

Revolution From Above: Women and the Priesthood in Canadian Anglicanism, 1968-1978

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On 30 November 1976 the Anglican Church of Canada ordained women to the priesthood for the first time in its history. With that action, it became one of the first churches in the Anglican Communion to welcome women into that dimension of the three-fold order of the church's ministry. By that action, the Anglican Church of Canada participated in an effectual revolution which has been changing the forms of ministry within Protestantism since the mid-nineteenth century.

The decision-making process by which the Canadian Anglicans chose to adopt the ordination of women to the priesthood was a comparatively brief following on the decision to ordain women as deacons in 1969. An examination of this relatively short decision-making process demonstrates that the Anglican Church of Canada experienced a revolution from above on this issue. More specifically, the initiative which influenced the direction of the ultimate course of action in this arena came from the upper levels of the church's hierarchical structure namely the episcopacy.

Twentieth-century Italian philosopher, Antonio Gramsci, developed a theory of revolution which applies in this case. He argued that in any revolution there is an intellectual elite which leads the mass of the population forward to the next stage of its historical evolution. An historic bloc is only successfully formed out of the revolution when the "organic intellectuals" are able to lead the people to a place where they are willing to go. In other words, the successful leader has a vision with which he/she will take his/her people into the future which is simultaneously visionary and

Historical Papers 1995: Canadian Society of Church History

grounded in the passion and experience of the people. No historic bloc can be successfully maintained without a certain amount of consensus. Extensive use of force or coercion will not hold the new social forms together effectively for any length of time. Ultimately people will rebel against forces which require that they live in a way that they do not want to live.¹

While the ordination of women represents a 'revolution' in an institutional and thereby limited sense, the concept of the intellectual which Gramsci articulated is illuminating. The Primate (titular head of the church) and the House of Bishops (college of those in episcopal office) formed an intellectual leadership which took the church into a new era. The ordination represented a radical break with preceding Christian tradition. That movement forward would not have been successful if it had not been sufficiently grounded in the passion and experience of the church to form a historic bloc. In other words, the actual ordinations of women did not precipitate a revolt or an irreparable schism. They have become an accepted part of everyday in the Anglican Church of Canada.

The bishops, the clergy and the laity of the church were the three primary players in this process of decision-making and revolution; an analysis of their respective roles and contributions to the debates will illuminate the primary thesis. The extent to which the movement toward the actualization of the ordination of women was episcopally led and grassroots supported is revealed in voting patterns at General Synods (the church's national policy making body), as well as the actions of each group between meetings of the Synod.

Before specific analysis of the Canadian case can be undertaken some reference must be made to the container in which the Canadian process unfolded. This is particularly true as the Anglican Communion provided the impetus for debate of this issue in the Canadian church.

Anglicanism began as a distinct denominational grouping during the time of the Reformation. By 1535 the Christian church in England had formally separated from its Roman origin and had given birth to the Church of England. Through the activity of British imperialism and colonization from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, the Church of England became the mother of what is now identified as the Anglican Communion. As of 1995 this is a group of 29 distinct provincial churches, of which the Anglican Church of Canada is a member.

This group of related churches has referred to itself as the Anglican Communion since the late-nineteenth century; however, defining an Angli-

can identity is not a clear-cut task. The provinces of the Communion agree to live in relationship with each other but are not bound by common doctrine of practice. This spirit of unity in diversity has been extremely important with regard to the ordination of women issue as it has allowed each province to make a decision for itself without any being bound by the conscience of any other.

Although diversity is perhaps the most distinctive Anglican characteristic at this point in the Communion's history, there are common points of reference which have served as a focus for unity. Among these the periodic Lambeth Conferences and the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) have demonstrated considerable unifying power. The Lambeth Conferences and the work of the ACC are of particular relevance in reference to the ordination of women.

The Lambeth Conference has brought together bishops of the Anglican Communion approximately once a decade since 1867 (1867, 1878, 1888, 1897, 1908, 1920, 1930, 1948, 1958, 1968, 1978, 1988). These conferences have evolved over the years into a forum for dialogue. While it does pass resolutions, these are not binding, and each province retains the right to respond to them, interpret them or implement them in any way that it chooses.

It was the initiative of the Lambeth Conference of 1968 which put the ordination of women both to the priesthood and to the diaconate on the agenda of the Anglican Church of Canada. While the topic may have arisen as an informal topic for conversation and debate prior to 1968 it was never raised within the decision-making bodies of the church. It was only when the Lambeth Conference of 1968 agreed that women should be accepted into the holy order of deacon that Canadians moved on the issue; it was only when Lambeth asked that each provincial church address the issue of the ordination of women to the priesthood and report its views to the newly formed ACC scheduled to meet in Limuru in 1971 that Canadian Anglicans formally instituted a process of debate and decision-making.² The impetus for discussion came from beyond the national boundaries of the Canadian church.

By the meeting of the ACC in 1971 the Canadians and most other provinces had not completed their internal discussions sufficiently to furnish a recommendation on the issue. As such, the ACC, which was a consultative body only, passed two resolutions. One encouraged all members to initiate or continue discussion on the matter. The second

resolution was more specific in content responding to a request for direction from the Bishop of Hong Kong, Gilbert Baker; it stated that any bishop moving forward on the issue with the approval of his synod and province would be acceptable to the ACC. All provinces were encouraged to remain in communion with one another regardless of the independent actions of some.³ Soon after the ACC meeting Bishop Baker of Hong Kong ordained two women to the priesthood. When Canada followed that example in 1976 it was the second province in the Communion to pursue such a course.

Back in Canada, the discussion of the ordination of women to the presbyterate had only just begun by 1971. Conversations were carried on in parallel streams.

When the Canadian bishops returned from Lambeth 1968 they asked that the Commission on Women (responsible for overseeing issues related to women's ministry) to begin discussion on the topic. At the request of this body the then Primate, convened a task force to examine formally the issue and make a report to the General Synod of 1971.

The task force convened by the Primate was formed in keeping with the General Synod practice of using regional committees to work on issues for the national church. A group in the Diocese of Nova Scotia was asked to be the task force on the ordination of women to the priesthood. The appointed group was a diocesan committee on women's ministry which was then asked to focus its group's work on the ordination of women. The group comprised of both clergy and laity was unable to complete its report for the General Synod of 1971, but by 1972 had prepared a report which was then received by the Synod in 1973. The report was comprised of two separate parts, a *Majority Report* and a *Minority Report*. At the conclusion of its work the task force found itself divided on the issue – six members were in favour of the ordination of women and one member was ardently opposed. As such, the task force agreed to present both views represented in the committee.⁴

At the General Synod in 1973, clergy, laity and bishops had an opportunity to discuss the reports of the task force, which they had received up to a year earlier. Eventually, a resolution coming out of the work of the Commission on Women was put by Miss Ruth Scott, former principal of the Anglican Women's Training college and Bishop David Somerville of the Diocese of New Westminster, "That this Synod accept the principal of the ordination of women to the priesthood and this decision be communi-

cated to the ACC.” Before the vote was taken it was agreed that voting would be by houses, or in groups of laity, clergy and episcopacy.⁵

Before the Synod voted a motion was made to refer any decision on the matter until after the opinions of dioceses and the synods had been polled. This motion to refer was defeated and as such it was determined that leadership on the issue would be given at the national level rather than at the local level.⁶ Ultimately the Synod passed a motion which accepted the ordination of women to the priesthood in principle but referred the matter back to the House of Bishops for final discussion and implementation.⁷

While there was positive sentiment on this issue in the General Synod, it was clear that the Synod felt that any action of the question must come from the episcopal leadership of the church after further discussion. The question of whether or not Canada would actually move to ordain women was thus placed back into the hands of the bishops.

What was the role of the House of Bishops on this issue up to 1973 and beyond? Between 1968 and 1973 the House of Bishops was fairly quiet on the topic of women and the presbyterate. The new Primate Edward Scott asked a committee within the House of Bishops to study the topic in conjunction with the Task Force. As such, the Committee on the Wider Ordained Ministry led discussion and debate within the House, in the context of other issues of ministry, both lay and ordained.⁸ We do not hear a strong united voice emerging from the House as a group in the early stages of debate. However, one must look at personalities involved and their particular views to gain insight into the role of the bishops throughout this period.

In 1971 Edward Scott was elected Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada. The Primate of all Canada is the titular head of the church. His powers in essence parallel those of a diocesan bishop. He is an Archbishop who has the chief pastoral responsibility for the care of the clergy and laity of the church. He has the power to ordain but has no specific jurisdiction within which to act without invitation by other diocesan bishops. In other words, he is a bishop without an actual diocese. In a sense the whole church is his pastoral charge but he has no power to act or direct dioceses – that is the responsibility of each individual diocesan bishop. By his election the church invests him with a certain authority to offer spiritual direction and leadership in the areas of policy and vision for the church.⁹ Whatever influence he has will be determined by the extent to which he is

able to gather support for his actions from other segments of the ecclesiastical structure. In other words, his power is persuasive rather than legislative.

Scott and several other influential bishops in the House were strongly in favour of the ordination of women to the three-fold order of ministry. They stated that conviction from the early 1970s onward. Prior to Scott's election in 1971, there was little activity on the ordination of women in the House of Bishops. At Scott's initiative it was a regular agenda item after 1971.

While Scott did not want to force the church in a direction that it could not go, he felt strongly that adopting the ordination of women was the direction in which it should go. As such, Scott supported the idea when it came up for discussion in various places. This can be seen clearly in his interaction with dioceses. The Primate visited virtually all of the dioceses at some point during the period when this issue was under discussion. When he was specifically asked to address the issue, he offered support for it along with a pastoral and supportive overture toward those who felt that they could not accept the ordination of women. Synod journals indicate that he did not initiate discussion on the topic. Many times he visited diocesan synods and if the synod did not raise the issue, then neither did he.¹⁰ His interaction throughout was that of a diplomat struggling to convey empathy for both sides of the argument while articulating his own position gently. He did not attempt to change the mind of a synod which was heading in a direction contrary to his own conscience.

The Primate is the senior member of the House of Bishops. As such his power and influence in that body is primarily that of *primus inter pares*. There is virtually no written record of the comments which Scott made in the House of Bishops. There is no record of the part which he played in the deliberations of the House. However, his brother bishops readily noted that he actively lobbied for women's ordination. By their admission and his own, he always worked for a common ground of understanding. The continued unity of the House was always tantamount in his approach to this subject and others. Many commented that the debates in the House were carried on with a great deal of good natured humour and very little anger.¹¹

What we see here is a quintessential Canadian approach to leadership and diplomacy. As the titular head of the church he was committed both to promoting the ordination of women to the presbyterate and to

maintaining unity within his national province and in the larger Anglican Communion in the controversy surrounding discussion of this subject. His colleagues both here and abroad noted his skills in diplomacy as highly influential, and indeed there is documentary evidence of his skill in this area (as will be seen later in a discussion of the clergy “Manifesto”). Ultimately the two things which he had worked towards were achieved – women were ordained and the unity of the church was maintained.

It is only in light of this leadership that the role of the House of Bishops in this matter can be understood. Together with Scott, many members of the House formed the intellectual leadership which chose and implemented change in this area

The General Synod of 1973 had asked dioceses to begin discussing the ordination of women in their own synods, while the House of Bishops considered the matter. The most illuminating record available of the role of episcopal leadership in the big picture is found by tracking the diocesan decision-making processes. At the diocesan level the influence of episcopal leadership is most clear. Episcopal leadership appears to have been the single most determinative factor in the positions adopted within dioceses.

A breakdown of the thirty dioceses of the Anglican Church of Canada shows that there are diverse responses to decision-making on this issue. The thirty dioceses dealt with the issue in ten different ways. The pattern of response indicates a direct correlation between diocesan bishops and the attitude of the synods.

In the largest category both bishop and synod were in favour of the issue. There was mutual opposition in only one diocese. In six dioceses both bishop and synod expressed no conclusive opinion on the matter. As such, a direct parallel between the bishop and the synod can be drawn in 16 out of 30 cases. While this represents only slightly more than 50%, the number of cases where there was direct conflict was much smaller. In two dioceses the synods voted against the position of their bishops and voted in favour of the ordination of women. In one diocese the synod voted against the direction of its bishop and in so doing voted against the ordination of women. These cases of direct opposition by the synod to the episcopal initiative comprise only 10% of the total. There were three dioceses which made a decision (one pro and two con) when the bishops gave no clear leadership. This represents another 10% of the total number of dioceses.

The grey area consists of those dioceses with a bishop who made his opinion known but who never invited the synod to comment on the issue in any way – this involved six dioceses or 20% of the cases. However, the fact that no one in those dioceses ventured to raise the topic on their own initiative lends further credibility to the point. 20% of the church's population by diocese was content to let the episcopal leadership decide of its own volition which course would be taken on the matter without offering any comment one way or another.¹² The diversity in approach and method for handling this issue in each diocese and by each bishop makes a clear statement. It demonstrates that there was clearly a 'hands off' approach taken by the national level of the church. After the General Synod expressed its opinion in 1973, the jurisdiction of diocesan bishops and dioceses to choose a course of action independently from the course selected by the national church was respected.

This finding demonstrated the reality of the "unity in diversity" approach to ecclesiastical life which has been prominent in the Anglican *mentality* from the inception of the Communion. The fact that every diocese in the Anglican Church of Canada has ordained women to the priesthood since 1976 (the last in 1991) demonstrates the strength of this approach – the church came to a common decision in its own time and in its own way without division as the predominant motif. It further strengthens the theory of a revolution from above; in each case where a bishop or diocese opposed the ordination of women, women were not ordained in that diocese until the election and installation of a new bishop with a different view point on the subject.¹³

Diocesan bishops pursued independent courses of action in their own dioceses. However, at the national level they worked as a group to formulate a national direction. As the above material indicates, some bishops opposed the ordination of women while others supported it. However, they were able in the context of the House to formulate a common direction which allowed for dissent. It was that common direction which defined the future of the church.

In the formulation of that direction for the future, the House of Bishops did not claim absolute jurisdiction for themselves, as they might have by the parameters of the Constitutional process. In the first instance, a bishop by virtue of his or her orders has the sole right of ordination without limitation or the possibility of delegation; a bishop may ordain whomever he or she chooses. However, through consent in the formation

of diocesan, provincial and General Synod, bishops agreed to work within a synodical form of government which if respected, effectively limits their choices and actions. A bishop is given powers to act in the Synod, by the Synod, of which he or she along with the other bishops are members.

In General Synod bishops exercise collective powers as members of separate houses, or orders along with two other houses – the House of Clergy and the House of the Laity. The weight of each House in voting is the same. The House of Bishops does not hold unique powers, but it does perform important functions in the areas of education, study and policy recommendation. It does not possess the authority to direct the decisions of the Synod or to cancel a synodical act. The usual *modus operandi* between the House of Bishops and the Synod has been co-operation.¹⁴

When the Synod entrusted the House of Bishops with any further action of the issue in 1973, they effectively relinquished any claim on continued involvement in the decision-making process. In their deliberations between 1973 and 1975 the bishops were repeatedly concerned with issues of jurisdiction and authority. In the final analysis they did not claim for themselves ultimate authority in this matter, as conferred by episcopal orders. Some did argue that the House had the sole right to make a decision for the church. Interestingly, those who articulated this view were opposed to the ordination of women.¹⁵ Those bishops who supported the ordination of women had explicit trust in the synodical process.

Between 1973 and 1975 the House intensively studied all aspects of the issue which they understood to be relevant. They raised questions of collegiality in the House in the face of differing opinions; the pastoral needs of the first women to be so ordained were discussed; practical questions of deployment, and emotional reactions to the theological and practical issues were shared.¹⁶

As noted the House did not need to ask anything further of the General Synod. It had been given the discretion to proceed according to its own wisdom. However, in an attempt to confirm the church's support for the direction which the House was planning to pursue, it referred the plan back to the General Synod of 1975 for acceptance.

Before the General Synod of 1975 the House met to formulate a plan of action. The bishops agreed that the Primate should introduce the subject at General Synod and attempt to set the focus for the debate and subsequent action. The House planned to ask the Synod to ratify the decision of 1973 and confirm the idea that there would be no further discussion on the

matter.¹⁷ Once that had been accomplished the House would proceed to ordain women in those dioceses where there were women and bishops willing to pursue that course of action.

The General Synod of 1975 ratified three motions on the ordination of women to the priesthood. The first motion reaffirmed the motion of the previous Synod. The second motion that the Synod made and carried provided the vehicle for actually implementing the ordination of women to the presbyterate. The third and final motion was the most controversial from the standpoint of history. Contained within the third motion was the controversial Conscience clause which was eventually revoked by the General Synod of 1986. The Conscience clause effectively allowed a middle road of compromise. In other words, it was agreed that no bishop, priest, deacon or lay person should be penalized in any manner, nor expected to violate their conscience as a result of the Synod's move to ordain women.¹⁸ The right of dissenters to disagree with the ordination of women with impunity was protected.

When the bishops arrived at General Synod in 1975 they voted in favour of the ordination of women by a large majority (26 in favour [76%] and 8 [24%] opposed). This affirmative sentiment was confirmed by the votes in the other two houses. Interestingly there was a larger margin of support in the House of the Laity (88 [83%] in favour and 18 [17%] against) than among the clergy (75 [71%] in favour and 30 [29%] opposed).¹⁹

The movement to proceed with the ordination of women initiated by the House of Bishops was well supported by the grassroots of the church. The laity demonstrated enthusiastic support and clergy support was also encouraging. What is revealed then is a manifestation of the Gramscian contention. The organic intellectual class of the church – the bishops – was a group proactive in implementing a course of action. The initiative did not come from the other two groups. However, the support for the episcopal initiatives was enthusiastic.

The role of the clergy deserve particular consideration at this juncture. Until 1975 the clergy as a group had been essentially silent on the matter. The voting figures demonstrate an openness to move forward. If they had decided as a group to stop the proposed resolutions they would have been able to do so, as any House voting against would have been sufficient to stop the proposed change in policy and practice.

Gramsci discusses what he identifies as the traditional intellectuals

in the scenario of social change. The traditional intellectuals are a leadership group in society (often in history the clergy have served this function) which has a vested interest in the old status quo and out of that interest resists any attempt at change to a new historic bloc.²⁰ Clergy in other Anglican provinces have successfully prevented movement to the ordination of women through their resistance to change in the form of organized opposition. The decision-making process in the Church of England was significantly affected by the clerical commitment to serving this function.²¹

While the Canadian clergy did not work effectively as a lobby group to prevent the ordination of women, the only organized opposition did come from the clergy group. This opposition did little to affect the decision-making process, however, as it came too late. It was not until after the General Synod of 1975, that a group of Canadian clergy attempted to stop the course charted by the Synod.

In September 1975 a letter signed by a group of more than 200 Anglican clergymen was published in the national church newspaper, the *Anglican Churchman*. This 200 represents less than 10% of the total number of active clergy at the time. This letter was called "A Manifesto on the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood from the Concerned Clergy of the Anglican Church of Canada." Its purpose was to offer a public protest against the General Synod decision to proceed with such ordinations. A document of substantial length for a newspaper publication, it argued against the ordination of women with its opposition grounded in concerns about the maintenance of Anglican tradition and heritage as well as ecumenism. It noted with alarm that with this move the church was abandoning its heritage which was grounded in the male apostolic succession of ordered ministry. The priests who wrote the "Manifesto" stressed that they felt it was simply impossible in the "divine economy" for a woman to be a priest regardless of what the Synod had decided. Their greatest concern was that the Anglican Church of Canada was only one small part of Christendom and as such should not act alone.²²

This "Manifesto" served as the only significant manifestation of organized opposition in the period under discussion. Those who wrote the letter contacted clergy across the country and asked for their support, although apparently the contact was limited to those whom the framers felt would be sympathetic to their cause.²³ When it was published it was with names and dioceses attached.

The impact of the document was limited. There was little organized follow-up on the part of those who had written the document. Primate Edward Scott demonstrated the brilliance of his diplomatic skills in responding to this “Manifesto.” This response did much to defuse a potentially bloody situation.

The Primate affirmed the integrity of those clergy who had signed the “Manifesto,” and stressed that he respected the deep struggle and concern over the issue which was reflected in the signing of it. He noted that no formal statement had been made to the Primate or to the House of Bishops up to that point which declared the displeasure of the clergy with the ongoing movement toward women’s ordination, although it was acknowledged all along that there was disagreement over the topic at every level of the debate. Scott stated that he realized that clergy had signed for differing reasons. He then responded to the problems raised by each of the identified positions. In other words, he refuted the arguments in the “Manifesto.” This tone was one of pastoral conciliation, but it was clear that in Scott’s view what was being done was the right path of action.²⁴

Several clergy defended their actions. Most did not. Within a few weeks the furore caused by the “Manifesto” died down and the House of Bishops continued to plan for the implementation of the agreed upon ordinations.

In summary, the clergy as a group were more opposed proportionately than the laity and the bishops but still very supportive. The only organized resistance came from this group but the resistance was too little too late and had little effect on the course of history.

The designation “grassroots” of the church most obviously applies to the laity, and it is to this group that we now turn. The Gramscian theory demands that the grassroots support the proactive initiatives of the intellectual leadership of the institution if a successful transition to a new form of organization and practice is to be realized.

The overwhelming support for the idea of women in the priesthood is documented by the voting at the General Synod of 1975. With 88% in favour of motions to implement the ordination of women, one can safely demonstrate significant support among the grassroots of the church. Indeed, as the group with highest level of support one might say that the laity were at least as ‘progressive’ as their leaders. That progressive support, however, was supportive of leadership initiatives rather than proactive in its own right.

Some have argued that the delegates who are sent to General Synod do not represent the mind of the church at large. However, the process of election is a democratic one and no piece of research has been undertaken which measures the level of representation. Until such a work is conducted we must assume that there is some correlation between the attitudes of the people in the pew and the people whom they send to General Synod.

The laity were also visible after the publication of the “Manifesto.” Some were vocal in expressing their outrage at the contents of the “Manifesto.” They were angered that clergy would presume to insult their integrity with the issues they raised. Some defended the notion of the ordination of women by denouncing the sexual hierarchy of the church as deeply unchristian.²⁵

There is no record of any formalized lobby in favour of the ordination of women from the grassroots of the church. Unlike the English case, there is no evidence of any attempts to put the ordination of women on the agenda of the decision-making bodies of the Anglican Church of Canada. However, it was the “grassroots” of the church which elected those leaders who moved the church toward visionary change.

The women who were the first ordained as priests also were not proactive in the promotion of the ordination agenda.²⁶ The story of the ordination of women is a women’s history project, at least in theory. However, in the case of the Anglican Church of Canada the decision-making process by which women became priests was not fundamentally a story about the women themselves. By their own clear statements those women who were the first ordinands in the church were not involved in the decision-making processes about women in the presbyterate; they were though, already trained and willing to acknowledge publicly their vocation to the priesthood when the church invited them to exercise that vocation.

Traditionally historians have presented women as acted upon rather than actors in their own right – a view which unfairly limits the perception of women as actors and weavers of history. Unfortunately, one must on some level repeat this pattern of interpretation. The women were actors in so far as they had long histories of active ministry. Exposure to the fine service and abundant gifts which women brought to ministry as deaconesses and Bishop’s Messengers must have influenced the readiness of the grassroots to welcome women as priests. They were not actors in so far as they consciously chose to have nothing to do with the debates which would determine the forms of their ministry.²⁷

There was a small group of lay women who were involved for years in paid lay ministry in the church. In 1967 they formed the Association for Registered Church Workers (ARCWA) to address areas of concern to women workers, such as low salaries, lack of respect and inadequate pensions. In the context of their discussions they did discuss the ordination of women to the three-fold order of ministry. However, in its gadfly position in relation to the church hierarchy, its concerns were more in the area of women's work rather than promoting an ordination agenda.²⁸

If it is a defensible thesis that the initiative toward the ordination of women ultimately came from the intellectual leadership of the church in the form of the episcopacy, it will be important to understand the motivation of those individuals in that group who promoted the ordination of women. This brings us then to the question, why did the episcopal leadership of the church support and in many cases actively promote the ordination of women to the priesthood? The answer to that question has several aspects to it.

Economic considerations were a factor. A myth has existed in the larger Anglican Communion that the Canadian church moved to accept the ordination of women readily because its 'vast wilderness' meant that it had a chronic shortage of clergy to minister to the needs of its people. Records from the House of Bishops in this period show that this was not the case.²⁹ Even if there was a localized clergy shortage in places, the perception of the bishops themselves was that there were sufficient clergy to meet the needs of the Anglican Church of Canada. It is true that there were labour concerns in the church but not of the kind supposed.

The labour problems which may have influenced the movement to accept women in Holy Orders were in the arena of the concerns of women workers. As ARCWA stressed there were issues of poor pay, lack of status and authority for both women lay workers and deaconesses. For years reports were written by church bodies naming these problems with few solutions being proffered. When the church moved to ordain women it closed opportunities for women as deaconesses and lay workers. Some have suggested that the move to ordain women was a vehicle for solving the long-standing problem of women's labour in the church.³⁰ This claim is hotly debated but is worthy of consideration. There is no evidence that this was a conscious move, but when women became part of the mainstream of ecclesiastical structure, the problems associated with not belonging were largely dissolved. Much of what creatively defined

women's ministry in the church was also lost.

A changing theological climate also influenced episcopal decision-making. During the 1970s the House of Bishops became involved in many questions which were in a sense justice issues as a result of a theological shift which was affecting western Christianity – the move away from an atonement-based theology toward a creation-centered theology of incarnation in liturgy. Theological challenges to traditional conceptions of ministry which held that the priest filled the top place in the hierarchical, parochial system led the bishops to rethink their theology of the priesthood of all believers, and its attendant implications for the place of women in the whole people of God. Discussions about Christian Initiation and the whole structure of lay and ordained ministry opened the door for the possibility of radical change, change which in theory led the church toward ancient forms of communal ministry and organization.³¹

No healthy religion is immune to the needs, demands, changes and particular circumstances of its culture. Christianity is no exception. The Anglican Church of Canada was shaped at least in part by the Canadian circumstance. Changes in the place and role of women were among the most drastic of the changes which had an impact on church life.

During the years that the ordination of women was debated in the Anglican church, Canadian society was experiencing a second wave feminist revolution. From 1969 onward there was an organized feminist movement albeit a small one which raised questions about gender assumptions and roles at home and in the workplace. Feminist theologians were few and far between in Canada between 1968 and 1978; however, feminist theological ideas did form part of the theatre within which the ordination debate was being acted out.

It cannot be concluded that "secular" feminism had a direct and immediate effect on the ordination debates. There is no evidence of 'secular' feminists anywhere in or around the decision-making process. Indeed, there was a definite rejection of such terminology by many involved in the matter including the women themselves who were eventually ordained. People did not want the ordination of women to be linked to a rights issue; the favoured terminology was of vocation (whether or not such a dichotomy between rights and vocation is helpful is worthy of debate). What can be argued was that changes in the sphere of women's involvement in society throughout the twentieth century influenced the perceptions of church members and leaders with regard to what women

were competent to do. Scott and several other bishops easily identified the changing world as a legitimate vehicle for the reformulation of traditional practice within the church.³²

In tracing the evolution of their support for the idea of women as priests, some bishops stressed their moment of personal revelation. Some felt moved to ordain women because God had communicated that it was God's will at that time in history. All agreed that something of the will of God was revealed to them as they struggled with the issue.³³

Ecclesiological orientation, formerly known as "churchmanship," also had an impact on episcopal response to the ordination of women. As we have noted there was divided opinion on this topic in the House of Bishops as in other parts of the church. According to bishops who participated in debates on this issue there was what they referred to as a "high/low" split.

Anglicanism has historically known two extremes of ecclesiological orientation – high and low. Those who identify themselves as high Anglicans are of the Anglo-Catholic orientation placing a strong emphasis on sacramental theology with a high christology. Those who identify themselves as low Anglicans are characterized by their appreciation for an evangelical view of Scripture and theology. As well as these two groups there is a third, in years past referred to as the "broad stream" of the church. This group has not traditionally aligned itself around any one theological worldview and does not function as an organized group. It is this group which comprises "middle of the road" Anglicanism in terms of its theological orientation.

There is some evidence of a relationship between churchmanship and attitudes on this issue in the Canadian church. This division was prominent in the House of Bishops as is seen in the minutes of the meetings.³⁴ Those who were Anglo-Catholic in their orientation often opposed the ordination of women for the following reasons: a woman cannot be the icon of Christ because she is not male, and ecumenical relations particularly with the Roman Catholics. Those who were inclined to the Evangelical side defended the second category of argument which held that a woman could not have authority over a man – the headship or *kephale* argument.

In the diocesan synod charges of those bishops who actively opposed the ordination of women, we see that they always expressed either the icon of Christ argument, the *kephale* argument, or the argument from ecumeni-

cal relations. In fact, *most* adopted the model of opposition defined by the first category. Clearly there is evidence of a relationship between attitude to the ordination of women and churchmanship.

Those who located themselves within the broad stream were more likely to be supportive of the ordination of women than were their high and low contemporaries. The broad stream of the church was considered to be a “new wind” in the Canadian church during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century; it did not share the extremism of the two other groups.³⁵ The label of “liberal” is also often applied to this category of churchmanship. Those bishops who were the most active protagonists in the movement toward the ordination of women identified themselves as liberal, or broad stream in their churchmanship. This expression of ecclesiological orientation is necessarily related to the theological shifts which were precipitated by the rise of liberalism as a school of thought in the life of the church.

It is in relation to the ecclesiological orientation of bishops, clergy and laity that the question of ecumenical relations arises. Ecumenism was an important issue for those who were opposed to the ordination of women. The concern that such a move would irreparably damage relations with the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox churches was a real one for several bishops, clergy and lay people. In the Majority Report of the Primate’s Task Force in 1972, it was noted that there were ecumenical implications for the issue whichever way it was decided. Ecumenically there were churches on both sides of the issue.

As such, the Canadian church declared that while it wanted to continue ongoing ecumenical dialogues with all parties with whom they were already in conversation, they had to act according to their own conscience on the issue. Little evidence can be found to document extensive ecumenical dialogue on this issue. While the Anglican Church of Canada was engaged in discussions regarding the possibility of union with the United Church of Canada throughout the relevant period of the early 1970s, no reference is made in debates on this issue to that fact except in one diocese. The United Church of Canada had been ordaining women ministers since the ordination of the Reverend Lydia Gruchy in Saskatchewan in 1936. Reference to this fact was made in General Synod, the House of Bishops, or diocesan synods. While there was some concern for ecumenism, it is clear that ecumenical relations were not of paramount importance in the decision-making process of the Canadian church.

Relations with other parts of the Anglican Communion were more important than ecumenism to the House of Bishops. The House would not proceed until after they heard a response from the other Anglican provinces to their intended actions in 1976.³⁶ Once assured that their right to decide would be respected, they risked further division and proceeded to act according to their own conscience.

Ultimately, the episcopacy of the Canadian church was able to provide its constituents with a fairly unified leadership. It was able to do this because of two things – a mutual commitment to collegiality and the conscience clause.

In the minutes of the House of Bishops, the word collegiality recurs. Throughout discussions on this subject the bishops maintained the contention that whatever happened the collegiality of the House would be key in steering the church through the decision-making process. By maintaining a united front, although divided in conscience, they were able to provide a model for the larger church which embodied the possibility of remaining together. This commitment reflected a long tradition of commitment to collegiality within the Canadian House of Bishops. On most controversial issues over the years, the Canadian episcopacy has maintained that the collegiality of the House was more important than any issue which might divide it. As such, when the question of the ordination of women to the priesthood arose a pattern of interaction and conflict resolution had been established which facilitated the formulation of a compromise.

The continued collegiality of the House was possible in large measure because of the construction of the conscience clause. This clause allowed all bishops, and in their turn all laity and clergy to act according to their own conscience within the context of the decision which the national church had made. In the words of Scott, “the conscience clause was crucial in finding a way forward on this issue for the Canadian church.”³⁷

It might be argued that the conscience clause was a document which allowed Canadian Anglicans to adopt a *via media* which sold out the convictions of those who felt that the ordination of women was just, right and the will of God. If the movement toward accepting women as priests was something which the church believed was right and the will of God, why then did it compromise its principles by allowing the injustice of the continuing exclusion of women at all levels of church life? While there is something to be said for this criticism, at that point in history, it may be that discretion was the better part of valour. Without the adoption of a

compromise in the form of the conscience clause, it is entirely possible that the church would have found itself unable to adopt the ordination of women to the priesthood. If the end in any ways justifies the means, then the conscience clause can be said to have fulfilled its purpose. It established a middle road along which most were willing to travel. The intellectual leadership of the church began a revolution which the people were prepared to finish. The General Synod repealed the conscience clause in 1986.

On 30 November 1976 the dioceses of Niagara and Huron, Cariboo and New Westminster ordained the first women to the priesthood in the Anglican Church of Canada. In the Diocese of Cariboo, Bishop John Snowden ordained The Reverend Patricia Reed with the Primate preaching at the service. In the Diocese of New Westminster, Bishop David Somerville ordained The Reverend Elspeth Alley and the Reverend Virginia Bryant. In the Diocese of Huron, Bishop David Ragg ordained The Reverend Mary Mills. In the Diocese of Niagara, Bishop John Bothwell ordained The Reverend Beverly Shanley and The Reverend Mary Lucas.

By January 1978 there were eighteen women ordained to the priesthood in ten different dioceses. After the first year of ordinations virtually no mention of the subject was made again in the House of Bishops or General Synod. Prior to the Lambeth Conference of 1978 it was simply noted in the House of Bishops' minutes that the topic would be on the agenda of the Lambeth Conference. For the Anglican Church of Canada the story of women in the priesthood as a decision-making process was ended, and the story of women in the priesthood as a reality was begun.

Endnotes

1. Antonio Gramsci, "Problems of History and Culture – The Intellectuals," in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell (New York: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 5-23.
2. Roger Coleman, ed., *Resolutions of the Twelve Lambeth Conferences 1867-1988* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1992), 119-20. With Resolution 32 Lambeth 1968 reversed the position taken in 1930 on women in the diaconate. By a vote of 22 for and 183 against, Lambeth declared that women who had been made deaconesses through an episcopal laying on of hands should be declared to be within the diaconate. After discussing the ordination of women to the presbyterate it was agreed that there were no conclusive

theological arguments for or against such ordinations. Resolutions 35-37 asked all of the provinces to study the issue and report its conclusions to the newly-formed ACC.

3. "Report of Actions," Scott Papers (M101), Anglican Church House Archives (Toronto), 2.
4. "Report of the Primate's Task Force on the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood," 1972.
5. *General Synod Journal of Proceedings* (1973), Anglican Church House Archives (Toronto), 24.
6. *General Synod Journal of Proceedings* (1973), 30.
7. *General Synod Journal of Proceedings* (1973), 31.
8. *Minutes of the House of Bishops* (1971), Anglican Church House Archives (Toronto).
9. R.S. Ryan, "The General Synods of the Anglican Church of Canada," *Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society* 34, No. 1 (April 1992): 52ff.
10. This observation is made after reading all diocesan synod journals on the topic for the relevant period.
11. These comments are made in light of interviews with Archbishop Edward Scott, Archbishop John Bothwell, Archbishop David Somerville and Archbishop Douglas Hambridge.
12. These figures are compiled from the Synod Journals of each diocese between 1973 and 1978.
13. Wendy Fletcher, "Beyond the Walled Garden: Women and the Priesthood in Anglicanism, Canada and England, 1920-1978," Ph.D. diss., University of St. Michael's College, Toronto, 1993.
14. Ryan, "The General Synods of the Anglican Church of Canada," 52ff.
15. *Minutes of the House of Bishops* (1973-1975).
16. *Minutes of the House of Bishops* (1973-1975).
17. *Minutes of the House of Bishops* (13-16 June 1975), 32-33.
18. *General Synod Journal of Proceedings* (1975), M-66.

19. These statistics are calculated from the voting figures (*General Synod Journal of Proceedings* [1975]).
20. Gramsci, "Problems of History and Culture – The Intellectuals," 5-23.
21. Fletcher, "Beyond the Walled Garden."
22. "Manifesto on the Ordination of Women," *Anglican Churchman* 101 (October 1975): 9.
23. See Primate's comments and letters, Scott Papers (M101).
24. Letter of the Primate, Scott Papers (M101).
25. Letters found in Scott Papers (M101).
26. In the Church of England there had been an organized grassroots lobby by predominantly lay people since the 1920s. In the American Episcopal Church the women who sought ordination actively lobbied for policy change.
27. In oral history interviews with the priest women ordinands all but one stressed that they were not feminist and had no overt commitment to gender equality. They were concerned with faithfulness to the task of ministry as their beginning and ending place. All but two of the first women priests had served either as deaconesses or Bishop's Messengers for many years.
28. Grace Hallenby, *Anglican Women's Training College: A Background Document* (Toronto: AWTC History Committee, 1989), 101.
29. *Minutes of the House of Bishops* (1973-1978).
30. This theory has been proposed by women lay workers who lost their vocations when women were mainstreamed. One woman priest also recalled that she was told that, "You can fit in here girls or else."
31. These comments are observations based on the changing theological agenda revealed in *Minutes of the House of Bishop* between 1958 and 1978. The 1970s were a time of large new questions.
32. Oral history interviews, and Reflections in the Scott Papers (M101).
33. Based on episcopal oral history interviews.
34. *Minutes of the House of Bishops* (1971-1978).
35. Phillip Carrington, *The Anglican Church of Canada* (Toronto: Collins, 1963), 201.

36. After the General Synod of 1975 Scott wrote to all other Anglican Primate and asked for feedback. Only after he personally collected this feedback did the ordinations occur (Scott Papers [M101]).
37. Oral history interview with Primate Scott.