that they do not really believe in the sacramental powers of the priestly ordination. Some started celebrating their own liturgies. So why do they still call for the ordination which they contest?

Their concept of equality is reduced just to mean sameness, which is not only against the nature, but in fact diminishes the unique role of woman as woman. In this way they achieve exactly the opposite effect. Such a radical and highly controversial approach brings more harm than good in its work for women. These “extremists” label themselves as “feminists” and because of the vast literature, most of the people get such picture of feminism. That certainly does not help the cause of women's development. Consequently any movement or voice speaking about inequality between the sexes or discrimination against women is received with caution and even suspicion. The result is that the two antagonist camps engage in rather destructive polemics and the majority of women do not see any effect in their lives as members of the church. I think it is time now to do some constructive work.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to identify the place of women in the Catholic Church. I evaluated the lay ministry looking at some of its aspects. Then my focus fell on the main theme, namely women's ministry. The basis for my reflection were two main church's documents on the lay apostolate: *Apostolicam Actuositatem* and *Christifideles Laici*. I contrasted two models of the church

- that of the pyramid and that of the people of God. I tackled also the question of equality and saw the leadership capacity of women. Then I looked at their ministry. Lastly, I gave some attention to the question of language and criticized the extreme feminism.

My findings are :

- There is an evident confusion in an attempt to define lay people.
- Although there has been great evolution in the movement from the clerical to the lay centered church, the laity are by and large still seen as “second class citizens”, deprived of the leadership and juridical roles and considered simply as helpers.
- There is a great emphasis on the baptismal mandate to evangelization, while at the same time, baptismal equality is blurred or misinterpreted.
- By and large the laity are deprived of the theological roots and education.
- The many good ideas of the Council lack basic practical implementation tools and as long as there is any element of superiority and inferiority the call for lay commitment and evangelization is futile.
- The theology of hierarchical ministry has brought passive expectations of the laity.
- Women’s issues have been taken very seriously in recent years.
- There are, however, a lot of conflicting ideas regarding women in both documents and indeed in the teaching of the church - emphasizing their dignity and equality and, at the same time, limiting it by some stereotypes.
- The pyramid model still puts non-religious women at the very bottom of church’s structure.
- In such a system there is no room for women’s leadership roles and realization of their gifts.
- There is a need to overcome the linguistic ambiguity and difficulty connected with the wrong

understanding of God caused by the masculine language and church tradition.

- Neither the hierarchy nor the “extreme feminists” look for some genuine solution to the problem.

CHAPTER III

FUTURE VISION

Introduction

In the analysis that I did in the previous chapter, one of the main weaknesses of the church's teaching on woman's ministry is a lack of the practical implementation tools. In this way the paradigm remains in the realm of theory, as it is by and large in the case of the pope. That is why in this chapter I am going to propose yet another vision of the church - my vision. I am not interested in the "pie in the sky". I do not want to fantasize, give ideas that can only happen in a fairy tale but I intend to concentrate on the practical suggestions of what could be done. I think that it is more important to prepare a plan of possible action, even if its effect will be very little, rather than to write a thousand page treatise which will have no impact and will just be one more book on the library shelf covered with dust.

A Life Giving endeavour - Not the Power Struggle

We know from the church history how many termoils she has endured because of doctrinal controversies, schisms and power struggles. Most of these happened under the pretence of the church's good. We might wonder though what were the real motivations and objectives of the people involved. I want to ask myself the same question. I am convinced that if the endeavour I am undertaking here was not going to be life giving for the church as a whole, it would be just another fashionable topic with rather empty slogans.

On the one hand, I do not agree with the militant feministic groups that contest almost

everything in the church and want to make her their private property fulfilling their whims. On the other hand, I challenge ultra-conservative elements in the church which want to preserve the structures that provide them with a monopoly of leadership.

Both groups, by and large, struggle for their own benefits when the overwhelming majority of women remain marginalized. Only in the atmosphere of peace and constructive dialogue can the true spirit of commitment to the upbuilding of the body of Christ be found. The outcome of such common venture would be benefiting not only women but the whole community of Christ's believers.

Lay Participation in Decision Making - Ministry as Service

Those in holy orders have the special task of the apostles, especially the pastoral care. However, they are not the only successors of the apostles. All the faithful are partakers in the apostolic faith and belong to one vine, where Christ is the head. Conversely the whole body should participate in the work as well as in decision making. The power of shared decision making comes from the common daughter/son-ship of the Father and sisterhood/brotherhood coming from Christ through the Holy Spirit. This can be understood correctly when there is intimate relationship and differentiation. The shepherds are specially authorised to proclaim the Gospel message to the laity and the latter have the obligation to check whether shepherds are faithful to their task.

This is a model of joint decision making where there is no superiority but service for the sake of the Kingdom. Service is the hinge on which the whole ministry in the church should be based. The pope is called *Servus servorum* - 'the servant of servants' That naturally excludes any connotation of mastership or superiority, but asserts that any authority in the church is grounded in the service. Rightly, Hans Kung remarked: "The church despite all differences of services is no two class society

of possessors, empowered and powerless, adults and minors, knowledgeable and ignorant but a community of love filled and authorised by the Spirit in which only greater service bestows greater authority.”⁴⁴ Hans Kung gives two proposals of the lay participation in decision making, namely: the collegial church leadership on the various levels and free election of presiding officers by a representation of the pertinent churches.⁴⁵ The authority of the pope, bishops and pastors is not being questioned. However, the laity should be included in decision making on all levels of church’s organization including their vote in the elections of the Church leaders: the pope, bishops and pastors.

Education for Transformation

No progress can be made unless a proper education is given that would give the adequate understanding of God, the church, women and the like. It will also uncover and expose ideologies that the faithful are often being fed with.

First of all, women themselves must realize that they are victims of such ideology. They have to start researching and reflecting on their own identity. To help them in that process, special educational programmes on different levels should be introduced. We should start from the grass-root levels, slowly reaching up. One of the examples would be women’s study meetings. It can be a Small Christian Community, on the parish or the diocesan level. It is important that they are provided with the adequate help in terms of materials and the like. We make sure that they progressively open up themselves to the new understanding of their identity as women and their role in the church. We have

⁴⁴ Hans Kung, *Reforming the Church Today, Keeping Hope Alive*, New York: Crossroads, 1990, p 83.

⁴⁵ See - Ibid, pp. 88-89, 94.

to be careful that by this study meetings the old ideology is not being perpetuated.

The basic source of ministry is Scripture. Therefore, these women's study groups should start by correcting distorted images of women in the Bible and get proper understanding of the language. Unfortunately women's self reflection and research depend in great extend on the pators and church leaders. I said "unfortunately" because the majority of them are not really prepared to facilitate and support such endeavour. On the contrary very often they can hinder these initiatives taken up by women themselves. On that account I judge as one of the first priorities, the revision of programmes of formation for priests and lay leaders in the church. This should include both those who aspire or are in the initial formation, as well as those in the ongoing formation, those who have been "well down the road". They should be enlighten and sensitized on women's issues and prompted to take action. First of all clerics have to realize that they "need to be actively involved as participants in the formation process rather than as the experts providing the formation".⁴⁶

We have to come out of our macho shell and overcome prejudices that have been influencing especially male seminary formation. Let women take active part in this process, both as fellow students as well as teachers and formators. We experience that a woman is invited to teach music, art, language and the like. It is time that they should take places in the biblical, pastoral, systematic, spirituality departments. Let the priest's monopoly for the spiritual direction be broken as well. We have to ensure that present and future ministers learn and accept equality and dignity of women and they promote it in their preaching, catechizing and life practice. This becomes even more urgent, after the document has been issued by the Vatican putting all the responsibility of preaching in the hands

⁴⁶ Norman P. Cooper, *Collaborative Ministry, Communion, Contemplation, Commitment*, N.Y /Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1993, p.16.

of clerics and banning everybody else from exercising it.⁴⁷ The old catechetical materials, text books, audio-visual devices should be revised and elaborated in such a way that they become means of fostering adequate understanding of woman's dignity, vocation and role in the church and society.

As a proverb says "what is bred in the bone will come out in the flesh," so the education for transformation should begin in kindergarten. It is absolutely crucial that in the religious education of children there are no elements of sexism or prejudice, but they are taught healthy and respectful attitudes toward one another. This becomes even more important in cultures where women have a lower status than men, and where girls are taught at home that they should be submissive towards boys. In such environments it is a special role of the missionary church to stand on the side of the oppressed. Taking into account the task of inculturation, the missionaries, nevertheless, must educate especially the young generations in the spirit that would enable them to overcome sexist prejudices which are deeply rooted in their culture.

To narrow down the professional gap between the male "experts" and female "listeners" we need a full scale women's theological training. The efforts made already in some countries are very significant but are certainly not enough for the end of the second millennium. The church needs female professional theologians whose educational standard will match the one of the male counterparts. This, however, can never happen unless we sincerely welcome our sisters to every parish catechetical school, college, seminary and university!

⁴⁷ *Instruction on Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of the Priest*, signed among others by the heads of the Vatican congregations of the Clergy, the Bishops and the Doctrine of the Faith, and approved by Pope John Paul. (source: The Tablet, November 22, 1997, p.1514.)

Between Theory and Practice

The key problem emerging from my evaluation of women's position in the church was the discrepancy between sometimes very progressive ideas in *Apostolicam Actuositatem* and *Christifideles Laici* and their effect in real life. It seems to be a common pattern in the church as some remarked: "Great incoherence remain between what church documents teach on the dignity of women and the practice in the church as a whole".⁴⁸

When we look at the Code of Canon Law, one might be surprised with the provisions which are there regarding women's participation in ministry. Most of them speak about the role of lay people in general, but I will point out just a few that I consider as a recommendation for women's involvement in ministry:

- Active participation in the Diocesan Synods (can 463), where all questions (so also women's issues) are to be subject of the free discussion of the members (can465).
- Membership in financial committees (492-94).
- Active roles in the Diocesan Councils (511-12). It is noteworthy that canon 512, #1 says: "The pastoral council consists of Christian faithful who are in full communion with the Catholic Church, clerics, members of institutes of consecrated life and especially lay persons (...)".⁴⁹
- Parish councils (536).
- Woman can assist at marriages if a cleric is not available and can give instructions to those who are getting married (1112).

⁴⁸ "The Concerns of Women", Catholic International, May, vol 4, 1993, no 5.

⁴⁹ Emphasis added.

We must not allow that even “the little they have is taken from them”!

A similar situation is in the field of liturgy, where the case of the “altar girls” can be a vivid example. The women who are the majority of the congregation want to, and have the right to actively participate in the liturgy, especially when the church’s teaching permits them. We should allow and support women becoming lectors, acolytes, Mass servers, choir masters etc.

In my opinion they should also be allowed to share the word of God, especially on certain occasions. Here I have touched a very sensitive point because, as I mentioned earlier, the recently issued document by the Vatican prohibits it... Although, I honestly do not see a plausible reason behind this radical statement, it is not my intention to start a polemic in this essay. Nevertheless, if we have educated women, working in the pastoral teams, living out the word of the Gospel, I sincerely think that they can and should share this word with us. Let it be in a different form, not a sermon or a homily, if that is an issue. But let women help us to understand the word of God, who speaks to every person, both male and female.

Some have remarked that :”Women are energized by the encouragement they have received from many priests to participate in the liturgical ministries that do not require ordination”. Since the liturgy is a priestly domain so the great responsibility of empowering women to take liturgical ministries lies in the hands of bishops, pastors and curates. One of the most urgent and pressing issue is the case of the “altar girls”. We have seen how difficult it was to reach the official church’s approval. We also see how slow the church is in implementation of the long awaited decision. Women want to feel as active part of the liturgical assembly, and rightly so. It is high time to cease considering sanctuary as reserved for clergy and that “unclean women” have to keep distance.

Religious Women

Although I purposely skipped the analysis of the role of religious women in the ministry, with the reasons given in the second chapter, it is inconceivable not to include them in my vision of the future church. I believe that these women, who have been giving their lives for the witness and selfless service, deserve some special attention. From the very early ages of Christianity they have been ministering in the church in so many areas. When looking to the future some old paradigms should be revised and a new up to date theology of nun's ministry must be put forward.

First of all, any elements of cheap servanthood for the bishops and priests have to be abolished. They are complementaries, collaborators of the hierarchy as well as the secular lay people. These women must be autonomous from any interference in their affairs by the church authorities. Only on such basis we can talk about new vision of religious women's ministry in the church.

Religious women render tremendous service in the pastoral field. That comprises vast area: from health care through education of lay and clerical faithful to counseling, spiritual direction and liturgy. When they are given opportunity and adequate training they can be a pearl in the future church and they, as women fully committed to the spreading of the Gospel, can bring immeasurable benefits to the people of God. There is however a condition - partnership and collaboration. They should form teams with other ministers where mutual sharing and common evaluating play a key role.

Forgotten Past

With the revival of the theology of the diaconate, when the permanent diaconate of the married men was established in some countries, it is sad that we forgot deaconesses. We have

forgotten that the first church gave them the right to exercise the ministry of a deacon. Maybe the magisterium is afraid that it will incite the discussion about women's priests and this is the reason why they remain silent. The extreme feminists do not want women deacons either, because they are afraid that this can be an excuse to silence women's voices demanding their ordination. Who gains in this battle is difficult to say, but certainly we can point out the losers - the people of God.

When I look at this situation I consider restoration of the diaconate of women and all the service deaconesses can render to the church as a matter of great urgency. Women have the right given to them by the early church to be officially included in the ministry of prayer, word and Eucharist as deaconesses. They will serve the people of God - praying for the church and with the church, proclaiming the word of God and distributing the body of Christ to the people they will serve.

Conclusion

My recommendations do not present the full picture of women's ministry. These are only some elements, which hopefully will contribute to the new vision of the role and place of our sisters in the church. In the suggestions my stress was on the practicality and the life giving. The whole concept is based on a few pillars:

- All baptized women and men have to become partners in ministry, in the service of people and in the decision making.
- One of the most important, if not the most important, courses of action is creation of the new educational programmes on all levels of the church's structure.
- We have to implement already existing provisions for women's ministry, especially in the area of liturgy, sacraments and church administration.

- Revision of the role that the religious women play in the ministry, in the context of partnership.
- Restoration of women deaconesses.

General Conclusion

Despite all the criticism I expressed, both Vatican Council II and Pope John Paul II give a revolutionary view of women's ministry in the church. Certainly never in the history was woman officially acknowledged as really equal to man, and given a clear place and status in the community of believers adequate to her dignity and vocation. The credit is even greater if we take into account the burden of the anti-feminist tradition that the Council and the pope had to break. We also saw some tangible fruits of this new approach, with a few examples of women entering, for the first time, the areas of ministry before reserved exclusively to men.

The sad part of the story is that the “winds of change” that refreshed the cold and fossilized structures of the church have not reached the depth of the problem and its strength is fading away. In many respects “Vatican II dramatically re-envisioned the nature of the church without providing for the structural change required to realize that vision”.⁵⁰ In this way it remains an “impossible dream” John Paul II seems to be very anxious to empower women to take their specific role in the church. However I see this desire conflicting with a contradictory one - to maintain the old order and stick to the tradition. Consequently there is an illusionary picture of women's full participation within the structures that inhibit them from doing so

⁵⁰ Catherine Mowry Lacugna ed., *Freeing theology. The essentials of theology in feminist perspective*, San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993, p.173.

We are standing at the threshold of the third millennium of Christianity. There are all signs “in heaven and on earth”. Do we want to listen to them or is it better and easier for us to preserve the traditional thinking ? We can not put the new wine into the old skins, we have to start preparing the new skins and pour the new wine there. The model of the church we will envision now, will determine the future. Vatican Council II has prepared the road for us but the work has to be continued. It is now, today that we have to continue the revolution leading to the empowerment of women in the church where . “There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither slave nor freeman, there can be neither male nor female for you are all one in Christ Jesus”(Gal 3:28).

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